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Drawing the Line Between Foodstuffs and Complementary Medicines

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Abstract

There is an ever-increasing interest in functional foods and beverages and the perceived health and well-being benefits that they offer. Trends such as 'superfoods', 'mood-enhancing' and 'gut health' have driven the food industry to include novel ingredients in products to provide added value beyond primary purpose. The food industry typically assumes that functional foods and beverages are regulated as foodstuffs; but in fact, it can be difficult to classify these novel ingredients and the products that contain them. Are they foodstuffs, food additives, or complementary medicine, and specifically: health supplements or discipline-specific medicines?

Foodstuffs and food additives are regulated under the Foodstuffs, Cosmetics and Disinfectants Act, but complementary medicines fall outside of the scope of this act. Although the various acts and regulations provide relevant definitions, there are other factors that must be considered when classifying novel ingredients and functional foods and beverages. These include how commonly an ingredient is consumed; whether it is consumed by itself or added to products; from where it is sourced; where the product is sold; the ingredient/product's functions and purposes; if a dosage is recommended; if the ingredient/product is perceived to provide any health or well-being benefits; and how these benefits are presented on the product's label.

Ongoing consumer interest in novel ingredients and functional foods and beverages has demonstrated that these types of products are here to stay. Therefore, it is important for the food industry to be able to distinguish between foodstuffs and complementary medicines. Adding certain novel ingredients to a foodstuff may result in a product being classed differently, and thus regulated differently.

This presentation will provide guidance on classifying products and navigating the regulatory realm to ensure compliance. A review of the types of claims permitted for each type of product, how products should be labelled, and the requirements for assessing product safety and efficacy, if necessary, will be provided.

PRESENTER BIOGRAPHY: SHANNON RIVA

Shannon completed her B.Sc. and M.Sc. in food science at Stellenbosch University, graduating both degrees cum laude. Her postgraduate studies were focused on the development of an edible coating for the post-harvest quality management of exported stone fruit. Shannon manages the custom analysis department at FACTS, where she assists clients with requests that do not form part of the routine services. Her role includes identifying viable analytical strategies, providing clients with scientific support, and investigating solutions to atypical industry challenges.