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**PRESS RELEASE**

**Gut feeling: Digestive health tops nutraceutical agenda**

Digestive health has hit the top of the nutraceutical industry’s agenda for the first time, a new survey shows. Experts have attributed the findings to growing consumer awareness of the importance of healthy gut microbiota, and of the potential of probiotics.

The organisers of Vitafoods Europe asked 220 nutraceutical industry professionals to choose the three most important health benefit areas for their companies. Nearly a quarter (23%) named digestive health, with the same number identifying general wellbeing and healthy ageing. Another 22% named cardiovascular health, while 21% said immunity was a key area.

This is the third time the Vitafoods Europe poll has been conducted, but the first that digestive health has been a top concern for the industry.

**Consumer awareness driving probiotic boom**

The importance placed on digestive health reflects the current boom in the global probiotic industry, which is expected to reach a value of €53 billion by 2023.\* In the US, the number of products promoting probiotic content grew from below 100 in 2002 to nearly 1,800 in 2016.\*\*

Experts attribute this to growing consumer awareness and demographic changes. “The rapid growth of the global probiotics market is due to increased interest in functional foods, as well as rising incidence of digestive and gastrointestinal disorders” said Rosanna Pecere, Executive Director of the International Probiotics Association Europe. “Consumers are becoming more aware that a well balanced microbiota is essential for the normal functioning of the body, and they’re looking for ways to ensure that the correct balance is maintained.”

“Growth in the functional food and beverage market has also been driven by consumer interest in healthy living” said Dr. Yiannis Kourkoutas of the Department of Molecular Biology and Genetics at Democritus University of Thrace, who will be discussing the potential of probiotics at Vitafoods Europe 2018. “This is particularly true among younger demographics, but population ageing has also been conducive to sector expansion.”

**Research reveals importance of microbiome**

The importance of the microbiome, and the potential of probiotics, are supported by increasing scientific evidence. Dr. Kourkoutas said “Thanks to large-scale research efforts, we now know the composition of gut microbiota is associated with a growing number of diseases. There is a large body of evidence supporting the concept that the maintenance of healthy gut microbiota provides protection against a range of problems – not just local gastro-intestinal disorders, but also neurological, respiratory, cardiovascular, and even mental illnesses.”

He added: “The role of probiotics is unique in the development of healthy digestive function. Daily intake of dietary products fortified with probiotic cultures may stimulate the growth of preferred microorganisms, crowd out harmful bacteria, and reinforce the body’s natural defence mechanisms. Probiotics can be exploited to manipulate the gut microbiota with beneficial effects for health, including reduced symptoms of lactose intolerance and lower risk of certain cancers.”

**Vitafoods Europe explores probiotic opportunities**

This year’s Vitafoods Europe (15-17 May 2018 in Palexpo, Geneva) will have a particular focus on digestive health. In the Education Programme the Probiotics R&D Forum, sponsored by DuPont Health & Nutrition, will explore challenges such as ways to incorporate beneficial bacteria into a food matrix.

The Vitafoods Europe Probiotics Resource Centre, in association with the International Probiotics Association (IPA), will also include new product showcases, a guide including a probiotics discovery trail, a presentation theatre, digital iPad presentations, and infographics showcasing the latest market statistics.

For a detailed report on the future of the digestive health market, visit Vitafoods Insights, the new online resource offering the best content from Vitafoods events:

<http://www.vitafoodsinsights.com/digital-issues/2017/12/vfi-digestive-health.aspx>

**About Vitafoods Europe**

Vitafoods Europe is the global nutraceutical event, featuring exhibitors from all over the world in four key market areas: ingredients & raw materials; branded finished products; contract manufacturing & private label; and services & equipment. The event offers a range of visitor attractions, including an industry-leading Education Programme.

Vitafoods Europe is part of Informa Exhibitions’ Global Health & Nutrition Network (GHNN), which brings together a portfolio of events, digital media and publishing for marketers, manufacturers and formulators of nutrition and dietary supplements, healthy foods/beverages and personal care products. GHNN’s events include Vitafoods Europe, Vitafoods Asia, SupplySide West, SupplySide East and SupplySide China.

Natural Products INSIDER is the global media brand covering healthy ingredients and finished applications. Vitafoods Insights offers expert online content and a series of topic-specific digital magazines that bring highlights of the Vitafoods events to a global audience. [SupplySide](http://storefronts.supplysideshow.com/) Connect is the always-on directory of ingredients, products and services that provides in-depth information about the companies that supply to the market. For more information, visit [www.informaglobalhealth.com](http://www.informaglobalhealth.com/).

Informa’s Global Exhibitions Division organises transaction-oriented exhibitions and trade shows, which provide buyers and sellers across different industries and communities with a powerful platform to meet face-to-face, build relationships and conduct business. Informa has a portfolio of more than 150 exhibitions, serving a number of core verticals, including Health & Nutrition, Beauty, Property & Construction and Pop Culture.

\* “Digest This! The Future for the digestive health market’, *Vitafoods Insights*

<http://www.vitafoodsinsights.com/digital-issues/2017/12/vfi-digestive-health.aspx>

\*\* ‘Probiotics and Prebiotics: Food and Beverage New Product Trends’ *Packaged Facts*

https://www.packagedfacts.com/Probiotics-Prebiotics-Foods-Beverages-Food-Formulation-Ingredient-Trends-11000252/