

# Health claim for omega-3 foods - US takes first step

**13/09/2004 - Last week the US approved a 'qualified' health claim for foods containing omega-3 fatty acids, one which could also be on the cards in Europe.**

Supplements of omega-3 fatty acids can already carry a health claim in the US but the new ruling by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will now allow conventional foods rich in eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) to carry a qualified health claim stating that they may help to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease.

Typically, the US is one of the first countries to allow a health claim, albeit a 'qualified' one, on foods rich in omega-3s. However some believe it could also be one of the first to be approved under a forthcoming European regulation on health claims.

*"If the status of the draft proposal stays as it is, this could well come through as a generic claim,"* Jean Feord, manager of the legislation unit at UK consultancy Leatherhead Food, told NutraIngredients.com.

*"I don't think anybody will try to get ownership of the claim but there seems to be enough well-established science out there."*

Kathy Brownlie, an industry analyst from Frost & Sullivan, recently commented that omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs) have one of the strongest futures of all functional food ingredients, based in a large part on the vast storehouse of well-documented research available.

Omega-3 PUFAs have been subjected to numerous medical and clinical trials by ingredient suppliers as well as independent organisations. This keeps them ahead of other competing ingredients like phytosterols for inclusion in a food or beverage product.

*"Most industry experts agree that more omega-3 PUFAs need to be incorporated into our diets,"* she said.

Indeed, US trade association the Council for Responsible Nutrition (CRN) last week expressed its disappointment at the FDA's failure to award a full, unqualified health claim to omega-3 and its ability to reduce the risk of heart disease, for which they had petitioned.

*"We continue to believe that the science is strong enough to warrant an unqualified health claim,"* said Annette Dickinson, president of the CRN.

Feord noted that the same scientific data available on omega3s and their benefit to heart health is likely to be used by the European Food Safety Authority but that 'qualified' claims do not feature under the proposed legislation.

"There are generic claims or claims specific to particular products but no inbetween," she said.

Recent analysis by Frost & Sullivan shows that while the annual growth rate for the total European omega-3 PUFA market in 2003 was 11 per cent, it is likely to stabilise at a lower rate of 8 per cent in the coming years. Europe is a more mature market compared to the United States where some key market participants are experiencing growth rates of over 20 per cent.

On the other hand, an unclear legislation requirement in the European Union remains a challenge for the PUFA market. The absence of a specific recommended daily intake (RDI) is further restricting marketing efforts, weakening the impact of packaging and promotional messages. A health claim would contribute significantly to growth of this market.