

PREDICTABILITY is at a premium

THIS summer has brought with it some unwelcome reminders that the ground rules our sector relies on to make our plans are themselves in motion.

In April, the European Commission published its most ambitious Better Regulation reform since the agenda was launched in 2002, promising a 'simpler, clearer and better enforced' EU rulebook. Meanwhile in Berlin, Chancellor Friedrich Merz's own conservatives spent the summer preparing to confront Commission President Ursula von der Leyen with a list of 27 demands to go further and faster still. Add to that a still-contested EU-US trade arrangement that Brussels concedes is not being fully honoured by Washington and it becomes clear that predictability - the one thing manufacturers most need from policymakers - is in short supply.

SIMPLIFY WITH CARE

Nobody in this sector will object to the stated aim of the Commission's reform: less friction, faster decisions and rules that are proportionate to the problem they solve. We have said for years that regulatory quality matters as much as regulatory ambition, and the renewed emphasis in Brussels on implementation and cost, rather than simply expanding the rulebook, is a welcome correction.

But speed and quality are not automatically the same thing, and this is where our sector needs to stay alert.

The new framework allows the Commission far more discretion to decide on its own terms when an initiative is 'significant' enough to require a full impact assessment and a proper public consultation. If not, it can be waved through as mere 'optimisation' under a compressed timeline with minimal scrutiny.

We saw a preview of what that can mean in practice with last year's omnibus packages, where substantial changes to sustainability and food-related legislation were pushed through under urgency procedures. Formalising that approach



Uncertain trading relationships and shifting regulatory priorities can only make business planning harder, says
Sebastian Emig

as the new normal rather than treating it as an exception carries a real risk. For manufacturers planning multi-year investment in reformulation, packaging or new production lines, legal certainty is not a bureaucratic nicety; it is the basis on which capital gets allocated.

The pressure for even faster deregulation, meanwhile, is coming as much from national capitals as it is from Brussels itself. Chancellor Merz's own party, once closely aligned with the Commission president on competitiveness, is now pushing to establish the right to veto new EU legislation. That says something about how febrile this debate has become.

Our message to policymakers on all sides is a simple one: we support genuine simplification, but the answer is better rulemaking, not less scrutiny of whichever rules survive the cut.

TRADE POLICY UNCERTAINTY

The same tension between speed and reliability runs through trade policy. The European Parliament's ratification this year of the EU-US tariff arrangement at 15%, rather than the higher rates once threatened, was presented as a stabilising step. In practice, it has proven to be anything but straightforward.

MEPs only agreed to ratify the deal after securing sunset clauses and suspension mechanisms, precisely because Washington was already found to be expanding tariffs on steel- and aluminium-derived products beyond what was envisaged in the agreement.

For a sector that sources ingredients, packaging materials and specialised equipment globally, this kind of conditional, contested stability is a poor substitute for the real thing.

None of this will change the fundamentals of our longstanding requirements: Supply chains must be diverse, engagement with policymakers should happen early in the process, and Europe's negotiators need to hold trading partners to the terms they sign up to. What has changed is the pace at which manufacturers are now expected to absorb these shifts, at the same time as they are busy reformulating, decarbonising and investing in innovation.

A RESILIENT SECTOR

It is against this backdrop that SNACKEX 2026 provided a useful reminder of our industry's underlying resilience. As the only international trade show dedicated solely to savoury snacks, it remains the one place where manufacturers, ingredient suppliers, retailers and policymakers end up in the same room, often for the only time in a two-year cycle. This latest edition drew record participation once again (see more on p36).

The regulatory and cost pressures I have described above were very much part of the conversation on the show floor, alongside the broader debate around GLP-1 medications and their effect on dietary habits. So too was genuine optimism: flavour innovation, bold, adventurous and often globally inspired, was everywhere, and sustainability has moved from being a standalone initiative to a thread running through packaging, sourcing and production alike. That combination of realism about the challenges and energy around solutions is, in ►

HELPING THE SAVOURY SNACKS INDUSTRY SUCCEED



+200 international members

+70 countries

- Industry representation at EU level
- Platform for sector-wide co-operation
- Technical expertise / input to EU policy
- SNACKEX flagship trade fair & conference
- Industry best practice courses
- Quarterly industry magazine
- Networking events
- Members' newsletter
- Industry companies database

Become a member now

We welcome worldwide membership from any company with an interest in the European savoury snack and nut sector.

European Snacks Association
The voice of the industry in Europe

Rue des Deux Églises 26, BE-1000 Brussels, Belgium
T: +32 (0)2 538 20 39 F: +32 (0)2 218 12 13

esa@esasnacks.eu | www.esasnacks.eu | www.snackex.com

many ways, our sector's most reliable trait.

It also chimes with what we are seeing in the wider consumer data. The nutrition debate has not gone away, and it is being reshaped still further by the arrival of oral GLP-1 medications that could suppress user appetites for far longer than the injectable forms allowed. But the emerging evidence continues to support a point our industry has made consistently: sustainable health outcomes depend on everyday food choices, not on pharmaceutical shortcuts. The sharpest growth is going to products that successfully combine genuine functionality, protein, fibre and clean labels, with the taste and enjoyment consumers still expect.

Younger shoppers, meanwhile, are abandoning the old category boundaries altogether, snacking their way through the day rather than sitting down to fixed meals, while remaining just as attentive to authenticity as to convenience. And on processed foods more broadly, researchers keep confirming what common sense suggests: Consumers are not rejecting these products outright, they are asking how they fit into a balanced plate. That is a far more constructive framing than the blunt 'good versus bad' narratives that still dominate parts of the political debate, and it is one our sector should keep making the case for.

As ESA's Director General, I remain convinced that the answer to a more volatile policy and trade environment is not to retreat from engagement but to intensify it: pressing for rules that are simplified without being rushed, trade relationships that are open without being naïve, and innovation that meets consumers where they actually are.

My tremendous thanks to everyone who made SNACKEX 2026 such a strong event. I would encourage anyone who has not yet experienced it to save the date for the next one, which will take place in Vienna in June 2028. ■

Director General Sebastian Emig*

*in his capacity as permanent representative of Prime Consulting BXLBCN SL

DALSORB®

— MAXIMIZE THE LIFE OF YOUR FRYING OIL —

DALSORB® Oil Purifier

Adsorbent filtration media for high-volume operations

**Reduce oil discard
by over 90%***

↓ **Lower oil management
costs by 77%***



— See how much your operation could save. —

*Results may vary by operation and oil-management practices.

www.dalsorb.com | info@dallasgrp.com | +1.908.534.7800

A product of The Dallas Group Of America, Inc.