

Taking off

This month **MICHAEL BELLINGHAM**, chief executive of the PFMA, focuses his attention on the bird food market and looks at some of the activities the newly formed wild bird group will be carrying out in the coming year



In 2012 the PFMA welcomed into membership 11 bird food producing companies and established a dedicated bird group. The companies joining the PFMA included: Countryside Products; GB Seeds; Gardman Ltd; Gladwell & Sons; Johnston & Jeff; Marches Natural; Harrison's (Pedigree Wholesale); Poortman; RSPB Trading; Vine House Farm; and Westland Horticulture. There are also a number of existing PFMA members who manufacture in this sector, including Henry Bell, Beaphar, Bob Martin, Mars, Oscar, Pets Choice and Vitakraft.

While wild birds are by definition not pets, it is clear that many people across the UK take a great deal of pleasure from feeding the birds in their garden. The bird charities have increasingly recognised the benefit of this, and in particular, the RSPB has taken the step of formulating and selling its own feed. However, a real catalyst in encouraging the bird food companies to join together was the fact that EU legislation is increasingly affecting how they operate. For example, the recent labelling legislation brought wild animals within its remit for the first time and companies manufacturing for wild birds recognised that belonging to a reputable trade association would offer many benefits, including advice on how to label in compliance with the new regulations.

The Food Standards Agency was also very keen for the bird food companies to become part of a reputable trade association. For a start, it makes their job much easier talking

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to one organisation rather than having to contact a number of companies. Also, they can be reassured that those companies who have joined the PFMA are seeking to improve the quality and safety of their products, as well as looking to speak with one voice on behalf of the sector.

One of the first things the members of the bird group wanted to do was to collect data on the size of the market. PFMA has already been running such a scheme for its members for a number of years. However, there were some clear distinctions in the bird sector which needed to be reflected in the survey. For example, the seasonality of sales is very important. Also, the routes to market are different in this sector, reflected by the importance of sales through garden centres (around 36 per cent volume, though different again in value).

Overall the market in 2012 amounted to something over £200 million, which makes this a very significant player in the whole pet food market and is over three times the size of the small furrries market. For the purposes of the survey, the market was divided into straight seed, blended seeds, fat balls and other fats and treats. What was perhaps the biggest surprise from the results was the sheer size of the fat ball sector, which is on a par with straight seeds and significantly higher than blended seeds in value. In terms of seasonality all parts of the market show distinct peaks in summer and then again in winter.

Looking forward to activities for the coming year, the sector is planning a distinct PR campaign for the early part of 2013, which will focus on promoting all-year-round feeding and the variety of bird food available to consumers. The group will also be looking to develop the information on the PFMA website on bird feeding. It will also seek to foster close relations with the large number of stakeholders in the sector, including organisations such as the British Trust for Ornithology.

PFMA has an open door policy on membership and welcomes applications



from those remaining bird food manufacturers who have not yet joined. The fees are based on turnover and give excellent value, including automatic enrolment in the PFMA market data scheme, access to guidance on technical and regulatory issues, as well as the opportunity to shape the development of the sector by playing an active role in the association. As the first chairman of the Bird Group, Richard Johnston (Johnston & Jeff) puts it: "I fully supported and encouraged the establishment of the Bird Group within the PFMA and I am delighted it has come about. It is only by working together collectively that we will improve the quality and reputation of our sector and I encourage companies to join us on this exciting journey. If you want more information please contact Michael or anyone in the PFMA team."

About the PFMA

The Pet Food Manufacturers' Association is the principal trade body representing the UK pet food industry; a key focus of activity is to promote animal welfare and responsible pet ownership. Its 60 members account for over 90 per cent of the market and produce a wide range of products for cats, dogs, rabbits and other pet animals. To find out more or download some useful information sheets for you and your customers, please visit: www.pfma.org.uk