

## **Debate: All probiotic effects must be considered strain-specific**

Speakers: Hania Szajewska (Pro position) and Sarah Lebeer (Con position)

Panel: Dan Merenstein, Maria Marco, Arthur Ouwehand

### **Abstract**

It is conventional wisdom that probiotic benefits should be considered strain specific. For decades, scientists and responsible companies in the probiotic field have communicated to stakeholders that evidence of a health benefit should be tied to specific strain(s) (and dose). Medical organizations make recommendations based on specific strains. However, in the ISAPP consensus paper on probiotics (Hill et al 2014), the concept of 'core benefits' was introduced, suggesting that with sufficient knowledge of a mechanism of action driving a clinical benefit, the distribution of that mechanism within a taxonomic group, and clinical evidence of benefit for a sufficient number strains within the taxonomic group, a health benefit could be assigned to a broader taxon than strain. Further, widely available are multi-strain blends of probiotic dietary supplements lacking strain designations and traditional fermented foods with undefined microbiota, both of which are consumed for their supposed health benefits. Is there legitimacy to this thinking?

This session is structured as a debate with short presentations on pro and con positions, followed by a panel discussion and vote by the audience.