

## **News and Views**

### **WREXHAM CONFERENCE HAS A CHANGE OF EMPHASIS**

The fifth conference in the Gums and Stabilisers for The Food Industry series was held at Wrexham from 10 to 14 July. In an attempt to make the meeting more attractive to industrial participants, the organisers had decided that the oral sessions should generally consist of a series of reviews on the properties and applications of individual biopolymers rather than give the opportunity for scientists to present the results of more fundamental research. The 36 orally presented papers were divided into seven sessions dealing with gum arabic, starch, gelatin, pectin, microbial polysaccharides, seed gums and celluloses and seaweed polysaccharides. I felt that this format was only partly successful as some of the information was repeated in successive papers, whereas in other cases the sessions lacked coherence. The one on microbial polysaccharides did work extremely well however. The results of new research were to a large extent confined to an excellent poster session which contained 43 presentations and I look forward to reading these more fully in the Proceedings.

It should be possible from a meeting like this to gain a feel as to where the industry is going. The statement that gellan gum will be the last food approved new polysaccharide has been made so often that it has now become a cliché. Two approaches to the problem of innovation in the face of legislative constraints were suggested which I felt were of interest. Professor Barker of the University of Birmingham discussed the possibility of inducing chemical modifications to polysaccharides during domestic cooking particularly in microwave ovens and Dr Vic Morris talked about the production of useful exocellular polysaccharides from microorganisms during the manufacture of products such as vinegar and yoghurt. In terms of industrially available new materials, it is clear that considerable progress is being made with the commercialisation of konjak mannan and I was pleased to learn that pectate was now available industrially as I have always felt that there are interesting applications for essentially completely deesterified pectins. Professor Ed Morris

demonstrated that the role of calcium in enhancing the gelation properties of iota carrageenan could be explained on the basis of a simple Poisson-Boltzmann model. The difference between kappa and iota in terms of ion effects is due to the specific binding of some monovalent cations (potassium, rubidium etc.) to the former, but a specific site binding mechanism is not required to explain any of the cation effects found with iota

The meeting was accompanied by an industrial exhibition which gave those interested a chance to catch up with the ever changing names and affiliations of some of the companies concerned with industrial polysaccharide production. As usual the standard of catering enjoyed by the two hundred participants was excellent, despite some problems associated with industrial action. I was however disappointed to find that my request for an easier course for the golf competition, made in the previous report on this conference had been ignored.

**John Mitchell**