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'Planting Trees Whose Shade We'll Never Sit In': Q&A With Fragrance Creators' Farah Ahmed

by [Eileen Francis](#)

The Fragrance Creators Association president and CEO discusses the group's vision for fragrance industry stewardship and opportunities provided by AI, biotechnology and wellness trends in an exclusive Q&A with *HBW Insight*.

The Fragrance Creators Association is working with a diverse set of industry partners and other stakeholders on stewardship activities that will strengthen and grow the entire industry, benefiting businesses of all sizes, according to the group's president and CEO Farah Ahmed.

The effort, which goes beyond regulatory management to serve workers and consumers and advance "sustainable chemistries," was the topic of a panel discussion involving Ahmed and other industry leaders at the World Perfumery Congress in Geneva on 27 June.

In the 7 August interview that follows below, Ahmed expanded on FCA's work to promote the science and safety that underpins fragrance products in an increasingly hazard-averse world, emerging trends and technologies – including scent personalization and biotechnology – the confluence of fragrance and well-being, sustainability, and the impact of artificial intelligence.



FARAH AHMED, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF
FRAGRANCE CREATORS ASSOCIATION

HBW Insight: At the World Perfumery Congress, you and a panel of peers discussed fragrance industry stewardship. How do you view the role of FCA and its partners in this movement?

Farah Ahmed: The Fragrance Creators Association (FCA) brings together industry leaders who are committed to advancing the fragrance industry beyond their own companies. Our focus is on creating a collaborative landscape where competitors unite to strengthen and grow the entire industry, benefiting businesses of all sizes. This goes far beyond regulatory management; we're addressing how to better serve our workers, consumers, foster sustainable chemistries, and navigate global geopolitical and economic challenges in ways that allow the fragrance industry to deliver solutions.

We prioritize finding ways to be effective partners with the government to achieve mutual goals, often looking deeper into the origins of policy and regulatory challenges to find solutions that benefit both the industry and the public.

Through the [Fragrance Conservatory](#) we are providing consumers the information they need to know and understand the science and creativity of fragrance and the people and values that shape the industry.

The soul of FCA's approach to [responsible stewardship](#) is captured by the proverb, "Society grows great when old people plant trees whose shade they will never sit in." This reflects our long-term vision and commitment to creating lasting benefits for the future of people, perfume, and the planet.

Q Who are your industry partners in this stewardship effort?

A Ahmed: Our stewardship efforts rely on a robust network of both upstream and downstream industry partners. We collaborate closely with organizations in the chemical sector, such as the American Chemistry Council and the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), NAM being particularly invaluable partners during the pandemic. Downstream, we work with trade associations including the American Cleaning Institute, Consumer Brands Association, the Personal Care Products Council (PCPC), the Independent Beauty Association, the National Association of Chain Drug Stores, National Retail Federation, and more.

Globally, our engagement extends to platforms like the International Fragrance Association, where I serve on the board, and collaborations with Cosmetics Europe, Canadian Consumer Products Association, and Cosmetics Alliance Canada. Additionally, we maintain active dialogues with NGOs, the medical dermatology community, and scientific experts to ensure our stewardship initiatives are informed by a wide range of perspectives and expertise.

Q Moving to trends, how do you see the use of fragrance changing in coming years? To what extent does personalization represent the future?

A Ahmed: Fragrance personalization is indeed a growing trend, but it's important to clarify what we mean by "personalization." On one hand, it involves using fragrance to create personalized experiences, such as crafting a unique scent for a specific individual. On the other hand, it's about integrating scent into everyday environments, like using fragrance to enhance the atmosphere of a room, similar to how you might choose colors or fabrics.

[Our study](#), partially funded by Procter & Gamble, highlighted the essentiality and well-being benefits of fragrance in home-care products, showing how scent can transform a space. This type of personalization – using scent in home and personal-care products – is definitely on the rise. We're also seeing a broader cultural shift towards greater consciousness of scent in everyday life, whether in hair care, laundry,

or fine fragrance. This trend suggests a growing appreciation for fragrance in various forms, which, I believe, reflects a positive evolution in our nation's olfactive culture.

Q How is AI impacting fragrance creation and industry operations?

A Ahmed: For FCA, AI is a tool that enhances our speed and ability to analyze data and predict what's coming around the corner sooner and with greater accuracy. In January, 2023 we launched our [Policy Foresights Program](#) – a first-of-its-kind initiative that is delivering deep insights and outstanding predictive intelligence. This program allows us to better anticipate regulatory changes and industry trends, positioning us to respond proactively.

For the fragrance industry, we are seeing AI is primarily a tool that drives efficiencies, helping companies get quicker answers and streamline processes. For our industry, it is important to appreciate the creative aspect of fragrance – what we often refer to as the art of perfumery – which remains deeply rooted in human intuition and the unexpected. While AI can enhance certain functions, it doesn't wholly replace the unique contributions of human perfumers. The artistic and instinctual elements that define perfumery are irreplaceable and we believe will continue to play a central role in fragrance creation. AI will certainly have an interesting role, but it will complement rather than replace the human touch.

Q What are the most significant regulatory hurdles for the fragrance industry right now?

A Ahmed: The biggest challenge we face is the need for stronger education and more effective communication with regulatory bodies, including the FDA [US Food and Drug Administration], at all levels of decision-making. There's a growing trend toward hazard-based regulation, which often stems from a lack of understanding of the science and safety data that underpin our industry. (Also see "[Fragrance, Cosmetics Sectors Unclench; EU Parliament Advocates Lighter Touch In CLP Revision](#)" - HBW Insight, 10 Oct, 2023.) This approach can stifle innovation, particularly in developing greener chemistries and better molecules which are crucial for

environmental sustainability. We advocate for a shift toward [hazard and risk-based regulation](#), which considers both hazard and exposure, allowing for more balanced and informed decision-making that supports innovation.

Q What has been the biggest impact of the Modernization of Cosmetics Regulation Act (MoCRA) on the fragrance industry?

A Ahmed: Having worked at the FDA, I have a deep understanding of the policy, regulatory, and enforcement processes as well as demands on agency staff when implementing new regulations. I appreciate how having trustworthy and reliable industry partners plays a key role in ensuring the best-informed regulatory implementation. Leading up to MoCRA's passage, we were heavily involved in legislative efforts while also maintaining active communication with the FDA. This proactive approach allowed us to build a strong foundation with the agency, ensuring we had a deeper understanding of FDA's views on fragrance safety and the agency's ideas around optimum labeling and consumer education. Since MoCRA's implementation, we've continued to engage with FDA, particularly in exploring digital labeling solutions. This approach not only reduces packaging but also provides consumers with more detailed information, aligning with modern shopping habits and enhancing logistical efficiency. (Also see "[Cosmetics Stakeholders Watching October For FDA Proposal On Allergen Labeling](#)" - HBW Insight, 17 Jul, 2024.)

Q How important is biotechnology to the fragrance industry's future? Can it solve some of the critical issues the industry faces, such as the need to find alternative ingredients and preserve natural resources?

A Ahmed: Biotechnology is crucial for advancing sustainability and biodiversity within the fragrance industry. At FCA, we've [engaged](#) with the [White House National Economic Council](#) and other stakeholders to share our approach to biotech, which balances innovation with responsible environmental stewardship. Our success depends on a healthy planet, and we've heavily invested in understanding the connection between nature, science, and supply chain resilience. (Also see "[Arcaea Resurrects Extinct Flowers With First Fragrances Under Future Society Brand; Cosmetics](#)")

[News](#)" - HBW Insight, 2 Oct, 2023.)

Biotech allows us to support both natural sourcing and farming communities while also offering scalable solutions that can balance these efforts. This dual approach ensures that critical natural ingredients are preserved, and sustainable practices are advanced. (Also see "[Debut 'Democratizes' Biotech Product Formulation, Promising Superior Claims, Sustainability](#)" - HBW Insight, 25 Jul, 2024.)