



FSSAI bats for consumers on food choice, but sugar industry sees red

According to the proposed draft of Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018, the packaged food companies will have to declare nutritional information such as calories (energy), total sugar and salt, total fat and trans-fat, per serving on the front of the pack. The food labels will also declare, per serve percentage contribution to RDA (recommended dietary allowance) on the front of the pack. At present, the draft is in public domain for suggestions and feedback.



In an endeavour to provide healthy food choices for consumers, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is planning to mandate displaying red colour-coding on front-of-the-pack labels on packaged food products that have high-fat, high-sugar and high-salt content levels. The proposed draft has irked the country's sugar sector. According to it, sugar is the cheapest source of energy for a large section Indian populace. The sugar industry has opposed the FSSAI's move, saying there is no scientific evidence that proves that consumption of sugar is harmful for health.

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National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories Ltd (NFCSF) has said that it along with Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) have decided to meet the Health Ministry, Food Processing Ministry and the top FSSAI officials to oppose the draft policy. Members of the Indian Sugar Mills Association (Isma) and National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Mills represent both private and cooperative sugar sectors. "The proposed policy of red colour coding at the time, when the sugar industry is going through tough times is a wrong move," said Prakash Naiknavare, MD, National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories Ltd.

Reeling under the impact of falling prices and piling inventory, the sugar industry termed it as a wrongly timed move, and said that before coming up with such a policy or draft the thought should have been given about the sugar's per capita consumption in India, which is barely 20-22 kilograms, while the same goes up to 50 to 65 kilograms in western countries. They questioned that when the western nations are not thinking about it, why should we think on those lines.

Further, the industry said that sugar continues to be the cheapest source of energy in India, where the large population belongs to Below Poverty Line (BPL), therefore, red marking on food products will send a negative message to people.

Commodity market experts also feel the policy of colour coding on packaged food items will harm the industry. "If this (red) colour coding is implemented there would definitely be an impact on consumption pattern of sugar because (packaged food) industry will have to follow the rules. If we go back to last 1-2 years and even this year, there has been an increase in Sugar production. It will be a setback for the sugar industry. There would also be a reduction in farmers' remuneration as consumption will go down if the

FSSAI IN NEWS

red colour coding system is implemented," says Vandana Bharti, Assistant Vice President, SMC Global Securities Ltd.

We see that sometimes for 2-3 continuous years there is an overproduction of sugar, and sometimes there is a deficit. In my opinion, farmers should be informed if a crop is in surplus. They should be advised to switch to those crops which are more profitable to them. It will help in increasing the soil fertility as well as in maintaining demand-supply balance also," Bharti added.