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Assam: Mithun meat may soon get approval from FSSAI

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GUWAHATI: Mithun, a semi-domesticated bovine, found in large numbers in four northeast states, could soon be declared a food animal paving the way for its commercial rearing and consumption. The meat is considered more tender than any other variety. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is actively pursuing a proposal by the Nagaland-based Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)'s National Research Centre on Mithun (NRCM) to declare it a food animal.

Mithun meat is consumed by various tribal communities of the region, but FSSAI's approval will help farmers benefit economically from the rearing of the animal. NRCM director Abhijit Mitra said, "Once the approval comes, it will open up several vistas of economic benefits for both farmers and food processors." He added that the approval will help in clearing the misconception that mithun is a wild animal and promote its rearing.

Scientific studies by NRCM have found that mithun meat contains significantly low (2-3%) fat compared to beef and buffalo (10-12%). NRCM had submitted the proposal to FSSAI in October 2017. The Nagaland cabinet in March 2017 had given its nod for taking necessary steps to register the bovine as a food animal.

Reared in free-range and forest ecosystem-based semi-domesticated conditions, mithuns are found only in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram. The four states account for 98% of the global mithun population. They are usually found in altitudes ranging from 300 to 3,000 meters.

The livestock population survey 2019 recorded an estimated 3.9 lakh mithuns in the four states, which is a 30% increase over the 2012 census. Mitra said NRCM is also studying whether mithun can also be used as a milk animal. "We are exploring if rearing of the animal could be introduced beyond the four states as a livelihood avenue for farmers in non-traditional areas," he added.