

Over of food safety key, FSSAI fortification norms for bakery soon: Expert

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An overview of food safety is the need of the hour and FSSAI is soon coming up with regulations, whereby cereals, bakery products and so on can also be fortified, according to Inoshi Sharma, Director, FSSAI.

She was speaking at a recently-held webinar on Tackling the Impact of Covid-19 on Micronutrient Deficiencies through Food Fortification, organised by FICCI in collaboration with World Food Programme (WFP) and DSM India.

Sharma said, "As of now, five staples - salt, oil, milk, flour and rice are being fortified. The FSSAI in the process of passing a regulation for processed foods and the industry would be happy to know that very soon we would be coming up with regulations, whereby cereals, bakery products, buns, breads, biscuits, pasta, noodles, etc., commodities consumed by the people for which wheat or rice is used as a base for creating, can also be fortified. The need for research is very important and we need to figure out how we can adopt the process of fortification effectively."

It is time for the industry to come forward and promote fortification with +F brand products and spread consumer awareness. "The only condition we have put for processed food is that they should not be HFSS - high in fat, salt and sugar. If they do not fall in this category, all other processed food can be fortified," added Sharma.

She said that, while on one hand, it is important that the government push forward the programme through PDS and other measures, it is also important that the industry adopts these fortification programmes and add fortificants so that awareness for health benefits of fortified products is created among people.

"The regulations are very simple," she said. "The amount of fortification, which is added, is restricted to 30-50 per cent of the RDA. So, if there is a concern that by consuming a lot of fortified products, it might lead to toxicity levels, we want to assure that all that has been taken care of. These regulations are passed only after a scientific pattern has gone through them," she stated.

While emphasising on the need for fortification from a policy perspective, Sharma said that a proposal for mandatory fortification of oil and milk, encouraging processed food manufacturers to undertake fortification, training of staff on food fortification, retail expansion for availability of fortified staples and checking and sampling of premix quality were some of the crucial key pointers and way forward. "We are making sure that slowly the process of fortification becomes mandatory," she added.

Speaking at the event, Maaiké Bruins, lead scientist, F&B/NI NSA Global, DSM, said that the Covid-19 pandemic has been undermining nutrition across the world, especially in the low-income and middle-income countries and has aggravated malnutrition across these countries. "This is an opportunity for fortified staple foods such as rice or wheat flour to be included in the food-based safety net as part of Covid-19 response. Integrating fortified foods as part of safety nets in Covid-19 response can support resilience among most vulnerable of population," she stated.

Purnima Menon, senior research fellow, International Food Policy Research Institute, said, "In India, the context for fortification is both what happens in the foods that go in the private markets also, very substantially, what happens to foods & products that go in the public programmes. There is a need to invest in understanding the implementation research and factors affecting its impact and outcome."

Shariqah Yunus, nutrition specialist, World Food Programme, said, "Food fortification is an intervention that hasn't been tried consistently or at scale apart from a few pilot efforts in the past few years." Yunus added that a national level policy now needs to be translated into state level actions and there is a need for an assured market for the private sector. "There is an overarching need to have laboratories accredited to take micronutrient analysis of fortified food," she said.

Rajesh Kumar Sahetiya, senior business director, South Asia, DSM Nutritional Products, said, "We need to provide access to safe, healthy and affordable nutritional solutions, which can optimise nutritional levels of all communities."