

## Board to revive Tea Council

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Arun Kumar Ray, Deputy Chairman, Tea Board Debasish Bhaduri - Debasish Bhaduri

Plans to carry out random sampling to ensure quality and better prices

The Tea Board of India is reviving the Tea Council to ensure that teas produced adhere to quality parameters as mandated by food safety standards authority FSSAI. This is keeping in mind the export markets as better-quality teas will command better prices.

According to Arun Kumar Ray, Deputy Chairman, the Council, which is essentially an independent committee, will be responsible for conducting random sampling to check if the teas are FSSAI compliant.

The Tea Board will take punitive action against any company that found to be violating the norms or is non-compliant.

“The Council will comprise of retired experts and officials from the tea industry, who will be responsible for random sampling of teas to ensure they adhere to quality,” Ray told newsmen on the sidelines of the Young Tea Entrepreneurs Meet organised by the Tea Board on Thursday.

The Council was set up in 2010 by the Tea Board to ensure quality compliance of teas produced. However, it had soon turned inactive.

The process of revival of the Council has already been initiated and will be completed by the first week of May, a senior Tea Board official said. It will also be given more teeth to ensure compliance he added.

The industry has been reeling under the pressure of rising costs outstripping price realisations. Quality is cited as one of the key reasons for fetching poor prices. The Tea Board has been undertaking various initiatives to improve production of quality tea and remove substandard teas from the market.

The Board had, in October 2018, directed gardens not to carry out plucking beyond December 10, in order to reduce the quantity of substandard teas. Tea gardens usually carry on plucking activities almost till the end of December, leading to increased supply of poor-quality leaves, which is usually produced when plucking continues till the fag end of the season. Such teas exert pressure on prices.

Road map

With a view to boost domestic consumption and increasing exports, the Tea Board organised the Young Tea Entrepreneurs Meet. “The tea industry, the planters, should look

at bringing in innovation so as to boost consumption. Enhancing the potential of tea tourism could be one way of doing it," Ray said.

Some of the entrepreneurs present at the meeting shared their experiences and success stories in tea tourism and marketing.

"The aim behind organising this programme was to show planters the innovations that are possible in the tea industry and also to tell them to make clean and compliant teas," he said. Branding of speciality teas, moving from bulk tea to value-added tea and enhancing manufacture of organic teas will help boost consumption and prices.