

FSSAI issues egg safety guidance note, busting myth about plastic eggs

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Shraddha Joshi, Mumbai

FSSAI, the country's apex food regulator, has issued a guidance note on the quality and safety of eggs. It also contains the points that must be kept in mind to maintain their freshness and debunks the myth about plastic or fake eggs, on which there have been news reports.

Of late, the issue of quality and safety of eggs has been in the limelight, and has been creating doubts in the consumers' and traders' minds. The note assured that it will guide the consumers on how to assess their freshness and the best way to store, maintain quality and ensure safety.

It stated that the quality and appearance of the eggs primarily depend on the way they are stored. Their quality is high when they are stored in refrigerators and consumed within two or three days. If stored at room temperature, their texture, smell and appearance will change.

The key takeaway points stated that owing to the unavailability of techniques to make eggs artificially, they lose their quality in a day at room temperature as opposed to four to five days in a refrigerator.

The added that while traders should source eggs from credible sources, consumers should avoid the use of dirty or cracked eggs, as they are the perfect foil for bacterial infection.

T Kotaiah, a poultry farmer, opined, "The information published by FSSAI is very factual and good. The matter has mostly been picked up from textbooks, and is age-old and from the western world. It is good that it is coming to light. Egg and chicken, which were treated as farm produce, are now regarded as food."

He added, "The standards should be set up and consumers should follow. One standard is Agmark, which mentions grading of eggs also. However, nobody adheres to it. Of late, FSSAI has begun to play an active role on many fronts, including antibiotic residues."

"We, as stakeholders, feel that the standards should be formulated in consultation with the stakeholders, including producers and others. Some research and development (R&D) should be conducted on some issues like the levels we currently have, the levels recommended, and the safe acceptable levels," Kotaiah said.

"They should circulate the set standards for discussion before making them standards. The industry and healthy consumers require such guidelines," he added.

"However, they just prepare them and seek suggestions giving a short notice. No suggestions are considered, and they publish them in the gazette where they become permanent guidelines," stated Kotaiah.

Addressing the issue and dispelling the myth about plastic or fake eggs, FSSAI, through the note, explained that as a consequence of water loss in eggs, the egg white and yolk portions shrunk, followed by the mixing of the two portions.

When such an egg is broken it does not give a separate egg yolk or white giving the impression of a plastic or fake egg. Due to the loss of moisture, it becomes dry and has a paper-like appearance and texture, which creates the impression that it is plastic.

One should note that the total egg production in India in 2016-17 was about 88.1 billion. Compared to the previous year, it had witnessed 12 per cent growth. The reason in the increase is due to the fact that they are sold at thin margins compared to plastic eggs, whose process is labour-intensive and expensive.

Taking into consider the price factor, the retail cost of an egg is around Rs 5. One of the reports published stated that the cost of printing a 3D print of an egg was about Rs 5000, if it was printed in excess of 100 pieces. Thus, by taking into consideration, the cost of ingredients and labour-intensiveness, it would be hard to believe someone producing fake egg at almost four to five times the price of a natural egg.

Kotaiah said, "A statement by an official agency like FSSAI is valued more. When people talk of impossible things like plastic eggs, FSSAI's version is more credible. I also strongly believe that nobody will venture to make plastic eggs."

"Imitations and adulterations are done to make money. Plastic cannot be cheaper than what the hen gives us. It will be easily detected. The consumers point out small variations in colour, smell, etc., as well, for which clarifications are given in the note," he added.

"It is neither practical, nor economical to make plastic eggs. It is a myth. The consumer is very sensitive to eggs, and deviations can be easily detected," Kotaiah stated.

As an suggestion to the note, he added, "Egg quality deteriorations are well discussed in FSSAI information. A recommendation on cleaning, grading (by weight 60g+; 57 to 60g; 54 to 57g, 50 to 54g and below 50g) will help the industry."

"Packing eggs in cartons of six, 12 and 30 will help the consumer. Giving the date of production and use-before date will be a good guideline for consumers. This will avoid spoiled eggs in the market. Branding will increase the competition, and competition will set the quality issues right. As the production is going up, the competition should take care of these issues," Kotaiah said.

Fiza Nawaz, consultant dietitian, said, "Considering the intricate nature of eggs and the powerhouse of nutrients that they are, it is practically impossible to create something similar in taste or nutrition."

"In spite of the fast development of technology, life comes from a supreme being and is impossible to create by man or machine. An egg is a life in itself," she added.

"In a world of celebrity endorsements, sponsored posts and paid influencers, it is very important that consumers look for authenticity in news more than anything else. The press

publishes myths, falsehoods and exaggerations which are nowhere close to reality,” Nawaz said.

“Consumers and the public need to crave authenticity when it comes to media posts. The egg has been portrayed as something harmful and destructive. At the bottom line, eggs are a nutritious wholesome food,” she added.