

## **F&B industry must tweak food formulations to replace sugar, say experts**

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The food and beverage industry now needs to take a clear-cut decision replacing sugar in products. Experts stated that sugar was the new evil, adding that this was where sweeteners were poised to play a role in defining the taste, quality, texture and nutrition as they were embedded into food and beverages.

“Sweeteners are pivotal taste determinants. There is a high degree of appetite for sweet food, and therefore, it is time the industry opts for low no-calorie solutions (LNCS),” they added.

Reduction of calorie consumption is key to reduce the incidence of non communicable diseases. LNCS has gone through the same regulatory approvals like any other food additive or ingredient across the globe.

A high level of safety evaluation, extensive toxicology studies have seen regulatory authorities, spanning from USFDA (the United States Food and Drug Administration) to the EU (European Union), Codex and FSSAI to endorse its safety and satiety.

There are already about 822 sweetener-based foods that are launched globally. The way forward is that taste is the primary determinant.

“The sweetener range also calls for scientifically proven data even on the food pack labels. These are measures to change the perception of LNCS among consumers,” stated Zafar Parvez Khan, head, scientific and regulatory affairs, India and Asia Pacific chocolate lead, Mondelez International, in his presentation, titled Into the world of sweeteners: Low-/non-calorie, which was a part of a seminar, which was titled Sweeteners - Innovative ingredients for better health and organised by the Food Industry Association and CIFTI-FICCI.

Shruti Bhargava, head, regulatory affairs, Cargill Starches, sweeteners and texturisers, Cargill India, in her presentation titled Global safety assessment of low/non calorie sweeteners, pointed out that since the regulatory framework was in place and every data being backed by robust scientifically-validated studies to prove the safety and

toxicity, there was no cause for concern.

Steven Bartholomeusz, policy director, Food Industry Asia (FIA), said, “It is important to get the right message on sweeteners. The key threats and challenges for industry to use sugar are the tax levies, and therefore, it will be out of the products.”

“As a part of the FSSAI’s Eat Right campaign mandating to reduce salt, sugar and fat intake, food companies in India have already infused fibre and making it healthy,” he added.

Quoting a study conducted across certain countries, Bartholomeusz stated that consumers indicated that when sugar was replaced, there was a need to ensure that it did not mess with the taste of the product when LNCS was used. Other parameters critical for customer preferences were cost, product quality and nutrition.

“When industry comes under pressure to reduce sugar, regulators need to have an open mind to look at the negative and positive aspects on the alternative forms of sugar or the LNCS, which are extensively tested and proved to be safe by global authorities,” said the FIA policy director.