

Milk fortification project gathers momentum across India

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The project aims to process about 2 million tonnes of fortified liquid milk reaching around 30 million consumers (file photo) - THE HINDU

25 milk federations in 20 States fortifying 55 lakh litres of milk per day

The Milk Fortification Project, a collaborative initiative of the World Bank, Tata Trusts and the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) to address vitamin deficiency in consumers, has seen significant progress in the past two years.

According to the latest information shared by the NDDB about 25 milk federations, producer companies or milk unions across 20 States in the country are fortifying about 55 lakh litres of milk per day. The fortification is being carried out per Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) developed by NDDB and FSSAI.

Till date, about one million tonnes of milk have been fortified.

The project aims to process about two million tonnes of fortified milk, reaching around 30 million consumers. The project duration is 23 months. The NDDB is providing consultancy services to the World Bank for implementation of this project.

The Board is also providing technical and financial support to milk federations, producer companies and unions for project implementation, including development of SOPs for milk fortification and testing; quality assurance and quality control; trials, training, capacity building and for developing promotional materials.

Of the 25 project proposals approved, 15 have been launched; in 10, trials and training have been completed and the launch is in the offing. While inaugurating a workshop on 'Sustaining Efforts of Milk Fortification in India' at NDDB in Anand on Friday, Dilip Rath, Chairman, NDDB, informed that Vitamin A and D deficiencies are widely prevalent in the country and fortification of appropriate foods with them is a viable strategy to tackle micronutrient malnutrition.

“More specifically to India, micronutrient malnutrition is a silent emergency. As per WHO and UNICEF 2009 reports, the nation bears the burden of more than a quarter of the world’s vitamin A deficient preschool children and more than 13 million susceptible infants to iodine deficiency,” said Rath. According to National Family Health Survey-4 data, among children under five years in India, 38.4 per cent are stunted, 21 per cent are wasted and 35.7 per cent are underweight. Micronutrient deficiencies such as iron, folic acid, vitamin B12, zinc and vitamin D are prevalent and have an overwhelming impact over public health and economic productivity of the nation. The most powerful solution to combat this challenge is food fortification.

With its high volume of production, widespread distribution network, affordability and all-around acceptability in the daily food habit has emerged as the best vehicle for fortification. “We are the world’s largest milk producing country and our per capita milk availability has now increased to 375 g per day. Milk fortification is highly affordable and cost effective, as it cost less than three paise per litre,” Rath said.

Edward W Bresnayan, Senior Agricultural Economist, World Bank, mentioned that the South Asia Food and Nutrition Security Initiative (SAFANSI) seeks to address the South Asian Enigma — How chronic malnutrition remains intractable despite high economic growth — by fostering cross-cutting actions that will lead to measurable improvements in food and nutrition security.