

FSSAI's FFRC and NDDB hold national consultation on milk fortification

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In order to scale up milk fortification, Food Fortification Resource Centre (FFRC), FSSAI, in collaboration with Tata Trusts and the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) held a national consultation on milk fortification in New Delhi recently.

Its objective was to encourage a larger number of dairies in India to adopt milk fortification. As a part of the consultation, the early adopters of milk fortification were also felicitated. Among private dairies, Creamline Dairy Products Ltd was felicitated as an early adopter with a capacity of two lakh litre per day (LLPD).

Mother Dairy was felicitated as they pioneered milk fortification by fortifying approximately 30 LLPD of their pouch milk and bulk vending milk across Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) and other regions. Jharkhand Milk Federation and Maahi Milk Producer Company were also felicitated for their outstanding work and success in milk fortification.

The managing directors and chief executive officers of these companies shared their experiences with the industry on milk fortification and their partnership with Tata Trusts and NDDB.

Dairies such as Chanakya Dairy, VRS Foods (Paras Dairy), Heritage Foods, Creamline Dairy, Kwaliti Foods, Hatson Agro Product, Britannia, Nestle, Dairy Power Ltd, Goma Foods Pvt Ltd, Sunfresh Agro Industries Pvt Ltd and Milk Mantra were the brands which had proactively adopted fortification and launched fortified milk in the open market.

Major cooperative federations, including Orissa State Cooperative Milk Producers' Federation Ltd, Madhya Pradesh State Cooperative Dairy Federation Ltd, Jharkhand State Cooperative Milk Producers Federation Ltd, Bihar State Milk Co-operative Federation Ltd, Chhattisgarh State Cooperative Dairy Federation Limited, Pradeshik Dairy Cooperative Federation Limited and West Assam Milk Union Limited, have also shown a remarkable work in the last few months.

The consultation brought together around 35 private dairies and 10 state cooperatives. Presentations were made by representatives from Tata Trusts, NDDB and FFRC – FSSAI on the various engagement with the industry on milk fortification and new standards were discussed along with the packaging and labelling requirements.

There was also an open house discussion revolving around food fortification as a strategy, the cost of fortification, sources of vitamin, quality assurance, etc.

In his remarks, Pawan Kumar Agarwal, chief executive officer, FSSAI, addressed several concerns about fortification. He informed that the standards for fortification were set by a scientific panel comprising eminent scientists and public health specialists who have decades of experience in the sector.

The levels of fortification have been fine-tuned basis the scientific evidence. Also, keeping in mind the sensitivity of the Indian population, the regulation prescribed that the fortification must be done only from vegetarian sources.

Also, the cost of fortification is minimal for all the staples, especially for milk which is less than three paisa per litre and does not have an effect on the price of the fortified milk.

Fortification is a tried and tested strategy that has been implemented for decades in developed countries and yielded successful results.

Agarwal also informed that fortified staples merely provided 30-50 per cent of the recommended dietary allowances (RDAs), and therefore, were a complimentary strategy in addition to dietary diversification and supplementation. The Lancet, which is one of the leading weekly peer-reviewed general medical journals, identified fortification as one of the most effective strategies in combating micronutrient malnutrition.

Milk fortified with key micronutrients, namely Vitamins A and D, from vegetarian sources is an effective way to deliver these key micronutrients to the population without changing their dietary pattern.

Thirty per cent of the milk is handled by the organised industry in India. Since the operationalisation of standards for fortification by FSSAI, 21.53 per cent of fortifiable milk in the organised sector is fortified.

Currently approximately, 78 LLPD of milk is getting fortified through 13 state dairy cooperatives, reaching 52 million people across country, and about 15 LLPD of fortified milk through private dairies.

To encourage the fortification of staples, FSSAI recently issued a gazette notification of Standards (Fortification of Foods) Regulations, 2018. The new standards have a range of limits with a lower and upper limit of Vitamins A and D.

The consultation ended with all the participating milk processors assuring their support to achieve increased percentage of fortified milk by the end of this year.

The growing concern of micronutrient deficiencies in India can be strategically addressed through the

cost-effective, scientifically-proven, globally-recognised strategy, food fortification.

Making an addition to the existing enabling environment, the regulator recently introduced the process of endorsement for fortification.

It is a simple process based on self-compliance, wherein FBOs fortifying their product, shall undertake an endorsement by logging into the food licensing registration system (FLRS) with their existing username and obtain an endorsement. The step was well appreciated by the industry members.