

Supply fortified staples to fight morbidity, say experts

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Micronutrients lacking in PDS contents

The Public Distribution System is largely grain-focussed (rice and wheat) and does not provide adequate protein and micronutrients such as Vitamin A and D, according to experts speaking at an event organised here last week.

The Karnataka Health Promotion Trust (KHPT) and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) in collaboration with the Food Safety Division, Kerala, had jointly organised the brainstorming session.

Food certification beneficial

Highlighting the benefits of food fortification and urgent need for its widespread adoption, they noted that many beneficiaries of food programmes are too poor to buy protein-rich foods, leafy vegetables, and fruits that provide micronutrients. Fortification is a proven, cost-effective scientific solution that can be scaled up.

Nutrition is a key focus area of the National Development Agenda (part of Global Sustainable Development Goals), an official spokesman said. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India is framing policies and guidelines and is engaging with the food processing industry and food business operators for fortification of cereals, oil, and milk.

Push fortified staples through PDS

The aim is to make the fortified staples easily available in the open market and to the State governments for distribution through the PDS, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) scheme, the spokesman added.

Gururaj Patil, Team Lead, Fortification, KHPT, said that the government has taken several measures to make food fortification a norm. The FSSAI has proposed to make retail edible oil and milk fortification mandatory. Efforts are being made to provide quality-assured fortified staples to all beneficiaries of social safety net programmes.

The blue +F logo

. Micronutrient deficiency results in poor cognitive and learning abilities in children, lower productivity, increased morbidity, and mortality and lower immune responses.

The packaging of fortified products will carry a blue +F logo and the nutrition label on the packed product would indicate the various added micronutrients and their quantities, as specified by the FSSAI.

Address chronic deficiencies

Investing in food fortification is a cost-effective way to reduce malnutrition. Data from the first phase of the National Family Health Survey-5, covering 17 states and five Union Territories, released in December last year, showed a worsening in indicators related to nutrition such as anaemia and Vitamin D levels in many States.

Different schemes on ground

Earlier, inaugurating the event, Ajaya Kumar, Commissioner, Food Safety, Kerala, said that the government and food manufacturers have implemented different schemes and projects to drive the addition of micronutrients into food. As a public health policy, this will go a long way to help to reduce dietary deficiencies in India.