

FSSAI notifies draft regulation containing mozzarella cheese definition

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With an aim to step up harmonisation of the standards with Codex, FSSAI, India's apex food regulator, has notified a draft regulation defining mozzarella cheese and standards for low-lactose/lactose-free milk along with permeate powder.

The definition for mozzarella cheese was missing in the earlier regulations, and given the rise of QSRs (quick service restaurants) in India, where this type of cheese is used in plenty, the regulator saw a need.

Called the Food Safety and Standards (Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Amendment Regulations, 2019, according to these regulations, in Sub-regulation 2.1.17 related to Standard for Cheese and Cheese Products, in Item 1, in Sub-item (a), the following sub-item shall be inserted, namely:

(aq) Mozzarella cheese is unripened cheese obtained by coagulating milk with cultures of harmless lactic acid-producing bacteria, suitable enzymes of non-animal origin or by direct acidification. It has a smooth elastic structure without curd granules and has a near-white colour.

Mozzarella, with low moisture content, is a firm/semi-hard homogeneous cheese without holes and is suitable for shredding. Mozzarella is made by pasta filata processing, which consists of heating curd of a suitable pH value kneading and stretching until the curd is smooth and free from lumps. Still warm, the curd is cut and moulded, then firmed by cooling.

According to the market research firm IMARC, the Indian cheese market would reach Rs 125.4 billion by 2024, mainly triggered by the fast food revolution, growing at CAGR (compound annual growth rate) of 26 per cent annually.

Meanwhile, the regulation also prescribes standards for lactose-free milk, which is a natural carbohydrate present in milk. This is particularly needful for the people having problem in digesting lactose and suffer from conditions like lactose intolerance. This problem can lead to indigestion, bloating, etc.

According to the draft regulation, the low lactose or lactose-free milk means in which, lactose content has been reduced significantly through hydrolysis by enzymatic or any

other appropriate process and shall conform with the following requirements:

- (i) Low-lactose milk shall have less than one per cent lactose; and
- (ii) Lactose-free milk shall have less than 0.01 per cent lactose.

While the labelling requirement for such products is also prescribed under these regulations, wherein in case of low-lactose or lactose-free milk, the name of the product may be Low Lactose or Lactose Free.....milk, wherein the blank will be filled by the name of the respective milk from which it is prepared.

FSSAI stated that people who are lactose intolerant need to take milk which is rendered free from lactose, and with these standards for low-lactose/lactose-free milk in place, such products can be effectively regulated for their food safety and quality.

Further, new standards were specified for dairy permeate powder, which is increasingly finding its use in the ingredient industry for nutrition products. "This has been done to harmonise the standards with those of Codex," stated FSSAI, while adding that comments are invited from the stakeholders, if any, by June 6, 2019.