

FSSAI working on standards for nutraceuticals

India may soon have mandatory standards for nutritional supplements since the Food Safety Standards Authority of India is working on benchmarks, even as demand for nutraceuticals increases rapidly in the country, according to people familiar with the matter.



Nutraceuticals, also known as functional foods, are largely nutritional supplements containing mostly vitamin C and D, and Zinc. They are available as pills, syrups, capsules, powders, gummies and chewables, and, a section of experts believe, have limited benefits.

“In FSSAI’s recent scientific committee meeting, nutraceuticals was specifically mentioned as one of the challenging areas as their use is clearly increasing among masses, especially in the post Covid era where everyone seems to be keen on boosting their immunity,” a government official said, requesting anonymity. “That has created an increased demand for such products. Therefore, these need to be well regulated.”

The market for nutraceuticals is growing as a large chunk of population is consuming these as dietary supplements. The market for nutritional supplements is anticipated to expand by a compounded rate of 50% from \$4 billion in 2017 to 18 billion in 2025, according to the national food regulator.

Earlier this month, the newly constituted scientific committee of FSSAI met for the first time since it was established in March to focus on sustainable food standards, new areas and challenges.

“The meeting provided an opportunity to highlight new challenges and areas such as nutraceuticals, ultra-processed food, rapid kits and methods for detecting food-borne pathogens, etc., which needs

special deliberation by the scientific committee,” G Kamala Vardhana Rao, CEO of FSSAI, said at the panel meeting.

The minutes of deliberations were released in a statement by the food regulator.

The scientific committee comprises six independent experts and chairpersons of the 21 scientific panels, which are constituted by the food authority under Section 13 of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 (FSS Act). The panel will provide scientific opinion and inputs to the food authority.

The scientific committee and the 21 scientific panels are principal scientific arms of the food authority in the standard development process.

Nutraceuticals have grown tremendously in popularity and acceptance in India, especially with everyone keen on working towards strengthening their immunity, industry insiders said. The bioactive derivatives from sources like phytochemicals, antioxidants, amino acids, fatty acids, and probiotics found in nutraceuticals make them a viable defence against viral attacks, they said.

However, industry representatives also said there is a need to regulate the market .

“Nutraceuticals have fast become a staple in the health care market. India’s nutraceutical market is prepped to be a global leader at \$4-5 billion and is expected to grow approximately \$18 billion by 2025. We’re also witnessing many global nutraceutical companies shifting their focus to the country,” Sanjeev Jain, joint managing director of Akums Drugs and Pharmaceuticals said in a statement.

On March 7, an advisory was released by the FSSAI regarding the implementation of special enforcement drives aimed at verifying the compliance of nutraceuticals and health supplements, Jain said. “The reason for this action is due to the sale of non-compliant nutraceutical and health supplement products in the market, as well as the false and misleading label and health claims associated with these products,” he said.

“Developing standards in the nutraceutical industry is much awaited,” said Amit Deshpande, founder and director of Activist Health Care, which also deals in nutraceuticals. “While leading players do abide by volunteer safety standards, the absence of mandatory standards makes some resort to practices that lead to suboptimal products. This is a cause of concern, especially for edible products.”

Mandatory benchmarks set by the food regulator would ensure quality products reach the consumer, Deshpande said. “This will also ensure that all the players involved in the industry pay heed to the quality, safety and efficacy of edible wellness products, be it at the source, the manufacturing facility, or the storage site,” he added.