



Food fortification priceless strategy to prevent vitamin deficiencies

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Food fortification is a simple, inexpensive and priceless strategy that is being used across the world to effectively prevent vitamin and mineral deficiencies. This was stated by Pawan Kumar Agarwal, chief executive officer, FSSAI at an interaction between domain experts, key stakeholders in fortification and the media, which was organised by the country's apex food regulator.

At the first-of-its-kind session, aimed at raising awareness about the large-scale food fortification being carried out, the participants deliberated on the progress made in food fortification, the challenges and the way forward, since 2016, when the draft regulations for fortified food, called the Food Safety and Standards (Fortification of Food) Regulations were operationalised.

Reiterating FSSAI's commitment to addressing the humongous challenge of micronutrient deficiency, Agarwal said, "Public health consequences of micronutrient deficiencies are serious. The message of food fortification, therefore, needs to go out using various methods, through various means, to various people."

The fortification stakeholders, experts and development partners pledged to support and mobilise knowledge partnerships in an attempt to reach out to a larger audience about the benefit of fortification.

Widespread micronutrient malnutrition is a serious threat to the health of the nation and consequently affects our growth and development. According to the National Health and Family Survey (2016), 70 per cent of the Indian population consumes less than 50 per cent of the recommended daily allowance (RDA) of micronutrients. About 70 per cent of pre-school children and over 50 per cent of women suffer from anaemia caused by iron deficiency. These statistics are alarming.

The food regulatory authority notified the standards and launched a fortification logo to help

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consumers and businesses identify the fortified product. The logo, comprising a square encompassing a +F sign, signifies the added nutrition and vitamins to daily meals was launched a month after the official roll-out of the Food Fortification Resource Centre (FFRC) and has already been adopted by several food businesses.

The scientific panel on food fortification and nutrition is continuously reviewing standards for fortification based on nutritional gaps in the Indian diet, in general as well as of specific target groups, based on diet surveys and credible scientific evidence.

Speaking to the media, experts stated that fortification was the need of the hour. Santosh Karmarkar, expert of folic acid deficiency, said, “The scope of fortifying wheat flour with folic acid has the potential to reduce child paralysis and incidences of spina bifida.”

R K Marwaha explained the importance of fortifying food with Vitamin D, stating that the source of Vitamin D was limited to sunlight and few non-vegetarian foods, hence fortifying foods was an essential intervention.

Speaking on widely-prevalent iron deficiency anaemia, Prema Ramachandran said that only the positive effect on the health of the baby can be the key message for pregnant women to consume iron-rich foods/fortified foods.

Chandrakant Pandav emphasised on the importance of the +F Logo from a consumer perspective. He urged the consumers to ask for it, look for it, use it and spread the word.

FFRC, housed in FSSAI, has been established with the support of Tata Trusts and is working towards the promotion and scaling up of food fortification in the open market and government programmes.

With the help of development partners such as the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), the World Food Programme (WFP), the Nutrition Initiative (NI), PATH and World continues to engage with staple food manufacturers and the states and Union Territories (UTs) for inclusion of fortified staples in government safety net programmes like Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDM) and the public distribution system (PDS) on a regular basis.

The standards and logo for fortified foods have already become synonymous to large-scale food

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fortification in India. Several states are already in the advanced stages of adopting fortified foods in government programmes. It is heartening to note that several food businesses have voluntarily adopted the fortification standard as an industry norm.