

FSSAI to develop standards for fortified rice kernels

Meenakshi Verma Ambwani_ New Delhi | Updated on September 26, 2021



FILE PHOTO: Farmers plant saplings in a rice field on the outskirts of Srinagar - REUTERS

Food safety authority wants consumers can get vital info; FRK units to get licence only after inspection

With the Centre planning to tackle malnutrition through distribution of fortified rice from various government schemes by 2024, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is looking at developing standards for fortified rice kernels (FRKs).

This is the first time the food safety authority is looking at developing standards for an additive. This is being done to ensure quality FRKs are used to fortify rice.

The food safety authority aims to bring this regulation so that consumers can get vital information on parameters such as total sugar, sodium, saturated fat and calories, in a simple manner, on packaged food and beverage labels.

Ensuring quality

Arun Singhal, CEO, FSSAI said that a scientific panel is looking at developing these standards to ensure quality of FRKs is maintained and to ensure blending efficiency is achieved.

“We have also decided that every fortified rice kernel manufacturing unit will be inspected before grant of licence. We follow a risk-based classification system for licensing and FRKs will be included in the high-risk category similar to segments such as meat and dairy,” he added.

Singhal said that efforts are also being made to strengthen the testing ecosystem for fortified rice through government and private labs.

Vitamins and minerals are added to pulverised milled rice and this mixture is then used to develop FRKs. The FRKs, which look similar to rice grains, are then blended with traditional rice. Singhal pointed out that the ratio in which FRKs are blended with traditional rice is critical.

The ratio in which FRKs are blended with traditional rice currently ranges from 1:50 to 1:200 and a scientific panel is now expected to define the ratio in which blending should be done.

Healthier food choices

FSSAI has already set standards for fortified rice and the level of fortification of iron, folic and Vitamin B12 on a per kg basis has already been defined.

Meanwhile, in a bid to address the issue of obesity and enable consumers to make healthier food choices, the FSSAI is also in the process of finalising regulations for the front-of-the-pack labelling for the packaged food industry.

“We have asked IIM-Ahmedabad to conduct a survey to gauge consumer feedback on the format in which the front-of-the-pack labelling should be done. This will be a fairly large scale survey of about 18,000 consumers,” Singhal added.