

Centre initiates steps to promote healthy eating as part of 'Eat Right' movement

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By Namita Kohli September 05, 2019



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The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has decided to remove the mandatory requirement of TSS (Total Soluble Solids, commonly used to measure sugar content in juices) in thermally processed fruit nectars, thermally processed fruit beverages, ready-to-serve fruit beverages, carbonated fruit beverages or fruit drinks. “This will facilitate reduction of sugar through reformulation or development of fruit and vegetable products with lower amount of TSS,” according to a technical note on the FSSAI's key regulatory measures to support the Centre's 'Eat Right' movement.

“This will allow the industry to restrict the addition of sugar to fruit products,” Pawan Agarwal, CEO, FSSAI, told THE WEEK. Agarwal also said the labeling advisory of 'not suitable for children, pregnant women' on 17 kinds of artificial sweeteners (except saccharine) will also be removed so that these sweeteners can be used judiciously in food products, particularly for the “obese” population of the country.

Other key measures that the food regulator is planning includes limiting Total Polar Compounds (TPC) to a maximum of 25 per cent, beyond which the edible oil is not suitable for use. Under the Re-Purposed Used Cooking Oil (RUCO) initiative that the regulator has undertaken with the ministry of petroleum and natural gas, used cooking oil is being converted to bio-diesel.

“An eco-system for collection, aggregation, and conversion of UCO to bio-diesel is being developed in the country,” the note said.

The measures are being undertaken in light of India's target to be free of industrial trans-fats by 2022, a year ahead of the global target set by the WHO. “India is passing through an epidemiological shift from communicable to non-communicable diseases, and the burden of diet-related diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity is rising rapidly. The new “food systems approach” judiciously combines the regulatory and capacity building measures with consumer empowerment initiatives”, Union Health Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan said at the launch of the 'Eat Right' movement in New Delhi on Thursday.

Vardhan also said the standards for five fortified staples—wheat flour, rice, oil, milk and salt— to reduce large-scale deficiencies of vitamins and minerals have been notified, in addition to standards for health supplements, nutraceuticals, prebiotics and probiotics products. “To facilitate informed consumer choices, regulations on advertising and claims and mandatory menu labeling has been notified. In addition, labeling provisions have been made for appropriate use of sweeteners for children and pregnant women,” he said.

To reach the target of a trans-fat free India by 2022, regulations to reduce trans-fat to less than two per cent in all oils, fats and food products are in place.

Vardhan also said, “The preparatory work for creating awareness around mindful eating is also in place, with prototypes for clusterisation schemes such as clean street food hubs, clean and fresh fruit and vegetable markets are being worked on.”

“Food businesses have participated in large-scale training and capacity building programs on ensuring food safety. Over 1.7 lakh food safety supervisors have been trained and certified. Robust material in the form of a Pink Book, Yellow Book, DART Book and informative videos are in place, and can be accessed through a video library on FSSAI’s website,” he said.

At the launch event, Dr. Poonam Khetrpal Singh, regional director, WHO-SEARO, also stressed on healthy eating, given India's burden of non-communicable diseases. “Ensure you have five servings of fruits and vegetables in a day, reduce your salt intake to half a teaspoon a day, avoid sugar, and eliminate trans-fat laden foods in your diet,” Singh told the audience.