

Press Release

After edible oil, industry warms up to fortification of wheat flour

Delhi, 5th April, 2017:Major wheat-flour brands and millers would begin to fortify wheat flour with Iron, Folic Acid and Vitamin B-12 .

Market leaders like the ITC, General Mills, Hindustan Unilever, Patanjali, and Cargill have agreed to start fortification of their flagship brands of wheat flour (atta) such as Aashirwaad, Pillsbury, Annapurna, Patanjali and Nature Fresh respectively. They have already initiated the process and their fortified wheat flour would begin to be seen in the market in different regions by July/August and then scale up pan-India by December 2017.

This decision is the outcome of a series of meetings convened by FSSAI over past 2 months with related businesses, including medium and small industry players and development partners such as GAIN who have been associated with fortification of wheat flour over the past few years.

Several flour millers in Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Orissa are already providing fortified wheat flour. In several places in these states fortified wheat flour is readily available. Decision of market leaders would prompt and encourage other flour millers to start fortification. In a meeting with Pawan Agarwal, CEO, FSSAI, the food industry associations like the Roller Flour Millers Federation of India (RFMFI), Wheat Products Promotion Society (WPPS) and Society of Indian Bakers (SIB) conveyed their commitment to start fortification of wheat flour and other products such as biscuits, breads, rusks and cakes, at the earliest.

Ratan Gupta, Chairman of WPPS and former President RFMFI, J.N. Kushwaha, President, SIB have assured that their associations would now reach out to their members to adopt fortification of wheat flour and other wheat-based products, as an industry practice. Mr. Raj Kapoor, Managing Director at AIBTM, offered to provide all the technical support to the wheat flour milling and bakery industry to initiate fortification of their products.

Fortification of staple foods, including wheat flour is gaining momentum. It is strongly backed by the scientific panel on fortification, medical experts and the academia. Fortification of wheat flour with Iron, Folic Acid and Vitamin B12 offers one of the most feasible and cost-effective strategy to combat anaemia and other micronutrient deficiencies that impact more than 50% of India's population across the population groups and geographies, affecting all socio-economic classes equally. India has a fairly high consumption of wheat flour with an average per person consumption of about 200-250 g per day, equaling to an overall annual consumption of 63.3 MMT.

Department of Food and Public Distribution, Government of India has also issued guidelines dated 22nd December, 2016 recommending the State/UTs to distribute fortified wheat flour as

per FSSAI standards through the Public Distribution System. Fortified wheat flour is being supplied in West Bengal through PDS since 2000. Similarly Government of Andaman and Nicobar Islands has also been providing fortified wheat flour through PDS. Government of Rajasthan is initiating supply of fortified wheat flour through the PDS from the coming July.

With a view to reduce the high burden of micronutrient malnutrition, FSSAI has laid standards for fortification of wheat flour with Iron, Folic Acid and Vitamin B-12. Technical issues and challenges with respect to wheat flour fortification have been discussed and addressed. Guidelines are also being issued for fortified packaged foods including the following categories – breads, biscuits, rusk and cakes. Stakeholders of the meetings on food fortification have agreed to jointly promote 'Consumer-facing' awareness, including promotion of the national logo for fortified foods, symbolizing better nutrition. Meetings have also been convened with Retailers Association of India and they have committed to promote the logo of fortified foods and provide a separate shelf to display fortified food products, which would be placed at a prominent 'eye-catching' place at their points of sale.

Pawan Agarwal, CEO, FSSAI, stated that *"Fortification Standards and a logo for fortified foods released by FSSAI recently, has provided a rallying point for food businesses to take up fortification on a large scale. With this we can see a lot of traction amongst the food businesses to undertake fortification of entire range of their food products on a voluntary basis. FSSAI has also established a Food Fortification Resource Centre (FFRC) to facilitate and support food businesses in their fortification efforts. I am reasonably optimistic that fortified staple food will soon be available in the open market and most States will soon switch over to using fortified foods in the government programmes."*

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