

Food safety policies need to cover the entire chain, from farm to fork

It is important that both the industry and government work in partnership to facilitate the growth of fortified food products



There is an opportunity for brands to enable healthy lives for consumers in a framework where products are purchased not only for taste but also for the nutritional value. Photo: Mint

India is one of the leading producers of food globally and there is a lot of potential which can be harnessed to create a safe and healthy food ecosystem in the country.

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Food safety is critically important for improving public health and policies need to cover the entire food chain, from farm to fork. The regulatory environment in India is very dynamic, with developments moving at a rapid pace.

Thus to contribute effectively to strengthening the food safety environment in India, Nestlé established the Nestlé Food Safety Institute (NFSI) in Manesar, which combines our global expertise in food quality and science into a larger foot print. Through this institute, we conduct training programmes on food safety management systems, testing methods and regulatory standards. All individual steps across the value chain in the “farm to fork” need attention. This holistic approach enables farmers and manufacturers to address issues early on, through measures that mitigate the hazard ideally at the crop stage.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is doing a commendable job in promoting and ensuring food safety and quality. Its continued focus has been to create a science-based regulatory environment that protects consumers’ interest and creates an enabling environment for the food industry. Its massive outreach efforts from schools to our homes to workplaces is helping develop a culture of food safety and nutrition across India.

Quality and safety are the key pillars of Nestlé India and we want to share knowledge through collaborative partnerships to help improve food safety in the country. We launched Project Serve Safe Food in collaboration with National Association of Street Vendors of India and have trained over 5,000 street food vendors across India in food safety and hygiene since its inception in 2016.

Our Nestlé Quality Management System encompasses the whole value chain from farm to fork, ensuring appropriate controls are in place at each step of the chain to ensure that our products are safe and compliant. The initiatives for strengthening food standards through consistent scientific review of mechanisms and regulations will go a long way in helping to ensure a safe and healthy food environment in the country.

Fortification is recognised as the most effective strategy to address micronutrient deficiency. However, in India, only 2-5% of food items are believed to be fortified with the micronutrients lacking in many Indian diets. As per the 2015-16 National Family Health Survey, 53% females and 22.7% males (15-45 years) suffer from iron deficiency with an almost equal split across rural and urban India.

The government is encouraging enrichment of food items with micronutrients to address dietary deficiencies among certain sections of the population and FSSAI has operationalised the draft Food Safety and Standards (Fortification of Foods) Regulations 2016 for fortifying food staples. FSSAI regulated that fortified foods should bear a logo indicating that the item has been fortified and enriched with essential nutrients. Nestlé India is always exploring ways to fortify its mass consumption products to close the gap and contribute to the larger national objective. Fortifying our Popularly

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Positioned Products with micronutrients can help address deficiencies where they are most prevalent—among lower-income consumers.

We are building a better and stronger Maggi brand driven by our purpose of enhancing quality of life and contributing to a healthier future. We want to introduce products that offer healthier choices as we simplify our ingredients and encourage home cooking. At the forefront of this drive is the commitment to reshape Maggi products to emphasize the use of familiar and common ingredients people know and use.

We have fortified our products such as Maggi Masala-ae-Magic spice seasoning. Maggi Masala-ae-Magic, which is the first ever fortified taste enhancer that can be used across different cuisines in India, efficiently enhances the taste inherent in the ingredients already present. It is specifically fortified with iron, vitamin A and iodine, which are known to be widespread deficiencies in India. Last year, we also fortified Maggi Masala noodles with iron. With 2.5 billion portions consumed annually in India, Maggi Masala noodles offer a powerful platform to address iron deficiency through the iron fortified variant. We have also taken steps to fortify other product categories as well, such as MILO, Nestlé A+ milk.

It is important that both the industry and government work in partnership to facilitate the growth of fortified food products. There is an opportunity for brands to enable healthy and productive lives for consumers in a framework where products are purchased not only for taste but also for the nutritional value. The consumption patterns in the country have also undergone significant changes with more consumers opting for healthier packaged foods and we want to offer healthier choices to our consumers.

The author is chairman and managing director of Nestlé India Ltd.