



FSSAI plans to make fortification of edible oil mandatory across India

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FSSAI is planning to make fortification of edible oil mandatory across India. The country's apex food regulator is actively considering this move and has held discussions with the stakeholders in the recent past. In a couple of months, it plans to put forth the strategy for the same.

Pawan Kumar Agarwal, chief executive officer, FSSAI, opined that the time had come for the mandatory fortification of packaged edible oil. However, as of now, it is not binding upon companies to fortify their offerings.

"Already 47 per cent of the refined packaged edible oils are fortified nationally. Food fortification is cost-effective and sustainable strategy. The cost incurred on food fortification is very little," he added.

"The regime of fortification of edible oil should start soon. Transition is not difficult, and technology is easily available by both government and various bodies," Agarwal said.

"FSSAI also has a dedicated team at its headquarters to help with the process. Even groups like TATA and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) have developed programmes to help with fortification of edible oil," he added.

According to GAIN, an international organisation which was launched by the United Nations (UN) in 2002 to tackle the human suffering caused by malnutrition, over 80 per cent of India's population consumes less than 50 per cent of their recommended daily allowance (RDA).

Fifty to 90 per cent population suffers from Vitamin D deficiency, and 61.8 per cent of the population has sub-clinical Vitamin A deficiency, making it a public health concern.

Dietary sources of Vitamin D are limited. Hence, it is difficult for people to meet their daily requirements of Vitamin D through dietary diversification.

The fortification of edible oil with Vitamins A and D is, thus, an effective complementary strategy to fill the gap between a person's daily requirements and consumption, as edible oil has a household penetration of over 99 per cent.

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Meanwhile, Rajasthan and Haryana are two states in the country which have already mandated fortification of edible oil.

Globally, the fortification of edible oil has already been taken up by several countries.

T Longvah, director in-charge, National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), Hyderabad, said, "There are 27 countries across the globe which have already mandated the fortification of edible oil. These include Bolivia, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria and Tanzania. According to sporadic studies, there is a high prevalence of Vitamin A and D deficiency in India.

Further, FSSAI is also considering mandating the fortification of milk as well in the second phase.

Agarwal said, "Along with oil, we should look forward to and take into consideration the fortification of milk as well. Various milk cooperatives, like the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), Amul, Mother Dairy, etc., are showing great interest. We are seeing significant growth in the fortified packaged milk segment. For instance, Prabhat Dairy has nicely covered the eastern region."

Longvah said, "So far, 14 countries have mandated milk fortification. These include the United States, Canada, Brazil, China, Costa Rica, Malaysia, Thailand, Finland, Sweden, etc."

"Both Vitamins A and D are very essential for our body. Thus, by slowly gaining more experience in the fortification of milk, the mandate might be for the fortification of milk as well," Agarwal added.

It would be appropriate to note that the food authority, in the past, put out standards and guidelines for fortification of edible oil and milk, and also issued a logo for fortified food on the food package for the consumer to easily recognise the product.

Many renowned companies in various segments, like milk and oil, are ready to adopt food fortification techniques, and the Central government is also supporting the move by providing fortified food through its schemes like the Mid-day Meal (MDM) scheme.

The food authority also hoped that industry will also show similar interest in the fortification of other staples, like rice, wheat and salt. India should come forward now in the fortification field.
