

Labels on fortified food products to carry details of micro-nutrients

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NEW DELHI: All fortified food products in the market will now have to carry "+F" logo on their label and comply with the standards set by the food safety authority, as per the new regulations notified by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). The regulations will come into effect from January, 2019.

In a move to enable consumers to identify fortified food easily as well as ensure quality of such products, the food regulator has notified the Food Safety and Standards (Fortification of Foods) Regulations, 2018. Apart from the mandatory logo, the gazette notification issued last week, provides for minimum and maximum range for fortification of products like vegetable oil, milk and other products. The standards also include adjusted dosage of the micro-nutrients so that they provide 30% to 50% of the daily requirements.

“Any manufacturer who fortifies any food shall ensure that the level of micro-nutrient in such fortified food does not fall below the minimum level specified in Schedule- I,” the notification said.

Fortification is the addition of key vitamins and minerals such as iron, iodine, zinc, and vitamins A and D to staple foods such as rice, wheat, oil, milk and salt to improve their nutritional content.

The regulations are aimed at placing food fortification on the national agenda to reduce the high burden of micro-nutrient deficiency in India. Besides, stringent regulations and standards are also essential to ensure fortified food available in the market are quality products.

FSSAI has asked manufacturers and packers of fortified food to give undertaking twice a year on quality assurance and submit evidence of steps taken in this regard to the food authority.

The regulation also mandates all fortified food to be packaged in a manner that takes into consideration the nature of the fortificant added and its effect on the shelf-life of such food.

According to the National Family Health Survey, around 50% of women and children in India suffer from anaemia. While food fortification helps combat malnutrition, the government is trying to introduce such products through government schemes to counter problems stunting, overweight and anaemia – major causes of maternal and child deaths.

“The regulation will also create an enabling environment and encourage food businesses to adopt food fortification,” the regulator said.

Last year, FSSAI had released benchmarks to fortify the nutritional quality of food items used in social sector programmes such as ICDS, PDS and mid-day meals.