

FSSAI notifies honey stds to curb adulteration and strengthen quality

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With the need to curb rampant adulteration in honey and further strengthen its quality, FSSAI, the country's apex food regulator, has notified the standards for honey. It has further initiated a probe into various popular brands products to check the authenticity of honey.

Lately, honey had been under the scanner due to adulteration, through the use of various artificial colours and sugars. Adulterated commonly with corn and rice syrup, cane and beet sugars and sulphite-ammonia caramel, the drop in production and the consequent increase in market prices mainly leads to such falsification practices.

Samples of the companies like Dabur, Zandu, Patanjali and others have been already taken. An official from FSSAI said, "A lot has been going on with regards to the honey sold in the market. There has been a growing concern amongst the public of honey being adulterated with corn or sugar syrup."

He added, "We have collected samples of all the brands selling honey in the market, but the testing is not yet over. The results may take couple of weeks to come."

The revised standards highlights new quality parameters of addressing quality and purity of honey products. Earlier, the FSSAI didn't have testing methods and parameters to figure out if the honey was authentic or not.

Any food business operator (FBO) found violating the set standards will be fine upto Rs 3 lakh and imprisonment upto six months under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006. The official said, "While the enforcement of the new regulation will start next year, the surveillance and monitoring activities is likely to continue."

As per the revised regulations, new parameter will help to easily detect the adulteration. A few of them are diastase activity, 13C/12C ratio between fructose and glucose, Specific marker for Rice Syrup (SMR), Trace marker for Rice Syrup (TMR), etc.

Honey can now be labelled according to floral or plant source. The apex food regulator had earlier set the tolerance limit of 10 antibiotics in honey to prevent the malpractices of using these antibiotics at producer level. The revised standards restricts heating or processing of honey to an extent that its essential composition is changed or its quality is impaired.

| Number | Parameter | Permissible limit |
|--------|--|-------------------|
| 1. | Fructose to glucose ratio (F/G ratio) | 0.95 – 1.50 |
| 2. | Diastase activity, Schade units (minimum) | 3.0 |
| 3. | Pollen count/g (Minimum) | 25,000 |
| 4. | Foreign oligosaccharides | 0.1 |
| 5. | Proline, mg/kg (minimum) | 180 |
| | (a) $\delta^{13}C$ maximum (the maximum difference between all measured $\delta^{13}C$ values); per cent | ± 2.1 |
| | (b) $\delta^{13}C$ Fru – Glu (The difference in $^{13}C/^{12}C$ ratio between fructose and glucose); per cent | ± 1.0 |
| | (c) $\delta^{13}C$ (%) Protein – Honey (The difference in $^{13}C/^{12}C$ between honey and its associated protein extract) per cent | $= - 1.0$ |
| 7. | Total Oligosaccharides, per cent (erlose, theanderose, and panos) | 3.0-4.0 |

The current notified amendment would be the Food Safety and Standards (Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Ninth Amendment Regulations, 2018. FBOs are direct to comply with these regulations by January 2019.