

Opinion | Food companies are watchful of adding nutrition

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Food CompaniesNutrition

After launching edible oils in different varieties (rice bran, soya, groundnut, cottonseed) as well as introducing rice, atta, besan and sooji, the ₹22,000 crore Adani Wilmer, which sells packaged foods under the Fortune brand, aims to add more nutrition to its staples. Its deputy chief executive officer Angshu Mallick talks of the opportunities he sees in the value-added commodities segment to attract the millennial consumers to its brand. Although the company is yet to take a call, Mallick said it could look at launching atta that doesn't spike the sugar levels, brown rice and other fortified products.

Recently, the Ahmedabad-based firm found a place in the India Spotlight Nutrition Index 2020, prepared by Access to Nutrition Initiative, a not-for-profit which ranks food and beverage firms based on their policies, practices and disclosures related to nutrition. In its second edition, Adani Wilmer ranked 11.

The report, released last week, did not find the kind of coverage that the subject deserves considering that India is known for malnutrition on the one hand and obesity on the other. The idea behind the report is to drive positive change in the food and beverage industry in terms of diet and health. To that end, it acts as an accountability tool for the private sector companies and reviews their efforts in tackling the health challenge.

In the Nutrition Index 2020, Hindustan Unilever and Nestlé India shared the number one spot, followed by PepsiCo India. Other companies that found place in the report for their efforts include Britannia Industries, Coca-Cola India and Mondelēz India. The report observed that while firms in India have shown increased commitment to providing healthy food, they need to do more to meet the twin challenge of micronutrient deficiencies, and

overweight and obesity. Companies found to be fortifying their products according to standards set by food regulator Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) include Mother Dairy and Britannia. Others have joined FSSAI's initiative to support the Eat Right Movement and pledged to reformulate their products. FSSAI launched the Eat Right Movement to improve public health and combat lifestyle diseases. On the demand side, the Eat Right Movement focuses on empowering citizens to make the right food choices. On the supply side, it nudges food businesses to reformulate their products, provide better nutritional information to consumers and make investments in healthy food as responsible food firms.

In the Nutrition Index 2020, Hindustan Unilever , Nestlé India and PepsiCo India stand out for their reformulation targets with the intent to reduce salt/sodium, saturated fat and added sugar/calories. According to Nestlé India, its strength lies in its overall nutrition governance and its pledge to reduce fat, salt and sugar in its products. The company believes that nutrition is a fundamental need and the food industry has a vital role to play in enabling healthier lives.

V.S. Kannan Sitaram, venture partner at Fireside Ventures that has invested in several food startups, believes that packaged food can be nutritious. Companies are voluntarily offering value-added products and the consumer is also demanding these resulting in the many better-for-you variants being launched, he said. Sitaram added that fortifying food does not make it expensive. "Some additives such as vitamins and iron do not cost much. Others like protein do. The other important consideration is whether these nutrients survive the cooking process, do not alter taste, and are bio available," he said.

Chocolate maker Mondelēz India is also a signatory to FSSAI's Eat Right Movement with commitment towards evaluating its portfolio and reformulating the products to reduce fat, sugar and salt. That is not all. the company also restricts marketing to children under 12 years. It has disclosures on the front of the pack of energy per serve per pack and has created single-serve portions of 200 calories or less that makes up 95% of its chocolate portfolio. Its other efforts include the introduction of micronutrient- fortified and less sugar products such as Bournvita for women, which contains no added sugar. Clearly, as Indian consumers move towards good-for-you products, which come with healthy ingredients such as fruit and nuts or fortified with proteins, vitamins and minerals, companies including the multinationals, home-grown fast-moving consumer goods makers and startups in the food space are voluntarily offering nutrient-rich foods and snacking options.