

FSSAI notifies to reinstate SMR as testing method for honey standards

Monday, 15 June, 2020

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The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has issued a notification prescribing the testing method related to honey standards wherein it has decided to reinstate the Specific Marker for Rice Syrup (SMR) test. This parameter is said to detect even a slight presence of syrups in the final product.

Previously, honey was tested based on parameters of SMR, Trace Marker for Rice Syrup (TMR), and foreign oligosaccharides. However in 2019, FSSAI decided to delete these parameters from the regulations but FSSAI's scientific committee in its recent meeting has decided to let go the TMR and foreign oligosaccharide parameters and reinstate the SMR Parameter.

The order referring to the notification asks all FSSAI-notified food testing laboratories to follow the reinstated regulator-approved detection method for rice syrup in honey products.

Pure honey has health-promoting properties, but adulteration with golden syrup, invert sugar, rice syrup, and so on causes honey to lose its purity and medicinal values. However, some honey manufacturers and processors prefer using syrup adulterants as they are much easily available & cheaper as compared to real honey.

Ashwin Bhadri, CEO, Equinox Labs, pointing out the risk, states, "Food businesses with honey as their main, sub-product or even additional product, need to buckle up and ensure that all of their materials, from raw to additional, are unadulterated, testing labs will now detect and report even a slight presence of syrups in the final product using the new method."

The Liquid Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry method identifies 2-Acetylfuran-3-Glucopyranoside (2-AFGP) which is the Specific Marker (SM) for Rice Syrup.

Bhadri adds, "Now, FBOs unable to give a satisfactory explanation to the presence of these syrups in their honey-based products may face persecution as per the provisions contained under Food Safety and Standards (FSS) Act, 2006."

FSSAI had earlier, in December 2019, directed food inspectors to carry out surveillance, sampling and inspection of the premises of honey manufacturers and processors, at regular intervals, so as to check any use of golden, invert sugar and rice syrups.

In May 2020, the food regulator issued a similar notification when it found out how the three sweeteners were often being used by manufacturers to produce honey.

The notification orders importers of golden syrup/invert sugar & rice syrup to submit necessary documents at the scrutiny stage before clearance, including the details of end-users of the imported food item. It aims to maintain the regulatory compliance of the rules and regulations made by the FSSAI.

Golden syrup is a very thick yellowish liquid sweetener made from evaporated sugarcane juice. Invert sugar, an edible mixture of glucose & fructose sugars, made by heating table sugar with water and rice syrup, a product of steeping cooked rice starch pictured with saccharifying enzymes. Due to the many similar physical properties, the three are often used to replicate/adulterate honey by manufacturers.