

Press Release

Food Fortification: Simple, Inexpensive yet Priceless

A key intervention in POSHAN

New Delhi, 23rd March, 2018: The Food Safety and Standard Authority of India (FSSAI) organised an interaction between domain experts, key stakeholders in fortification and the media, to raise awareness about the large-scale food fortification being carried out. The meeting deliberated on the progress made in food fortification, the challenges and the way forward, from the time the draft Regulations for fortified food, “Food Safety and Standards (Fortification of Food) Regulations” were operationalized in 2016. In a first of its kind media briefing- the fortification stakeholders, experts and development partners pledged to support and mobilise knowledge partnerships in an attempt to reach out to a larger audience about the benefit of fortification.

Addressing the gathering, the CEO FSSAI, Pawan Agarwal reiterated the Food Authority’s commitment to address the humongous challenge of micronutrient deficiency. Shri Agarwal said, “Food fortification is simple, inexpensive yet priceless strategy that has been used across the world to effectively prevent Vitamin and Mineral deficiencies.” “Public health consequences of micronutrient deficiencies are serious. The message of food fortification therefore needs to go out using various methods, through various means, to various people,” he added.

Widespread micronutrient malnutrition is a serious threat to the health of the nation and consequently affects our growth and development. According to the National Health and Family Survey (2016) alarming 70% of the Indian population consumes less than 50% of the recommended daily allowance (RDA) of micronutrients. About 70 percent of pre-school children and over 50% of women suffer from anaemia caused by iron deficiency.

The Food authority notified the standards and launched a fortification logo to help consumers and businesses identify the fortified product. The Logo comprising of a square encompassing a ‘+F’ sign signifies the added nutrition and vitamins to daily meals was launched a month after the official roll out of Food Fortification Resource Centre and has already been adopted by several food businesses. Scientific Panel on “Food Fortification and Nutrition” is continuously reviewing standards for fortification based on nutritional gaps in the Indian diet in general as well as in specific target groups based on diet surveys and credible scientific evidence.

Speaking to the media, experts spoke about fortification as the need of the hour. Dr. Santosh Karmarkar, an expert of Folic Acid deficiency said, “scope of fortifying Wheat Flour with Folic acid has the potential to reduce child paralysis and incidences of Spina Bifida.” Dr. RK Marwaha explained the importance of fortifying food with Vitamin D and stated that “the source of Vitamin D is limited to sunlight and few non-vegetarian foods, hence fortifying foods is an essential intervention.”

Speaking on widely prevalent Iron Deficiency Anaemia, Dr. Prema Ramachandran said that only “Positive effect on the Health of the Baby’, can be the key message for pregnant women to consume iron rich foods/fortified foods. Dr. Chandrakant Pandav emphasised on the importance of +F Logo from consumer perspective. He urged the consumers, “Ask for it, Look for it, Use it and Spread the word”.

FFRC, housed in FSSAI has been established with the support of TATA Trusts and is working towards promotion and scaling up of food fortification in the open market and government programs. With the help of development partners such as Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), World Food Programme (WFP), Nutrition Initiative (NI), PATH and World Bank, it continues to engage with staple food manufacturers and States/UTs for inclusion of fortified staples in Government Safety Net Programmes like ICDS/MDM/PDS on regular basis.

The Standards and logo for fortified foods have already become synonymous to large-scale food fortification in India. Several states are already in the advanced stages of adopting fortified foods in government programmes. It is heartening to note that several food businesses have voluntarily adopted the fortification standard as an industry norm.