

Fortification – A Mechanism to Address Micronutrient Malnutrition

Food fortification continues to be gaining momentum in terms of acceptance in India. With the increasing trends of consumer preference shifting towards healthy options, the processors are innovating in their existing line of products or opt for product development that includes micronutrient fortification of food products, ranging from staples that are consumed widely across income groups to processed varieties.

Given that micronutrient malnutrition in India is putting a significant section of the population, particularly women and children at the risk of under-nutrition and poor health outcomes. Food Fortification has emerged complementary strategy to address malnutrition

Recognising this various State Governments in India have identified Food Fortification as an effective mechanism to address the micronutrient gaps in our regular diet and have included it as part of their mission to curtail malnutrition.

To supplement these efforts, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has collaborated with Global Alliance for Improving Nutrition (GAIN) and launched an initiative on National Edible Oil Fortification. The project aims at building consensus around fortification as an Industry-led voluntary initiative and generates evidence on the merits of business led expansion of fortified edible oil portfolio.

With emerging range of fortified staple food product like Wheat, Rice, Milk etc. and shift in consumer preference towards healthy products, food fortification appears to be simplest and most cost effective solution to supplement our diet with required micronutrients. Thus to understand the challenges & opportunities in adopting food fortification as one of the complementary strategy to overcome micronutrient deficiency, **CII with GAIN has organized a Stakeholder Consultation on Food Fortification on 9th October 2015 in Bengaluru.**

Addressing the stakeholders, Mr. Siraj Chaudhry, Chairman National Alliance for Edible oil Fortification & Chairman - Cargill India Pvt. Ltd, said that micronutrient fortification of staple food items is one a complementary Strategy to combat micronutrient deficiencies in a sustainable manner. He shared Cargill's journey of fortifying its edible oils by providing essential vitamins (A, D and E) to over 30 million people across India and appreciated that over time, innovation has motivated other brands also to fortify their oil offerings, thus helped in addressing the micronutrient deficiencies.

Mr. Tarun Vij, Country Manager India operations, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) highlighted that child and maternal malnutrition rates, including micronutrient malnutrition are at very high levels and is increasing over the years. He emphasized on the need for a stronger political will, policy implementation framework and industry participation to promote large scale food fortification. Mr Vij also pointed at the need to integrate nutrition and health program giving due importance to sanitation and hygiene.

Speaking on the occasion, Ms Subhasini, Manager, Public Distribution System, Government of Karnataka emphasised that cost of providing fortified oils and the cost to the Government in terms of subsidy, are important aspects for the State to engage. At present the National Food Security Act does not mention about making fortified foods available in the public distribution system. The Food and Civil Supply Corporation is in a process of making National Food Security rules as per the act and the govt will try to introduce the term fortification in these Rules.

Industry Speaker from ITC and Britannia shared their success stories in staple food fortification and assured continued efforts towards fortifying their range of products.

The session was conclude with the thought that, to harness the benefits of food fortification, Industry and Government has come together and a framework has to be developed to introduce food fortification in government run programmes like Public Distribution System (PDS), Integrated Child and Development Services (ICDS) and many other such schemes. These are some of the avenues that offer ready opportunity for micronutrient interventions.

Excerpts from Experts

Mid-Day Meal Scheme is an effective mechanism to address malnutrition among children in States across India. The manufacturers and researchers needs to work closely with the government to have clarity on issues related to regulations, the kind of fortified foods that can be used in large scale programs and the potential impact on the consumers. The pricing will be a critical factor in ensuring that fortified foods are affordable to all sections of the population; Mr Madan Kumar, CFO, Akhya Patra.

Continuous engagement with consumers to enhance their awareness and education about the benefits of food fortified. Linking consumer with nutrition programs like Swasth Bharat Sashakt Bharat to ensure better understanding around the concepts nutrition and its impact on health ; Mr Ashim Sanyal, COO, VOICE.

Creation of a logo for fortified foods for consumer awareness and acceptability of fortified products; Dr Shruti Pandey, Scientist, CFTRI.

Need to make fortified foods affordable and accessible to the people at the bottom of the pyramid; Access to affordable, safe, and efficacious fortified foods is hence a good way to eliminate micronutrient malnutrition that will transform the food and nutritional security landscape in the country. Dr Sangeeta Pandey, Head of the Department, Nutrition, Mount Carmel College.

