'FSSAI working with industry to address food fortification challenges'

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is working with the industry to understand the challenges being faced in promoting fortification of wheat flour, rice and double fortification of salt, its chief executive officer Pawan Kumar Agarwal said at an ASSOCHAM event held in New Delhi.

"We have received fairly good amount of success in getting the free-market availability of fortified oil and milk but in case of wheat flour, rice and double fortification of salts, the progress has been slow," said Agarwal addressing an ASSOCHAM conference on Nutrition and Food Security.

"We are working on it, we are working with the food industry to nudge them, persuade them to understand what are the challenges they are facing," added Agarwal. The FSSAI is also trying to figure out regulatory concerns the industry might have as they go in for fortification. "Obviously when we go-in for fortification as per standards, we have to be monitoring an evaluation of whether we are getting the results, so for doing all of it we have established Food Fortification Resource Centre with the support of Tata Trust at FSSAI and we have a dedicated team working to promote large-scale fortification of these five staples in the country," Agarwal added.

Despite government policy for fortification, the progress has been somewhat limited, except a few areas where excellence has been achieved largely based on initiatives of individual officers who have felt and recognised the need for fortified staples to reach out the benefit of fortification to the poorest of the poor, he conceded. "But by and large there had been a lukewarm response to it," he noted.

"In last one year we have made significant progress in terms of standards, giving some structure to the space, but going around the country, we still feel that whole idea of socialisation of the importance of food fortification amongst key stakeholders in the states is still not complete," he said.

"Merely issuing orders and notifications from Government of India will not suffice, state governments in many cases require hand-holding support in order to first be sensitised about why going for fortification and enable them to procure in various programs, fortified staples," added Agarwal.
When it comes to achieving food fortification of five staples across India, there is a long way to go as there are many challenges to make it happen. "I have seen many reports from the states whereby state officials remained confused as to whether or not this is required to be done, clarity in terms of how it is to be done is not there in most states," he added.

"In many of these programs, particularly where you are depending on local initiatives at the state government level are not easy to implement and they take their own time," he added.