Fortification of rice & double fortification of salt is slow

Tuesday, 03 October, 2017, 08 : 00 AM [IST]

Our Bureau, New Delhi

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 and rice and double fortification of salt.

This was stated by Pawan Kumar Agarwal, chief executive officer of the country’s apex food regulator, at an Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASSOCHAM) conference on nutrition and food security, which took place in New Delhi recently.

“We have received a fairly good amount of success in getting the free-market availability of fortified oil and milk, but in case of wheat flour and rice and double fortification of salt, the progress has been slow,” he added.

“We are working on it. We are working with the food industry to nudge them and persuade them to understand the challenges they are facing,” said Agarwal. He added that the FSSAI was also trying to figure out the regulatory concerns the industry might have as they go in for fortification.

“Obviously when we go in for fortification as per the standards, we have to be monitoring an evaluation of whether we are getting the results. So to do this, we have established the Food Fortification Resource Centre with the support of the Tata Trust at FSSAI, and we have a dedicated team working to promote the large-scale fortification of these five staples in the country,” Agarwal stated.
He added that despite the government policy for fortification, the progress has been somewhat limited, except in 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 benefits of fortification to the poorest of the poor. “But, by and large, there has been a lukewarm response to it,” he stated.

Agarwal said, “In the 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.”

“Merely issuing orders and notifications from the government of India will not suffice. State governments, in many cases, require hand-holding in order to be sensitised about why they must go in for fortification and enable them to procure, in various programmes, fortified staples,” he added.

Agarwal said that when it came to achieving the fortification of the five staples across India, there was a long way to go, as there were many challenges.

He added that he had seen many reports from states, in which the officials remained confused as to whether or not this was required to be done. Clarity in terms of how it was to be done was not there in most states.

“Many of these programmes, particularly where one is depending on local initiatives at the state government level, are not easy to implement and take their own time,” Agarwal said.