FSSAI sets up panel to finalise laws on food fortification

Food regulator FSSAI has set up a scientific panel to frame final regulations on fortification of foods and prepare strategies to address malnutrition problem. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has already issued the draft guidelines on fortification for five food items -- salt, milk, wheat flour, rice and edible oil -- to boost production and consumption of fortified foods.

The draft rules were operationalised in October even as FSSAI sought comments from stakeholders before finalising the final regulations. Fortification means deliberately adding or increasing the content of essential micro nutrients in food items to improve quality.

Standards have been set for fortification of salt with iodine and iron; of vegetable oil and milk with vitamin A and D; wheat flour and rice with iron, folic acid, zinc, vitamin B12, vitamin A and some other micro nutrients.

"FSSAI has set up a new Scientific Panel on 'Food Fortification and Nutrition' to address issues related to fortification of food," the regulator said in a statement.

The panel has 11 experts and scientists -- Ambrish Mithal from Medanta; CS Pandav and R K Marwaha (Retd) from AllMS; Anura Kurpad from St John’s Medical College; Yogeshwar Shukla from CSIR - Indian Institute of Toxicology Research, HPS Sachdev from Sita Ram Bharatia Institute of Science and Research; KM Nair from NIN; P Ramachandran from Nutrition Foundation of India; Sumit Arora from NDRI; Sirimavo Nair from the MS University, Baroda, and Harsulkar from Bharati Vidyapeeth.

Members from Scientific Panels dealing with food fortifying vehicles such as wheat flour, refined flour, rice, milk, edible oil and salt will also be a part of this committee.
The Panel will identify critical nutritional gaps in the Indian diet in general as well as in specific target groups based on diet surveys and credible scientific evidence.

It will define strategies to address nutritional needs of the general population and vulnerable groups, besides reviewing the standards for all suitable food fortifying vehicles.

The panel will also address regulatory and related technological issues, review proposals from industry using modern risk assessment methods, and prescribe standard sampling and test methods for effective monitoring, surveillance and enforcement of the relevant regulations.

FSSAI had earlier brought out Draft Regulations for fortified food -- Food Safety and Standards (Fortification of Food) Regulations, 2016 which were operationalised in October, 2016.

"Based on the comments received on the draft Regulations, the Panel will finalise the Regulations," FSSAI said.

Apart from framing standards, FSSAI has launched the Food Fortification Resource Centre (FFRC) to promote large-scale fortification of food across India.

An online portal of FFRC to facilitate food businesses and bring fortified foods into government programmes was launched in November.

With an effective regulatory mechanism along with the continuous support of all the stakeholders, FSSAI expects that the problem of malnutrition in general and micronutrient malnutrition in particular would be overcome soon.

FSSAI has also unveiled a Logo for fortified foods which may be used by food companies.