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After six decades, India to get new national safety standards for milk



The country is receiving new safety standards after more than six decades.

India is set to get new national milk safety standards after 60 years that will standardise outdated benchmarks for determining adulteration, include sources such as camel and yak and incorporate flavoured and fortified milk.

Under current guidelines set in 1954, only milk from cow, sheep, buffalo and goat is considered. “There is a need to revisit old standards to ensure people eat and drink quality food,” said Pawan Agarwal, CEO, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, the country’s food-safety regulator.

Close to 70% of milk sold in India is considered adulterated as it doesn’t conform to standards for fat and solid non-fat (SNF) content — including vitamins and

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minerals — that vary from state to state. This is a problem, experts say, as not conforming to fat standards is not a health hazard — which is what adulteration implies. Also, hybrid cattle and environmental changes have rendered the old standards useless.

“Milk with water added is considered adulterated. It may be non-conforming to set standards but is essentially not unsafe to drink,” said an FSSAI official.

Diluting milk with water lowers the percentage of fat, vitamins and minerals.

Fat and SNF standards differ across states. In Punjab, Chandigarh and Haryana, for example, the percentage of recommended fat is 4%, it's 3% for Mizoram and Odisha, and 3.5% for the rest of India. For SNF, earlier criterion was 8.2%.

“With milk sourced from across states, there is no point in having different standards for different states. While drafting the new standards, we have brought uniformity to the criteria,” the official said.

While 8.5% will be the recommended benchmark for SNF, 3.2% is being considered for fat in milk as the tentative cut-off across India.

“We have adopted a three-pronged strategy, in which setting new standards is one component. The other two being commissioning a national-level survey to measure the quality of milk India is drinking and identify problem areas,” Agarwal said.

The revised standards were also needed because of changes in environmental conditions, quality of fodder and water that cattle are consuming.

“We now have hybrid cattle and the quality of milk is changing naturally across country, which is why we need to revisit old standards,” the FSSAI official said.

“Why should someone be persecuted if his or her cow or buffalo is producing milk with lower fat content than the permissible limit?”

“Since camel milk is traded in some states, we have proposed 3% fat content and 6.5% SNF for camel milk. Yak milk is also being considered, though we are yet to set the criterion for it,” he said.

For flavoured milk, the levels of additives are under consideration, and in fortified milk, the regulatory body is looking at vitamin A and vitamin D fortification that should not exceed the set limit.
