

Press Release:

Large-scale Food Fortification in India Gets a Big Boost

November 17, 2016

Large-scale food fortification got a tremendous boost today with Mr. Bill Gates, Co-Chair and Trustee of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and Tata Trusts jointly committing their support.

A special meeting on large-scale food fortification was held at the headquarters of Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), today November 17, 2016, in which Mr. Bill Gates was a special guest. Secretaries from 8 key Central Ministries and Departments, namely, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Department of Food and Public Distribution, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Ministry of Food Processing Industries, Department of Biotechnology, Department of Health Research (Indian Council for Medical Research), and Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries were present. Senior representatives from key development and industry partners also attended this meeting.

The Standards and logo for fortified foods that were released last month have already become a rallying point for large-scale food fortification. Several states are already in the advanced stages of adopting fortified foods in government programmes. For instance, double fortified salt is being distributed in the public distribution system of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan and Karnataka is introducing fortified wheat flour in their mid-day meals. Ms. Leena Nair, Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development mentioned that they are looking forward to making fortified food mandatory.

Several businesses have also come forward to introduce fortified foods in the market. The MD of Mother Dairy informed that they have already begun to use the logo for their fortified milk.

A Food Fortification Resource Center (FFRC) to provide technical support, advocacy and expertise in all aspects of food fortification -on the supply side for industry players as well as on the demand side for consumers was also launched at

this special meeting. The online Portal of FFRC would function as a knowledge, dissemination and interaction platform across stakeholders. In a marked departure from the previous stand-alone efforts for food fortification, an integrated, pan-India approach has been adopted.

Mr. Bill Gates remarked, *“I am encouraged by the government’s new initiatives to advance India’s nutrition goals. In particular, I congratulate FSSAI on the launch of the Food Safety and Standards (Fortification of Foods) Regulations (2016) and continued improvement on salt iodization. The foundation is committed to working with the government and other partners to help scale nutrition interventions that advance India’s nutrition goals.”*

Widespread micronutrient malnutrition poses a serious threat to the health and consequently the growth and development of the nation. An alarming 70% of the Indian population consumes less than 50% of the recommended daily allowance (RDA) of micronutrients. India has more than a quarter of the world’s vitamin A deficient preschool children. About 70 percent of pre-school children and over 50% of women suffer from anaemia caused by iron deficiency.

Food fortification is a simple, proven, cost effective and complementary strategy that has been used across the globe to safely and effectively prevent vitamin and mineral deficiencies. At present, 86 countries have mandated fortification of at least one industrially milled grain – wheat flour, maize or rice. In India, fortification of salt with iodine, started in 1962 by the Government, has significantly reduced the prevalence of iodine deficiency disorders and is a landmark public health success story. However, large-scale fortification of food has yet to reach its full potential in India, since efforts have been sporadic, scattered and focused on single food commodities.

These substantive developments in the past three months towards a nation-wide unified approach for food fortification have given a much needed fillip to the efforts during the past 30 years, ushering in a new era in the fight against micronutrient malnutrition in India.