

If you get a fly in your milk: Get the post mortem done

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Dear friends,

Last fortnight the nation celebrated the birth anniversary of Dr. Verghese Kurien as National Milk Day on 26th November. On this day the food regulator of India launched a national action plan on safe milk delivery. This action plan is a follow up plan of the outcome of the National Milk adulteration survey 2018 and a milk product dipstick conducted in 2019. Its time to remember Dr Kurien and look at how he handled initial instances of milk safety in India.

First, few recorded incidences of adulteration in milk in India are quoted in his autobiography "I too had a dream". These incidences occurred in the early 50s when Amul began supplying milk to Bombay Milk Scheme.

"Although we were supplying large quantities of milk to the Bombay Milk Scheme, there was no dearth of obstacles in our way. Once the Milk Scheme officials claimed to have found a fly in the milk we supplied, a huge hue and cry was raised and the media splashed the news. I immediately suspected foul play and suggested to the Milk Commissioner's office that they should do a post-mortem of the fly. I wanted to see if the fly had milk in its lungs – if so, then it had drowned in the milk; but if not, then a dead fly had been put in there to frame our cooperatives. Miraculously, the uproar quietened down and nobody mentioned the hapless fly again. "

This shows the presence of mind is shown by the great dairyman of India and in the next incidence his intent for zero tolerance is self-explanatory.

"One evening, Medora returned home from work and with an extremely worried look on his face said to me, 'Hey Kurien, we've found formalin in the cooperative milk.' I was shocked. Formalin is a poison and is sometimes used illegally as a preservative since it kills bugs and bacteria. But it is a cumulative poison. We had to investigate and find out its source."

"We learnt that it came from the milk collected from Pansora village. We went there immediately, called the society's Chairman and searched the collection centre. Sure enough, we found a bottle of formalin. When we enquired about the presence of the bottle at the centre, he explained to us quite gleefully, 'Oh we add this much (indicating a small amount) to every can and then, Sir, there are no rejections!' He was an illiterate farmer and extremely happy that all rejection of their milk had stopped since they started adding formalin. We were horrified and asked him who had advised him to do this. He looked at Medora and said, "Sir your chemist came and told me to do this." Both the chemists were suspended immediately .

Excerpts from "I Too Had a Dream: Verghese Kurien as told to Gouri Salvi

Now saluting the spirit of great dairyman of India, the salient features of the action plan by FSSAI may be summarised as follows :

a. The use of the latest technologies of rapid milk testing for regulatory compliance, adulterants, and contaminants along with high-end technologies for quantitative verification of contaminants has been provided to state-level infrastructure including Food safety on wheels (mobile vans) for surveys and surveillance.

b. Nationwide drive to verify milk vendors and offering free registration to initial milk vendors. This verification scheme will also include training of these vendors on safe milk vendors along with awareness of regulatory requirements.

c. The regulator is contacting GST council for bringing GST on packaged dairy products (which are normally being sold in loose) at par with that of loose products thereby motivating all stakeholders to shift to packaged dairy products.

d. The regulator is also mulling over the idea of developing feed regulatory in the country to counter the menace of Aflatoxin which emerged as the highest contaminants (5.7%) in the 2018 survey.

e. Self-regulatory compliance through Scheme of testing and inspection will be implemented for all licensed dairy FBOs. Initially, it will be for liquid milk plants only in which initial surveillance will be carried out by the regulator free of cost and later the FBO will be getting it done at a frequency based on risk-based inspection mechanism.

The largest dairy in the United States , Dean foods is undergoing a closure. They have begun to close their dairy units and stopped renewing their contracts with milk vendors.

Ironically USA has seen a drop in 40 % of milk demand since 1970. One of the major reasons for this shift is the conversion of consumers to plant-based nutrition from animal-based nutrition.



In our country too if the menace of milk adulteration is not controlled then chances of shifting of our generation z from milk to Vegan would be inevitable. We must not forget that over 60 % of our population is under 35 which is economically upwardly mobile and could afford costlier Vegan foods.

Now industry has to make a choice between being a responsible processor or getting prey to responsible consumerism.

Happy e reading.

with best regards

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