

Representation Demanding Elimination of Food, Beverage, Milk and Milk Product Adulteration in India

Environmental Justice Forum, Hyderabad

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To

- 1) The Union Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India
- 2) The Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution
- 3) The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)
- 4) All State Food Safety Commissioners
- 5) State Public Health Departments
- 6) Central Pollution Control Board
- 7) State Pollution Control Boards

Subject: Urgent Demand for a Nationwide Mission to Eradicate Adulteration all Food Items, Edible Oils, Milk and Milk Products, and Medicines in India — A Public Health, Nutrition and Environmental Justice Imperative

Sir/Madam,

We express our deep concern over the growing and widespread adulteration of food, edible oils, beverages, milk and milk products, and medicines across India, which has emerged as a serious public health, nutrition, ecological, economic and environmental justice crisis.

Food adulteration is no longer an isolated criminal activity. It has become a systemic threat affecting millions of citizens, particularly infants, children, pregnant women, workers, senior citizens and economically vulnerable populations.

Milk, edible oils, spices, sweets, paneer, ghee, beverages, pulses and processed foods are increasingly being contaminated with harmful chemicals, synthetic substitutes, industrial additives, detergents, starch, urea, artificial colours, preservatives and contaminated water. Repeated enforcement drives and laboratory investigations across India continue to reveal alarming levels of adulteration in essential food items.

Scientific and Public Health Concerns

Milk and dairy products are fundamental sources of proteins, calcium, micronutrients and essential fats, particularly for children, mothers and elderly citizens. Adulteration destroys nutritional quality and introduces toxic substances into the human body.

Investigations and laboratory analyses across India have identified adulterants such as:

- Urea
- Detergents
- Formalin
- Synthetic milk compounds
- Caustic soda
- Starch
- Artificial colours
- Industrial oils
- Contaminated water
- Antibiotic residues
- Aflatoxins and toxic contaminants

Scientific studies associate these contaminants with:

- Gastrointestinal disorders
- Kidney and liver damage
- Hormonal disruption
- Neurological disorders
- Reduced immunity
- Cancer risks
- Malnutrition
- Developmental disorders in children
- Maternal health complications
- Food poisoning outbreaks
- Antimicrobial resistance risks

Children are particularly vulnerable because adulterated food directly affects physical growth, cognitive development, immunity and long-term health outcomes. Pregnant and lactating women face additional risks affecting maternal and child health.

Facts, Figures and Instances Across India

- A nationwide survey by FSSAI found that approximately 68.4% of milk samples tested across India did not conform to prescribed standards.
- Investigations in several states have detected synthetic milk, fake paneer, contaminated edible oils and chemically adulterated food products.
- Enforcement agencies in Hyderabad and Cyberabad recently booked multiple cases involving adulterated oils, dairy products, sauces, flours and processed foods, seizing large quantities of unsafe products.
- Food safety drives across states including Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra and Delhi continue to detect unsafe dairy and processed food products.

These recurring incidents indicate not isolated violations, but structural weaknesses in food safety governance, supply chains and enforcement systems.

Nutrition, Mother and Child Health Impacts

Food adulteration severely undermines national nutrition and public health goals.

Unsafe milk and food products directly threaten:

- Child growth and brain development
- Maternal nutrition
- Infant immunity
- School nutrition outcomes
- Public nutrition programmes
- Long-term productivity and human development

Adulterated foods supplied through or consumed within:

- Anganwadis
- Mid-Day Meal schemes
- Welfare hostels
- Hospitals
- Low-income settlements

can have devastating long-term consequences on public health and human capital formation.

Environmental Justice and Ecological Dimensions

Food adulteration is fundamentally an environmental justice issue.

The burden of unsafe and adulterated food disproportionately falls upon:

- Low-income households
- Informal workers
- Rural communities
- Urban slum populations
- Tribal and marginalized communities
- Children dependent on public nutrition systems

Economically weaker communities are often forced to consume cheaper and poorly regulated food products due to affordability constraints and lack of access to safe alternatives.

Food adulteration also reflects deeper ecological distortions including:

- Industrialized and profit-driven food systems
- Excessive chemicalization of agriculture and dairy sectors
- Antibiotic misuse in livestock systems
- Unsafe waste disposal
- Water contamination
- Weak local food sovereignty
- Poor traceability mechanisms
- Unsustainable supply chains prioritizing profits over health

Toxic residues from adulterated and chemically contaminated food systems ultimately enter:

- Water bodies
- Agricultural soils
- Food chains
- Livestock systems
- Human bodies and maternal nutrition pathways

This threatens biodiversity, ecological resilience, climate-sensitive food systems and inter-generational public health security.

Addressing the Crisis of Adulterated and Substandard Drugs

The pervasive circulation of adulterated and "Not of Standard Quality" (NSQ) pharmaceuticals across India demands immediate, aggressive

regulatory intervention. While deliberate "spurious" formulations represent a smaller fraction of the market, robust testing data highlights a far more alarming reality: approximately 3.7% of all tested drug samples consistently fail quality and safety standards. This statistic is not merely a compliance failure; it represents millions of compromised, ineffective, and toxic doses entering our healthcare ecosystem. The breakdown in manufacturing integrity directly sabotages our public health framework, turning life-saving medical treatments into active hazards for unsuspecting citizens.

The human and economic cost of this regulatory oversight is catastrophic and unacceptable. Substandard and contaminated medications lead to widespread treatment failures, accelerated antimicrobial resistance, and preventable loss of life. The horrific, documented fatalities of over 140 children globally and domestically due to cough syrups adulterated with diethylene glycol stand as a grim testament to the current systemic vulnerabilities.

Food safety and Safe Medicines therefore cannot be separated from:

- Environmental protection
- Sustainable agriculture
- Nutrition justice
- Climate resilience
- Public health planning
- Social equity

Economic and Social Costs

The economic burden of food adulteration includes

- Rising healthcare expenditure
- Reduced workforce productivity
- Increased burden on public health systems
- Malnutrition-related developmental losses
- Reduced learning outcomes among children
- Loss of consumer trust
- Damage to India's food economy and exports

The long-term societal costs far exceed the short-term illegal profits gained through adulteration.

Our Demands

1. Zero Tolerance National Mission

Launch a time-bound National Mission for Elimination of Food Adulteration under coordinated central and state action.

2. Strict Enforcement and Fast-Track Prosecution

- Fast-track courts for food adulteration cases
- Criminal penalties including imprisonment and cancellation of licenses
- Public disclosure of repeat offenders

3. Universal Random Testing and Surveillance

- Mandatory periodic random sampling in urban and rural markets
- Mobile food testing laboratories in every district
- Independent accredited laboratories with transparent reporting

4. Strengthening FSSAI and State Food Safety Systems

- Massive increase in trained Food Safety Officers
- Modern food testing laboratories in all states
- AI and spectroscopy-based rapid detection technologies

5. Protection of Milk and Child Nutrition Systems

Mandatory testing of products supplied to:

- Anganwadis
- Mid-Day Meal schemes
- Hospitals
- Welfare hostels
- Public nutrition programmes

6. National Digital Traceability System

- QR-code based farm-to-consumer traceability
- Public food safety verification systems
- Real-time complaint monitoring platforms

7. Environmental Justice-Based Food Governance

- Integrate food safety with environmental and public health policies
- Environmental audits of large food and dairy industries
- Monitoring of heavy metals, toxic chemicals and antibiotic residues

8. Protection of Vulnerable Communities

Priority food safety surveillance in:

- Low-income settlements
- Rural areas
- Tribal regions
- Informal food markets

9. Sustainable and Ethical Food Systems

- Promote decentralized and local food systems
- Encourage organic and low-chemical agriculture
- Strengthen farmer cooperatives and transparent supply chains
- Promote sustainable dairy and livestock practices

10. Public Participation and Whistleblower Protection

- National multilingual complaint platforms
- Legal protection for whistleblowers
- Incentives for verified public reporting

11. Mandatory Transparency and Public Disclosure

Monthly public disclosure of:

- Samples tested
- Failed samples
- Adulterants detected
- Enforcement actions taken

12. Nationwide Food Safety Education

- Public awareness campaigns
- School and college education programmes
- Scientific awareness on nutrition and adulteration risks

13. The Crisis of Adulterated and Substandard Drugs

- To halt this preventable crisis, enforce zero-tolerance penalties
- Implement mandatory QR-code supply chain tracking
- Mandate strict, unannounced audits for Good Manufacturing Practices

Conclusion

The right to safe food and safe medicines is a fundamental human right and a constitutional public health obligation.

A nation cannot build a healthy, productive and equitable society on adulterated food and medicine systems. The health of children, mothers and future generations cannot be sacrificed for illegal profits.

India urgently requires a transparent, scientific, accountable and people-centric food safety framework rooted in health and nutrition security, environmental sustainability, ecological responsibility and social justice.

We therefore urge the Government of India, FSSAI, CDSCO (DCGI), State Governments and all concerned authorities to initiate immediate, coordinated and time-bound action to eliminate adulteration in food, edible oils, beverages, milk and milk products across the country.

Food Safety, Nutrition Security and Environmental Justice are inseparable pillars of a healthy and equitable society.

“Safe Food, Safe Edible Oils, Safe Milk, Safe Future” must become a national public health mission.

Yours Sincerely

On behalf of Environmental Justice Forum (EJF), Hyderabad

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