

# “We must know what nutritional value is added after food products leave the farm”

*Ending nutritional deprivation to improve world health and spur economic growth by 2030 is one of the sustainable development goals enshrined by the United Nations General Assembly. Given that India is set to become the most populous country by the end of this decade, it is imperative to analyse the nutritional reach in our country. Understanding the gravity of the subject, ASSOCHAM organised a national conference to study integrating nutrition and health strategies with agriculture and food security.*



(L-R) D. S. Rajora, Director, Agriculture, ASSOCHAM; Vivek Chandra, Chairman, Food Processing and Value Addition Council, ASSOCHAM & CEO-Global Branded Business, LT Foods Ltd; Inoshi Sharma, Director, FFRC-FSSAI; and Akshat Khandelwal, Founder and CEO of Nuflower Foods and Nutrition Pvt. Ltd.

**T**he Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) organised a national conference on ‘Achieving nutritional security through agri-nutri-food value chain’. The conference focused on enabling an ecosystem for investments in the food and agriculture sectors, against the backdrop of malnutrition as one of the most important causes of underdevelopment.

The event saw many panel discussions about fortification of different varieties of food and crops as two separate remedies to consolidate nutrition in our dietary patterns. In this regard, the speakers identified the need for regulatory frameworks to support this process and further the cause of long-term nutritional security in India.

“In order to meet the health demands in today’s time, we need to focus on the fortification process and understand how nutrient-rich food will reach the consumers. We must know what nutritional value is added after food products leave the farm,” said Inoshi Sharma, Director, FFRC-FSSAI (Food Fortification Resource Centre-Food Safety and Standards Authority of India) while articulating the need for this exercise in the context of the burgeoning population, climate change and environmental degradation.

Inoshi further added that it is important to save the produce and have a proper food wastage management system to pursue the agenda of food conservation. “By aligning with the International Year of Millets 2023, we need

to revive traditional foods such as millets in our dietary habits and all sections of the society need to undergo this change to achieve food security,” highlighted Inoshi in a different reference.

The conference emphasised on the interlinkages between nutrition, food security and livelihoods in the Indian context where agriculture, including livestock, remains the principal source of livelihood for almost 60 per cent of rural households and 86.2 per cent of Indian farmers, who are small and marginal holders. It was observed that value chains are a core element of food systems and most crucial in creating an enabling environment to promote nutrition-sensitive food systems, agricultural policies, and effective nutrition education strategies. Therefore, a multisectoral approach including agriculture, healthcare services and socio-economic development is needed to strongly influence nutrition and health. It was noted that a sustainable agri-nutri-food value chain can address the aforesaid by increasing supply and demand of nutritious and safe food. It can be done through holistic interactions among different commodities within the food system to tackle nutrient gaps while keeping in mind the



environmental risk of reducing diversification.

The speakers were of the opinion that such interventions should analyse the current nutrition situation to identify locally suitable food crops in order to improve market demand, and farm-income. However, the implementation will require coordinated efforts of several sectors and stakeholders. In view of the same, effective Information, Education & Communication (IEC) strategies and other large-scale educational campaigns can be integrated with the existing national nutrition and health programs. Raising his concerns over the current data on malnutrition, Vivek Chandra, Chairman, Food Processing and Value Addition Council, ASSOCHAM & CEO-Global Branded Business, LT Foods Ltd, said, "The impact and extent of malnutrition is huge on our economy as India loses \$10 billion every year with the impact of illnesses, malnutrition or death cases. Societal and national nutrition is the future of the country and everyone in the vulnerable sector of the country."

He continued, "Nutritional security is a global challenge and there is a need to increase food production. The agriculture system to consumer process must be supportive of the resources delivering nutritious food and an integrated multi sectoral approach is required in the supply chain." According to Akshat Khandelwal, founder and CEO of Nuflower Foods and Nutrition Pvt Ltd, urban populations are more susceptible to ailments like diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and obesity due to a lack of a nutrient-rich diet. Therefore, a serious consideration for maintaining a macronutrient balance in the agricultural sector is essential. It is also important to foster public-private partnerships to reduce the burden of food production in our country.

The conference identified agriculture as the most integral component of achieving food and nutritional security through its crucial linkage between health and biodiversity. Increasing predominance of crops such as wheat, rice and maize in the global agricultural food production has led to loss of biodiversity and agri landscapes, thus affecting the income of small-holder farmers along with leading to macro and micro undernutrition.

The loss of agricultural biodiversity is also recognised by the Rio Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as an important component to make our diets healthier and our food systems more resilient and sustainable.

Achieving positive nutritional outcomes entails not just the way food is produced through agriculture but how it is processed, distributed, marketed and consumed in terms of better food systems. They can contribute to nutrition by extending the shelf-life of fresh food, maintaining the food quality over time, and enhancing safety, palatability and

convenience of transportability. Our food systems have been influenced by urbanisation, changing lifestyles and dietary patterns, and has, in turn influenced the availability, accessibility, affordability and desirability of food.

A joint ASSOCHAM-Nangia Andersen LLP report on 'Curbing nutritional attrition to achieve nutritional security through agri-nutri-food value chain' was also released during the national conference by eminent dignitaries and panellists. According to the report, nutrition is a cross-cutting policy issue and requires synergetic regulations to address imbalances in food markets, impairment of local food production and promoting nutritious food consumption. In this respect, agricultural policies including agri-research, training and extension, agri-input, land, agricultural finance and infrastructure, natural resource conservation were identified as some of the potentially reformative areas. It was backed up by data, highlighting agriculture as the only sector affecting both supply and demand of nutritious food because of a significant population depending on it for their livelihoods.

The report also talked about marketing and pricing policies including incentives, subsidies, farmer protection measures like Minimum Support Price (MSPs), inflation control measures for essential commodities etc. It was followed up by defining policies on food import, domestic production and exports, roads, warehouses, irrigation, mandis and market yards, logistics and cold chain etc.

Citing the significance of launching the joint report, Suraj Nangia, Partner, Nangia Andersen LLP, said, "The statistics on nutritional status indicate that India has struggled on the issue, along with the other fast-growing economies of Asia and the World. With a ranking of 101 of 116 on the Global Hunger Index 2021 and 131 of 189 on the Human Development Index 2020, India is home to almost one-fourth of the world's chronically undernourished people. Therefore, the Sustainable Development Goal of zero hunger cannot be achieved globally, unless it is achieved in India."

"Achieving nutritional security in the context of a growing population, unpredictable climate change effects, diminishing land and water resources, environmental degradation, and fast changing diets will require not just approaches to sustainably producing more food, but also dealing with food waste and promoting improved nutritional outcomes. Capacities for nutrition-sensitive value chains can be developed through resources and interventions that support local stakeholders in driving change through locally suited and participatory processes including, but not limited to, policy and decision-making, investments, research, innovation, and learning," Nangia concluded. **NS**

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