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Consumer awareness and evaluation of probiotic products sold in Indian market

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Consumers are becoming more aware of functional foods and nutritional supplements and the potential role of these products in a balanced diet and in ensuring good health. Probiotics are becoming increasingly popular as functional foods because of their health benefits. In coherence with the global scenario, the demand and supply for probiotics in India too is at a steep rise. The aim of this study was to assess the consumer awareness and perception about probiotics. The research design also evaluated the type of probiotic products being sold in the Delhi market, their current labeling and storage practices. The storage temperature is critical to the functionality of the probiotic products as inappropriate storage temperature at any step post manufacture may result in decline of the probiotic microorganisms. A cross sectional random population survey using questionnaire across NCR about the knowledge and perception of the Indian consumer (n=735) about probiotics was conducted. Majority of the consumers were not aware about the concept of probiotics and were not able to differentiate probiotics and fermented foods. The perceived barriers to purchase of probiotics included cost and availability. Onsite analysis of the probiotic products at the retail outlets (n=132 outlets) showed a storage temperature deviation as high as 22 °C which is detrimental to the viability of probiotic microorganisms and thereby the functionality of probiotics. The viable counts were found in range for majority of probiotic foods. The labeling practices of probiotic products (n=213) revealed that there is no mention of the species name and health claims by majority of the Indian brands although it is a must as per the guidelines down by ICMR-DBT, India. There is an urgent need of a regulatory regime governing the sale of probiotic products in the country.

Biography

Shalini Sehgal is working as a Vice Principal and an Associate Professor in the Department of Food Technology, Bhaskaracharya College of Applied Sciences of University of Delhi, India. She has 18 years of experience in the field of education and has been associated with various academic and research projects. She has completed her MSc and Doctorate in Dairy Microbiology from National Dairy Research Institute, India. Her area of interest is food safety and she is trained in HACCP implementation, IS 22000: Food safety management system and food safety & food hygiene. She also has expertise in container integrity and undergone training by USFDA at Alameda Lab, USA. She has worked as National Food Safety Consultant with WHO and also undertaken projects on safety aspects of street foods and fresh produce and probiotics. She has authored two books and 12 chapters on different areas of food microbiology and food safety. She has published her research work in journals of repute.

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