Menacing food commodities

Escalating trends of fraudulent practice in food business has penetrated the ‘whole food chain’

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Fraudulent practices by our food industry are undermining public health in Nepal. Although newspapers and media frequently cover them, fraudulent practices in the food business are becoming more rampant. It is high time that consumers, who spend a sizable proportion of their earnings on food, learn the bitter truth about the adulteration that has become “food business as usual.”

Tests reported in the annual bulletin of the Department of Food Technology and Quality Control (DFTQC, HMG Nepal) reveal that food producers and distributors have been playing their dirty games for at least 20 years. A large number of marketed food items have been adulterated or contaminated (see Figure 1a); we will be discussing only a few of the more egregious cases.

According to a report in the DFTQC bulletin for 1998/99, over 90 percent of milk and milk products (as mentioned in the text) were substandard due to the presence of mesophilic contaminants (yeast, mould, coliform, Salmonella species and other few microorganisms) which resulted from adulteration of milk with unsafe water. The 2000/2001 bulletin states that 14 dairies have been producing dairy products in Nepal, and that, for the most part, the quality of their products has been deteriorating (see Figure 1b). The culprits include Adhunic Dairy, Pushpa Dairy, Sainju Dairy and Kharipati Dairy, out of which the products of Pushpa Dairy and Adhunic Dairy were completely substandard during 1999-2001. In addition, 60 to 80 percent of the marketed products of Integrated Dairy, Sital Dairy and Nepal Dairy were adulterated. FIGURE 1b gives more details on the quality of dairy products consumed in past seven years.

There was a significant and almost continuous rise in oil adulteration from 1995 to 2001 (see Figure 1c). Most mustard and rapeseed oil was found to be adulterated with the toxic Argemone and other cheaper oils. There is no reason to suspect that these oils are any safer today. Noodles, though comparatively expensive, are widely consumed snacks, especially popular among school children. 48 percent of snack noodles and 42 percent of

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FIGURE 1. Food adulteration in different food products – total food items (a), milk and mild products (b), oil (c), and snack noodles (d). Values in parentheses are the number of samples studied. (CFRL 1998/1999, DFTQC 2000/2001)
TABLE 1. Conflicting values for pasteurized milk and milk products published in two DFTQC bulletins

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Marketed items in milk and milk products with adulteration (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1998/99 bulletin</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>106 (one hundred and six)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>62.5 (sixty-two point five)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6.3 (six point three)</td>
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<td>75 (seventy-five)</td>
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