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FSSAI's nod for Stevia is relief for Coke, Pepsi

Till now, many companies in India have been using aspartame, a high-intensity artificial sweetener in their products.

By *John Sarkar*, TNN | Updated: Nov 24, 2015, 12.05 PM IST

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NEW DELHI: In what has come as a relief to FMCG majors, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has allowed the use of natural sweetener **stevia** (steviol glycoside) in selected products, including soft drinks, dairy-based beverages and desserts.

Till now, many companies in India have been using aspartame, a high-intensity artificial sweetener in their products. Aspartame's use

in food products has been the cause of concern among consumers due its alleged health concerns. In August, New York-based food and beverage company **PepsiCo** dropped aspartame from its zero-calorie drink Diet Pepsi in some markets such as the US over public outcry.

Vipul Prakash, VP, beverages category, PepsiCo India, said, "The approval of stevia is a welcome step for the industry. We believe this will encourage innovation and help the industry to bring forth more choices for consumers."

Moreover, the approval of stevia, a plant-based extract, could also open the floodgates for many new products to enter the domestic market, as globally, many MNCs use it as an alternative to sugar and other artificial sweeteners. Stevia's natural origins help them create a 'healthy' brand image of their products.

"Pepsi True and **Coke** Life that are marketed as low-calorie carbonated drinks in some markets, use a mix of stevia and sugar. Since, stevia was not allowed in soft drinks in India, these companies couldn't bring in those products since they are very sensitive about fiddling with ingredients and changing the resulting taste. Now that hurdle has been removed," a senior executive of a large beverage firm told TOI.

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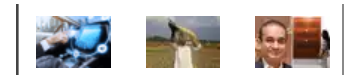
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Along with many FMCG companies such as Coke and PepsiCo, stevia supplier Pure Circle, have been batting for stevia's approval in India for some time. "These companies are looking at the long-term potential," said Arvind Singhal, retail expert and founder of Technopak.

"At present, the market for diet drinks in India is very niche. But one has to remember that India has a big [diabetes](#) problem. As awareness grows, consumers will start looking for alternatives to sugary products. Having stevia in the armoury could prove to be a boon for FMCG companies."

Apart from aspartame and now stevia, acesulfame K, splenda, sucralose and saccharine are some of the other artificial sweeteners allowed in India.

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