

Role of Government to Boost up the Food Processing Industry - A Study with Reference to COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) are facing several problems due to the pandemic. The Food Processing Industry (FPI) is considered the sunrise sector of MSME. FPI establishes linkages and synergy amongst the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors. More than 40000 registered and 25 lakh unregistered food processing units exist in India, in which 7 million labours are engaged. Due to the sudden lockdown, huge quantities of raw materials and finished products have started to rot, and many units have been forced to shut down, and a huge number of workers in this industry have lost their jobs. The industry needed strong Government intervention to survive this crisis. The study has tried to focus on the impact of lockdown on FPI and the role of the government in boosting this industry during the current crisis period. The study is based on secondary data. The Central Government has tried to boost the industry by announcing a financial package of Rs. 10,000 crores for the establishment of micro food enterprises, changing the definition of MSME and providing relaxation in tax and other laws. A positive approach by the Central Government will definitely support the food processing industry to turn around under this critical situation.

Keywords: *COVID-19; Food Processing; MSME; Central Government*

INTRODUCTION

The food processing sector is one of the largest employment sectors in India. Due to lockdown, unemployment has increased very fast. According to the Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy (CMIE, 2022) report, India's unemployment rate stood at 23.48 % in May 2020, which was 8.75% in March 2020. The International Monetary Fund (Noronha, 2020) has projected India's growth rate will come down by 1.91% in 2020 for COVID-19. The Government of India (GoI) has taken a number of steps to revive the economy. The Finance Minister (Ministry of Finance, 2020) announced a relief package of Rs. 1.70 lakh crore under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojna (PMGKY) for the poor and also announced another relief package of Rs. 20 lakh crores, which includes the Rs. 8.01 lakh crore announced by the Reserve Bank of India for liquidity measure. GoI has placed special emphasis on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) in view of rising unemployment. The government has sanctioned Rs. 5.94 lakh crore in various sectors for MSME and agriculture and its allied Rs. 1.50 lakh crore, of which Rs. 10000 crores for micro food enterprises, Rs. 15000 crores for animal and husbandry, and Rs. 500 crores for beekeeping.

Agriculture and industry are linked by the Food Processing Industry (FPI). During the lockdown, FPIs played an important role and carried on their activities. For an uninterrupted supply of food grains and food products throughout the country, the government has declared that food supply and all the activities related to food are included under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955. FPIs have faced several problems regarding the supply of raw materials, labour, finances, and rules and regulations due to lockdown, but GoI has helped the FPIs in every possible way so that the industries can continue their operation without any hindrance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Kumar, Thombare and Kale (2020) highlighted that India's trade will suffer an estimated loss of \$348 million due to the impact of COVID-19, and according to the UN report, that will be estimated at \$387

million. According to the Asian Development Bank, the chemical sector will suffer a maximum loss of \$129 million, while textiles and apparel will lose \$64 million. The electronic sector will suffer a huge loss because China is the major supplier of electronic goods. A rumour was spread that the coronavirus can be transmitted through the consumption of chicken, so consumption and prices also dropped. Gupta and Chandak (2020) explained the importance of seasonality in the case of the spice industry. January to April is the main season of India's major spice harvest. Due to the announcement of lockdown, pre-harvesting and post-harvesting were hampered by major spices. Marketing and sales were also hampered because "mandi", where the majority of spices are sold, was closed for lockdown. Processing operations were disrupted due to the restriction of lockdown and limited logistics. Exports were halted because coronavirus had spread to the majority of export destinations. Halder (2020) has observed that under the lockdown situation, demand for processed and packaged food has doubled but no sudden inflation was found. He has concluded that the industry will turn around and will grow with 25% annual growth in the next two years, but for this, food processing companies should adopt a more safe and secure manufacturing process and packaging. He has also concluded that India is going to be the kitchen of the world post COVID-19. Dev (2020) has argued that a nationwide lockdown was the right step for the government. He has pointed out some measures to keep the agricultural sector and supply chains working smoothly. He has appreciated the government's relief package of food grains distribution through Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojna (PMGKY), cash transfer to 200 million women's bank accounts and has suggested arranging transport facilities for migrant labour so that they can return home. Shukla and Bhattacharya (2020) have concluded that the pandemic has massively impacted the poultry industry. Due to logistic problems, the supply chain was disrupted, but the rumour which was spread on social media was the main cause of the projected loss of Rs. 22500 crores. They have observed that with the combined effort of industry and the government at the time of crisis for consumer awareness, consumers have gained confidence and consumption has increased. Still, the industry had some problems, but they were expected to be resolved quickly by government intervention.

Objectives of the Study

The major research objectives of the study are

- i. To understand the impact of COVID-19 on different sectors of the Food Processing Industry.
- ii. To find out the problems of food processing industries due to COVID-19.
- iii. To show how government has tried to boost up the Food Processing Industry.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on secondary data. Secondary data has been collected from various sources like FICCI, Techno Serve, UNCATD, KPMG, ASSOCHAM, and CRISIL, and many news articles, research papers, and government orders and guidelines of FASSAI. All these survey and study reports, articles, newspaper reports, government orders and guidelines were published during the pandemic.

Impact of COVID-19 on different sectors of food processing industry

(a) Grain processing / Milling industry

India is the largest producer of pulses, the second-largest producer of rice and wheat, and the largest exporter of Basmati rice. Due to sudden lockdown, grain mills were forced to reduce their normal production and for those, huge quantities of raw materials were wasted, which were stored in warehouses. The supply chain was also disrupted because farmers were unable to collect food grains for lockdown, and there has been a lot of crop damage due to falling in the field. As per the Central Government's guidelines for the COVID-19 pandemic, mills have run their operations with a 40–50% labour force, and because of labour shortages, production and packaging processes were also hampered, and because of transport problems, it was not possible to deliver the finished products to

the market at the right time, and the export of Basmati rice was also disrupted. As a result, mills have suffered huge financial losses.

(b) Fruits and vegetables processing industry

India is called the "fruit basket of the world." Verities of fruits and vegetables are produced in India, but the processing percentage is very low compared to other countries, so post-harvest losses are usually very high. During the lockdown, post-harvest losses of fruits and vegetables were estimated to be Rs. 20,000 crores (Mishra, 2020). The problems of fruit and vegetable processing are the same as grain processing. In addition, there are some other problems like cold chain, testing labs, and export. Due to a shortage of cold chain facilities, raw materials and finished products were damaged. There was a delay in getting the quality testing report because most of the quality testing laboratories were closed due to a lack of employees. As a result, delays in delivery of products to the market and the markets' being open for a specific time during lockdown, maximum hotels and restaurants were closed, and many countries had cancelled their export orders, so the sales were decreased.

(c) Dairy industry

India is the highest producer of milk in the world and contributes around 20% of the total production of milk. At the beginning of the lockdown, demand for milk and milk products was high, but suddenly it was reduced because all the coffee shops, tea stalls, hotels, restaurants, canteens, and sweet shops were closed for lockdown. Milk is perishable in nature. Due to lack of proper preservation and a shortage of cold storage, huge quantities of milk are wasted. Some industries sold milk in the local areas at a cheap rate, and some converted it into milk products, but a large number of milk products are in storage. If the products are not sold in time, then they will also be wasted. The dairy industry has suffered a huge financial loss.

(d) Meat and poultry industry

The rural economy depends on livestock. India is the third highest exporter of meat. This industry has suffered the most during lockdown. On one hand, all the restaurants and canteens were closed, and export orders were cancelled. On the other hand, a rumour or misinformation was spread through social media that the meat of goats and poultry birds is being sourced for coronavirus. Due to this, a strong impact has fallen on the meat and poultry industries. Many poultry farm owners were forced to sell or burn crores of live poultry birds to reduce their loss, which was raised due to maintaining poultry birds. Many abattoirs tried to fight the situation by reducing the selling price, but the rest were forced to shut down. According to the India Poultry Breeders Association (AIPBA), the estimated loss in the poultry industry at the time was about Rs 22500 crore, and the livelihoods of about 5 crore people who were directly or indirectly involved in this industry were in jeopardy (Singh, 2020).

(e) Fish and marine processing industry

India is the third-highest fish-producing country next to China and Indonesia. The two main sources of fisheries collection are inland and marine. Marine products which are exported from India are frozen shrimp, frozen fish, frozen squid, dried items, live items, and chilled items. Japan, the USA, and the European Union are the major importers of these products. Before the announcement of the lockdown, so many boats were sent out to catch fish, but when they came back to shore, they found it difficult to send their marine products to the market and processing units, so huge quantities of marine products were thrown away. According to the Central Institute of Fishing Technology (CIFT), India's fishing sector made a loss of around 28 million euros a day (Buitenland, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Problem of food processing industry due to COVID-19

FPI had many problems even before the outbreak of the pandemic in India. But after the lockdown old problems have become apparent and so many new problems have arisen. All the problems are discussed in detail below:

(a) Disruption in supply chain

Due to the sudden announcement of lockdown, labour movements have been restricted, so post-harvest procedures for cereals, pulses, oilseeds, fruits and vegetables have been stopped. Huge quantities of crops, fruits, and vegetables were damaged due to not harvesting at the right time, and so the supply chain has been disrupted. Another reason is that failure to sow the new seeds on time has resulted in disruption of new crop production. While collecting the crops, the labourers had to work while maintaining social distancing. That is why enough time has been spent to collect the crop and disrupt the supply chain.

(b) Problems of labour force

FPI has suffered the most from the problems of the labour force. Under the lockdown situation, as the government has announced that no wages will be deducted from labour, they are not willing to come. Migrant labourers have returned to their homes and will not be able to return for lack of communication. Laborers who live near the units had transportation issues when they first started working. As per government guidelines, labour must maintain social distance and maintain hygiene at the time of work and will come rotationally, so the industry can run with only 40% to 50% of its workforce daily (ASSOCHEM,2020). So, the production process will be lengthy, and the cost of labour will be increased. So many seasonal food processing industries are forced to shut down due to a lack of labor.

(c) Problems related with infrastructure

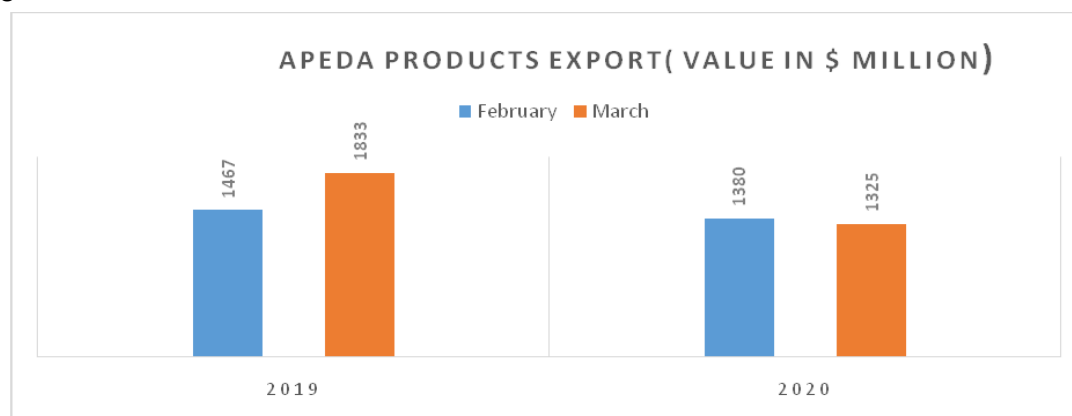
Infrastructure related problem was a serious issue to the FPI's before the pandemic but in current situation the problem has become more evident. Huge quantities of fruits and vegetables have been wasted, meat, fish and other marine products have been rotten due to lack of modern and high capacity of cold storage facility. The available cold storage are less in number and not well equipped. Milk also wasted. Food testing laboratories were closed due to absence of employee. Training programme also postponed due pandemic.

(d) Problem of distribution

The government announced that foods are essential commodities yet, there was disruption in distribution of processed food because truck drivers were not willing to go to long distance and all inter-state borders were closed. Rail and flight service also stopped.

(e) Export and import problem

The outbreak of the pandemic started in the middle of February in India, but COVID-19 had spread by then to other countries. All the export orders were cancelled by Indian food processing companies, and they also cancelled their import orders. Due to this Indian food processing companies had to bear a huge amount of financial loss.



Source: file:///C:/Users/User/Desktop/COVID%2019%20sana%20sir/IMPACT_OF_COVIDI19_ON_APEDA_EXPORT.pdf

Figure 1: Products exported by Agricultural & Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) for the months of February and March of the year 2019 and 2020

Export of agricultural and processed food products was increased by 24.9% from February to March 2019 but Export of such products decreased by 4% from March than February 2020 due to COVID-19 in India.

(f) Huge financial burden

In India, most of the FPIs are unregistered and small enterprises. Industries reduced their production capacity due to several problems. Due to market volatility and a decrease in demand, sales were also reduced. But every unit has its fixed cost which cannot be avoided. The units are unable to meet its cost for that financial burden increased.

(g) Complication of laws and regulations

Aiming for food safety and packaging every FPI unit has to follow enormous laws to take permission from different ministries and then get the license. This process is very lengthy. Processed food products also pass through several tests in the laboratories. Under this situation, it is more time consuming to get a license and the permit from the laboratory.

(h) Problems related with rumours

Consumers always have several quarries about the food safety of processed food. If any rumour spread about any food product, then it would spoil the demand for the product in the market. A rumour was spread on social media and in newspapers that poultry birds are the source of the coronavirus. Due to this, the demand for eggs and poultry meat has fallen. The producers reduced the price, but the demand was not increased. So many poultry birds were forced to be buried alive. But the government announced that it was a rumour and misinformation spread on social media.

Government support for food processing industry during the COVID-19 situation

The central government has always given special priority to the food processing industry. Due to the sudden outbreak of COVID-19, food processing industries also faced huge problems like other industries. To protect the industry from the current crisis, the central government has taken a number of steps and given several supports to boost the industry.

(a) Food processing declared as essential commodities

At the beginning of the 1st phase of lockdown, the government of India considered food processing essential commodity. As per the order of the Ministry of Home and affairs that the ration shop or any other shop which are dealing in grocery food, fruits and vegetables, fish and livestock and other food products also included under essential commodities during lockdown.

(b) Established a Grievance Redressal Cell

Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) has formed a Special Task Force and established a Grievance Redressal Cell to resolve all the issues regarding food processing activities as early as possible during the lockdown. Any member of this industry if faces any kind of problem-related to operation or distribution can send their queries and the task force will help the member for smooth operation.

(c) Smooth supply chain

MoFPI took the initiative and assured the transport unions that no disruption will come, and trucks can freely move with food products and raw materials. Farmers are allowed to continue their work with 50% of the required labour force and maintain social distance. Gol has assured FPIs that raw materials, packing materials, and cold chain facilities will be available under lockdown. Ministry has ensured a smooth supply chain for the general people.

(d) Financial relief package for the industry

A large number of food processing industries are registered under MSME. The central government

announced a huge amount of financial package to combat the situation and turn it around in the near future (Gol,2020).

Table 1: Relief Package under Atmanirbhar Bharat

Sl. No	Items	(Rs. Crore)
1	Emergency working capital facility for business, including MSMEs	3,00,000
2	Subordinate debt for stressed MSMEs	20000
3	Fund of funds for MSMEs	50000
4	EPF support for Business & worker	2800
5	Reduction in EPF rates	6750
6	Special liquidity scheme for NBFC/HFC/MFIs	30000
7	Partial credit guarantee scheme 2.0 for liabilities of NBFCs/MFIs	45000
8	Micro Food Enterprise	10000
9	Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana	20000
10	TOP to Total: Operati on Green	500
11	Agri infrastructure Fund	100000
12	Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund	15000
13	Promotion of Herbal Cultivation	4000
14	Beekeeping Initiatives	500

Source: Government of India (2020)

Key Highlights:

- The industry can take term loans at a concessional rate of interest and without a guarantee for additional working capital of 20% of its outstanding credit. But upto outstanding credit of Rs. 25 crore and turnover of Rs. 100 crores.
- The government has announced total of Rs. 20000 crores for the MSME which is under stress.
- Gol has sanctioned Rs. 1 lakh crore for agricultural infrastructure development.
- Rs. 11000 crores sanctioned for activities in marine and inland fisheries and Rs. 9000 crores for infrastructure through the scheme of Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojna (PMMSY).
- To encourage private investment in the dairy industry, the government has announced a package of Rs. 15000 crores for infrastructure development and incentives for establishing new plants and cattle feed infrastructure.
- To promote the honey processing industry government has declared Rs. 500 crores as incentives for beekeeping and it is expected that around 2 lakh beekeepers will be benefited.
- Reserve Bank of India has offered 3 months moratorium period on payment of instalments and interest on all types of term loans.
- To provide financial support to the start-up enterprises under MSME, Government has set up funds under SIDBI.

(e) Changed the Definition of MSME

To support the MSME government also changed the definition of MSME by increasing the investment limit and merged the manufacturing and service sector. According to new definition Investment limit has extended for Micro < Rs. 1 crore, Small < Rs. 10 crore and Medium < Rs. 20 crore and also Turnover limit extended for Micro < Rs. 5 crore, Small < Rs. 50 crore and Medium < Rs. 100 crores.

Table 2: Comparison of existing and revised definition of Medium Small and Micro Enterprises

Existing MSME classification			
Criteria: Investment in Plant & Machinery			
Classification	Micro	Small	Medium
Manufacturing Enterprise	Investment < Rs. 25lac	Investment < Rs. 5 cr.	Investment < Rs. 10cr.
Service Enterprise	Investment < Rs. 10lac	Investment < Rs. 2 cr.	Investment < Rs. 5 cr.
Revised MSME Classification			
Composite Criteria: Investment and Turnover			
Classification	Micro	Small	Medium
Manufacturing Enterprise & Service Enterprise	Investment < Rs. 1cr. & Turnover < Rs. 5cr	Investment < Rs. 10cr. & Turnover < Rs. 50cr	Investment < Rs. 20cr. & Turnover < Rs. 100cr

Source: Government of India (2020)

(f) Relaxation in tax liability

The government has extended the due date of filling income tax returns for the Assessment Year 2020-2021 till 30th November 2020 and also extended the due date of tax audit till 31st October 2020. The income tax authority will be paid the pending tax refund to the business including proprietorship, partnership, and cooperatives immediately. The government has extended the due date of filling Goods and Service Tax (GST) return till 30th June 2020 and no penalty will be charged if fail the due date.

(g) Relief in electricity charges

FPIs needed an uninterrupted power supply for the preservation of raw materials and processed food during this lockdown, for the huge number of electric charges have due to the power supply companies. In this situation, Union Food Processing Minister has requested all the Chief Ministers to provide relief in electricity charges.

(h) Formalisation micro food processing enterprises

MoFPI has launched a new scheme during the lockdown "Formalisation of Micro food processing Enterprises" for the benefit of nearly 25 lakh unorganised food processing units which are based on rural areas. The main objectives of the scheme are to provide financial assistance, increase the revenue of the organisation, encourage women's entrepreneurship, produce minor forests in tribal districts and transform from the informal sector to the formal sector. Central Government has sanctioned Rs. 10000 crores for the scheme.

(i) Encourage home delivery and E-commerce

Under the lockdown situation, the government has allowed restaurants to open only for home delivery of cooked food and also allowed food delivery companies like Swiggy, Zomato, etc. to continue their activities. It has been found that during this period, demand for online groceries and home delivery of other food products also increased. So, the Government also allowed retail shops for home delivery of groceries and e-commerce to encourage and promote the trend.

(j) Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) facilitates food businesses

FASSAI has taken several initiatives to facilitate the food business in response to the COVID-19 (FASSAI, 2020a). FASSAI set several guidelines for food businesses regarding food safety and food hygiene during the pandemic. FASSAI has waived the penalty on renewal of license for the business whose renewal dates were from 22nd March to 31st May 2020 and also provided a grace period till 30th June 2020, due dates of return extended till 31st July 2020 (FASSAI, 2020b). FASSAI also

established a dedicated contact number and email id in each to resolve any compliant and set up an online portal for licensing.

(k) Support to the employees of the industries

Hon'ble Prime Minister has assured the employees about their job security. Employees got free food grains from the ration shop under the scheme of PMGKY. The government also reduced the provident fund contribution rate from 12% to 10% for three months.

(l) Campaign against Rumours

The government has strongly handled the rumours spread on social media regarding the meat and poultry industry. The government immediately earthling the rumour and campaigned against such types of rumour (FICCI, 2020). Consumers understood the fact and after a few weeks poultry industry recovered its 80% of losses.

CONCLUSION

The present number of Corona cases is increasing very fast in India, and experts are saying it will reach its peak at the end of August. Due to lockdown, industries are closed, exports are not possible, and the unemployment rate is also growing very fast. Economically, India is not in a good position. In this situation, it is not possible to continue lockdown for too long. In keeping view of this situation, Gol has announced a financial relief package, which is around 10% of India's total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) value. Through this relief package, the Government of India has placed a special emphasis on the MSME sector, agriculture, and related sectors. The food processing industry is one of the important sectors of MSME and the agriculture sector also depends very much on this industry. The government of India is ready to provide more support to this industry in all aspects. It is expected that with the help of the financial relief package and other support from the government, this industry will cover all the losses in the near future that have been incurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendations and Suggestions

Gol has offered a relief package and has taken several positive steps in favour of the food processing industry. There are more issues that the Gol should take on, like setting up a large number of new cold storage facilities with modern facilities, new quality testing laboratories, and training institutes after the removal of lockdown. Interest for the next 6 months starting from March 2020 shall be exempted and the interest rate shall be reduced for the next two financial years. To reduce the GST rate on processed food products. To promote the export of food products and capture more foreign markets, reduce the customs duty and make the process easy. To attract and encourage new entrepreneurs in the food processing industry, reduce the processing and licencing fees, make the registration process easy and fast, and provide loans at a subsidised rate of interest. Provide more grants for packaging and distribution procedures. Introduce a health scheme for the employees of this industry free of charge under this pandemic situation. Government should be running a campaign and requesting the citizens to purchase more and more Indian processed food products to keep this industry alive in this crisis situation.

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