

Better Specification for better Foodstuffs

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Abstract. In order to ascertain that the foodstuffs procured in bulk for the Services are of good quality, certain specifications known as ASC specifications are laid down for them. These specifications as also methodologies are periodically reviewed, amended and brought up to-date. The process of updating is achieved through the Technical Standardisation Committee.

Introduction

Looking back to the history of procurement of various foodstuffs for Defence, it is interesting to note that the Technical Standardisation Committee (Foodstuffs) was constituted as early as 1944 as an Inter-Departmental Committee between the representatives of the Ministry of Food and the Ministry of Defence, mainly with a view to update the Royal Indian Army Service Corps (RIASC) Specifications and to formulate new specifications for various food stuffs which were required in huge quantities by the Army during the Second World War. In the post-war and post-independence period, the activities of this Committee were diversified in other fields also and its composition was expanded to include experts in the field of food research and standardisation. The Committee has formulated about 200 ASC specifications (the nomenclature used for the Defence specifications) for different food items so far and thereby has been offering a great deal of service to the nation. It also reviews the ASC specifications for foodstuffs from time to time with regard to standards of quality, methods of processing, packing, hygiene standards, warranty, chemical and bacteriological methods of examination etc. keeping in view the latest development in the respective fields and suitably amalgamating them to the special needs for Defence.

During the last few years the Committee has been endeavouring to evolve newer packing system to suit Defence needs and to substitute scarce and costly wooden packing cases and tin containers with cheap and technically feasible packaging materials. Indian Institute of Packaging, Bombay has also been associated in the matter and the recommendations of the Committee in this regard are now being considered. In this connection, two transportation trials on rum bottles packed in corrugated fibre board boxes were quite encouraging. Similar trials are also planned for other items. Some studies to introduce flexible packing for toffees, boiled sweets, dehydrated vegetables, etc. are also in progress in Defence Food Research Laboratory, Mysore.

This continuous process of updating the ASC specifications is achieved through the Committee of experts wherein besides the Department of Food, Government of India organisations like Defence Food Research laboratory, Mysore; Central Food Technological Research Institute, Mysore; Directorate General of Health Services; Indian Standards Institution and Army Headquarters, Ministry of Defence, Government of India are also represented.

Keeping these objectives in view, the Committee normally meets once in a year and discusses the issues in great detail and arrives at a feasible decision. Amendments brought about to the various ASC specifications are discussed at great length, For example the amendment brought about for some of the items in the recent years are given below :

Name of the item with respective ASC specifications No.	Relevant points
1	2
1. No. 22 Buttertinned	1. Microbiological Standards (viz. bacteria, yeast and mould count) 2. Addition of 0.1% Sorbic acid or its Sodium and Potassium salt
2. No. 139 A Refined Groundnut Oil	1. Draft specification put up 2. Suitable modification with reference to packaging etc. and approved finally on 24.9.82
3. No. 139 Vanaspati	1. Change of Nomenclature "Oil Hydrogenated" to "Vanaspati" 2. Standard for colour index 3. Nett weight
4. No. 33 Cigarettes	1. Packaging 2. Revision of the entire specifications with reference to quality marking and inspection parameters
5. No. 57 Egg powder	Alignment with ISI standards with respect to quality parameters
6. No. 187 Tomato sauce	Quality, packing and inspection (request received from supplies)
7. No. 14 Beans Dried (Rajmah)	Packing
8. No. 146 Peas Dried	Packing
9. No. 97 Kabli Chana Whole	1. Revision of entire specification 2. Packing
10. No. 118 skimmed Milk Powder	Alignment with ISI standards as per quality
11. No. 185 Tea	Recommendations of the Expert Group on Tea with reference to quality requirements

Defence Food Research Laboratory, Mysore has always been playing a key role in attempting to solve the immediate problems with regard to amending the ASC specifications and updating the methodologies. In this context recent studies carried out by DFRL in formulating the limits of benzaldehyde and malonaldehyde content and also suggesting suitable test for determining the rancidity in the fruits viz. Almonds without shell (ASC Spn. No. 67A) and Walnut without shell (ASC Spn. No. 203A) are worth mentioning with appreciation. Studies to devise a suitable container for storage and transportations for groundnut oil are also being investigated by the laboratory (ASC Spn. No 139A)

The international School of Milling Technology, Central Food Technological Research Institute, Mysore has also been associated with TSC in regard to finding out the devide range of bran extraction when the atta is produced simultaneously with flour (maida) and/or suji (ASC Spn. No. 64 for flour).