

INDUSTRY PLAYERS SAY PLASTIC STRAWS ACCOUNT FOR LESS THAN 0.1% OF PLASTIC CONSUMPTION

Amul, beverage makers want straw ban postponed

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As the deadline to implement the ban on single-use plastic comes into force from July, large beverage firms, both global and domestic, have urged the centre to exempt plastic straws from the ban.

Fearing disruption in the industry, homegrown dairy giant - Amul - has approached the centre to postpone its decision. The Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), country's largest FMCG firm, has written to the ministry of environment urging it to delay the implementation of the ban till next

year to ensure that the country has enough

capacity to replace plastic straws with paper straws.

The plastic straws accompany small packs of juices and milk-based beverages.

"The intention of government is good. But currently, our country simply does not have the capacity to manufacture paper straws which have to be imported and are 5-6 times more costly. Also,

INDUSTRY'S CONTENTIONS

- Plastic straws account for less than 0.1% of total plastic consumption
- Ban on plastic straws can disrupt the pricing of juices, milk-based beverages
- Currently, there is zero capacity in the country to manufacture paper straws
- The supply of imported paper straws is limited, costly



- Approval from regulatory bodies, testing protocols and clearance for biodegradable PLA straws that can replace plastic straws will require at least a year

they are not as effective as plastic straws," said R S Sodhi, managing director of GCMMF which markets dairy products under the brand Amul.

Sodhi said that plastic straws do not even account for 0.1 % of the total plastic consumption. "We are following it up with the centre," said Sodhi.

The Action Alliance for Recycling Beverage Cartons (AARC), the industry group whose members include PepsiCo, Coca-Cola Co, Parle Agro, Dabur and other milk firms, too is lobbying for an extension of the ban.

"When it comes to paper straws, we are currently sitting at zero capacity. We have urged the government to give us transition time," said AARC's CEO Praveen Aggarwal, adding that the industry needs at least one and a half years for every plastic straw to be replaced by either biocompostable or paper straws.

"We have been working on biodegradable PLA straws as an alternative. But these are still 9 to 12 months away before they get approved by regulatory bodies, and undergo testing protocols and clearance from the Food Safety and Standards

Authority of India. We are also looking to import paper straws, whatever can be imported but there is not enough availability globally," he said, adding that there are limited manufacturers of strawline machines globally.

He said that of the overall plastic consumption of 34 million tonnes a year, plastic straws constitute just 1,800 tonnes.

"We support the government's initiative but there is a difference to be made between loose straws that cause litter and the integrated ones that come with packaging as the industry collects and recycles it," he said.

"Besides Amul, all other branded products which sell juices and other beverages in smaller tetrapaks cannot do without straws. This has put a number of FMCG manufacturers in a fix. At the same time, plastic manufacturing units are reeling from losses not just because of the ban but also because of the steep rise in raw material costs," said Prerad Patel, president, Ahmedabad Plastic Manufacturers' Association (APMA).

"A slew of representa-

tions have been moved before pollution control boards at the state and central levels as well as the state and central authorities by plastic manufacturers given the situation," he said.

A paper straw doesn't last long in a liquid, industry players say.

"We have demanded an advisory from the central government suggesting viable alternatives to single-use plastics earlier. There is still no viable alternative for spoons or straws at similar prices and similar quantities and it is the biggest hurdle. If we start manufacturing more quantities of optional products, the prices will go down. The industry is willing to comply provided affordable and viable alternatives to single-use plastics are provided," said Hiren Gandhi, chairman of GCCI food committee.

Packaging and disposable cutlery cost for food processing industry players has gone up by 20% over the past six to eight months, industry sources claim.

(With inputs from Niyati Parikh & Parag Dave in Ahmedabad)