

Coronavirus curfew cuts milk demand, adds to adulteration

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Amritsar: The coronavirus (Covid-19) curfew in Punjab has brought down demand for milk and milk products due to closure of sweet shops, roadside tea stalls and ice cream parlours.

Dairy owners are selling milk for as low as Rs 20 per litre even as cooperative Verka, a leading player in the milk segment in Punjab, has hired

private plants to procure milk from dairy farmers on a par with pre-curfew days.

Amritsar Verka milk plant general manager Harminder Singh Sandhu told TOI on Tuesday that even people's buying power had fallen after the curfew. "Also, all eateries are closed," he said.

He said Amritsar's daily milk demand had come down to nearly 64,000 litres per day as against nearly 84,000 litres per day earlier. However, he said, their milk procurement was around 2.6 lakh litres per day. "We have hired private milk plants for manufacturing milk powder," he said.

A visit to a few residential areas in Amritsar on Wednesday revealed that milkmen were selling milk for Rs 20-25 per litre as against the normal price of Rs 45-55 per litre.

Rise in adulteration

Lockdown has also led to milk adulteration. Many small-time traders tour villages early in the morning to collect milk for Rs 20 per litre. They dilute it with water and sell it for Rs 20-25 or Rs 30 per litre.

A source in the dairy industry said the government's 100% attention was on containing the coronavirus. "The home delivery system has collapsed, so these people go unnoticed in such a scenario. People are unable to go out due to the lockdown and wait for supplies by such sellers of adulterated milk," the source said.

Dairy owner Kulbir Singh said he was selling milk for Rs 15 to Rs 20 per litre these days. He said demand from organised milk procurement companies had significantly fallen.

He added they had also not been giving full feed to their cattle due to decreased demand. "During initial days of lockdown, I had to distribute milk free in my village, so why not lower production?" he said.

'Substandard, not unfit for consumption'

Amritsar district health officer Dr Baldev Singh said the department had been taking samples of milk and it was found to be substandard in few cases, but not unfit for human consumption. "These days, everyone's attention is on preventing the spread of coronavirus, but we will look into it and take appropriate action against persons selling adulterated milk and milk products," he said.