



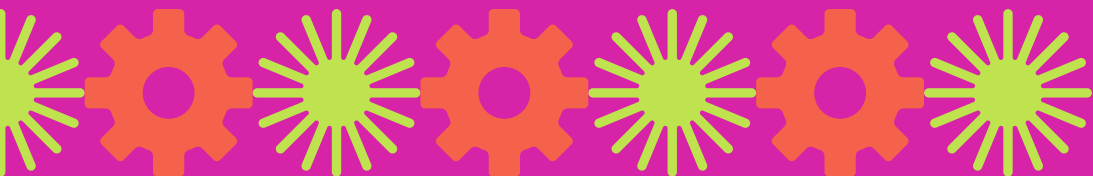
Millers
for
Nutrition



Case Study

ShyamaTara Rice Mills

Building an Open Market
for Fortified Rice in India



Summary

ShyamaTara Rice Mills (STRM) has a long track record of supplying fortified rice to government social safety net programs in India. In early 2025, with technical support from the Millers for Nutrition (M4N) Coalition, STRM took a decisive step beyond public procurement by launching a fortified rice brand for middle-class consumers in a voluntary market — becoming the second fortified rice brand in West Bengal. The decision was driven not by compliance or philanthropy, but by a clear commercial logic — to differentiate in a competitive market and capture a fast-growing, digital-first consumer segment.

Through sustained investment in consumer education, strong digital-first retail distribution, and evidence-based messaging (including health-focused influencers), STRM is helping shift the perception of fortified rice from a product associated with poverty alleviation to a nutritional requirement for all segments of society. By creating an open market for fortified rice, STRM is helping lay the foundation for fortification that can endure beyond subsidies and mandates — and offering a model that could inspire a new generation of millers.

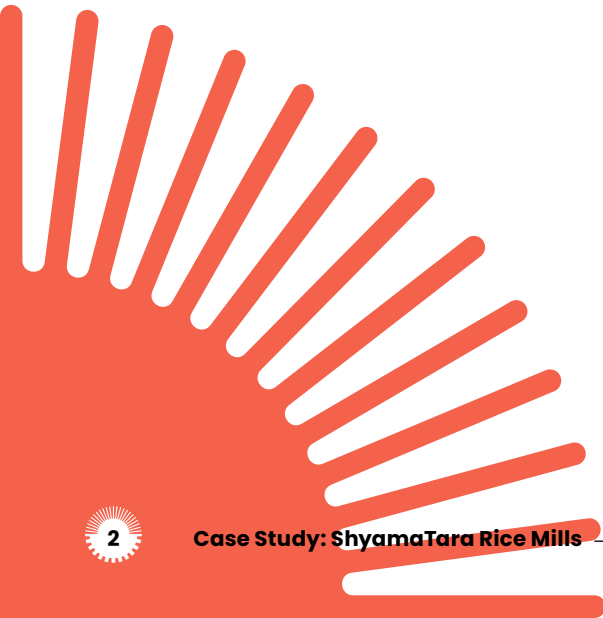
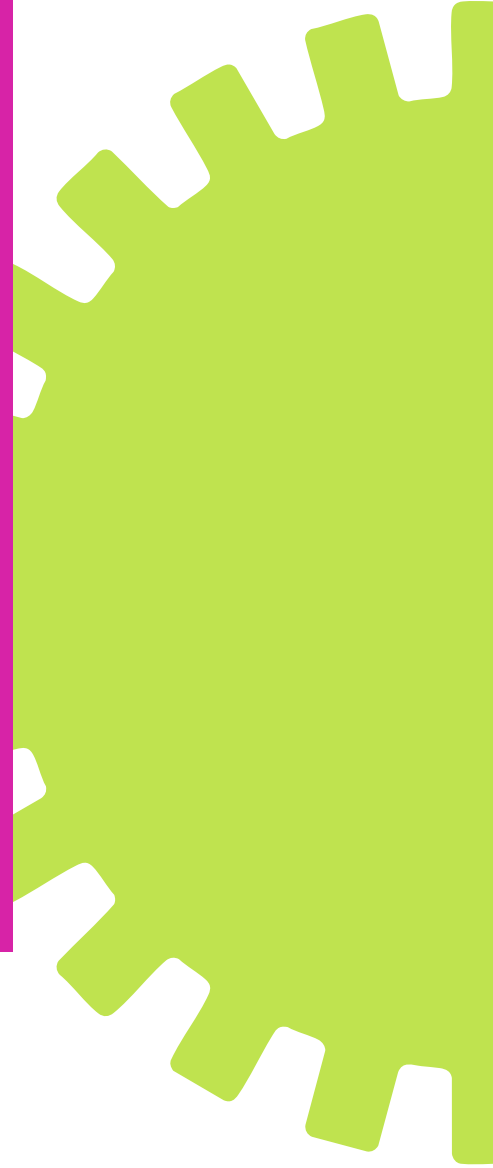




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From Public Supply to Market Differentiation



ShyamaTara Rice Mills (P) Limited has played an active role in India's fortification journey through its longstanding supply of fortified rice to the government for public distribution and social safety net programs. Fortification is therefore familiar territory for the company: technically sound, operationally embedded, and implemented at scale.

Fortified rice itself is also not new in India. Hundreds of millions of people consume fortified rice daily through the public distribution system. At the same time, the government-led rollout has shaped public perception. Fortified rice is widely associated with welfare schemes and poverty alleviation, often framed as "food for the poor" rather than as a relevant and desirable choice for everyday household consumption.

From a business perspective, the existing model offered limited room for differentiation. In the open market, rice is a highly competitive commodity, where price alone leaves little space for strategic positioning. For Abhishek Agarwal, a third-generation entrepreneur leading STRM, this was the starting point.

STRM observed that many middle- and upper-middle-class consumers assume they do not need fortified staples, despite changing diets, rising consumption of processed foods, and persistent micronutrient gaps across income groups. This gap pointed to a clear opportunity: to build a new fortified rice brand designed specifically for middle-income consumers, and to demonstrate that fortified rice is not only for public programs, but also beneficial for the health of everyday households.

"I was looking for a way to differentiate my product. Fortification gave me something meaningful that others were not offering."

Abhishek Agarwal
Director at STRM



Picture: STRM's fortified rice brand targets middle-class consumers

A Commercial Bet on the Voluntary Market



In February 2025, STRM was introduced to the Millers for Nutrition (M4N) Coalition. Within two months, the company launched a fortified rice brand for the voluntary market.

This speed reflected confidence in the business case. With technical guidance, partner introductions, and external credibility from M4N and TechnoServe, STRM moved quickly from concept to launch. By April 2025, STRM had become the second fortified rice brand in West Bengal, entering a competitive voluntary market shaped by consumer choice, trust, and clarity of messaging – targeting middle-class consumers willing to pay a modest premium for a clearly differentiated product.

The fortified brand was positioned deliberately: not as a luxury product, and not as a welfare product, but as a practical upgrade to a daily staple. For STRM, the move was driven by dual logic. A clear societal need and a clear business opportunity: a way to stand out in a crowded market with a proposition that carried real consumer value.

“Without the support of Millers for Nutrition and TechnoServe, we could not have launched these product lines.”

Abhishek Agarwal
Director at STRM



Picture: STRM prominently highlights the five micronutrients contained in its fortified rice products for consumers

Beyond Compliance: Shifting the Narrative of Fortified Rice



STRM's leadership is defined not only by producing fortified rice, but by actively building the conditions under which consumers will choose it in open markets — through inclusive positioning, consumer-centric product design, and sustained demand creation.

Digital-First Retail as a Strategic Advantage

Targeting a new consumer segment of middle-class consumers, the retail strategy was key. Rather than relying primarily on traditional offline retail, STRM built its fortified rice brand around e-commerce and quick-commerce platforms, including Amazon and fast-delivery grocery apps. This was not an afterthought — it was a core strategic choice.

STRM was already present in digital marketplaces and sees online purchasing as the direction of travel in India — especially for middle-class households that are rapidly shifting to online food purchases for convenience. STRM followed this shift early, designing its go-to-market strategy around digital discovery, digital education, and digital purchasing.

Today, around 20% of STRM's fortified rice sales come through e-commerce channels, a share that continues to grow steadily.

For STRM, going digital-first is not simply a channel choice — it is a scaling lever. Online platforms enable targeted awareness campaigns, faster market learning, and more direct consumer feedback loops. These dynamics allow STRM to refine its proposition in real time and accelerate adoption — capabilities that are critical when building a new product category in a voluntary market.

Designing a Fortified Product People Trust

In staple categories, trust is everything. STRM therefore invested not just in marketing, but in product integrity and consumer experience — reducing the risk that consumers perceive fortified rice as unfamiliar or “different.”

With support from M4N, STRM adopted a five-micronutrient formulation, creating a strong and credible health proposition. At the same time, pricing was kept intentionally accessible, with a premium of around 5% — reinforcing that fortified rice is not a luxury item. A practical embodiment of STRM's “for everyone” philosophy.

“The future consumer in India is buying rice online. If you want fortification to scale, you have to meet people where they are shopping.”

Abishek Agarwal
Director at STRM

“If it looks different, people won't trust it. Fortified rice has to feel exactly like the rice they already eat.”

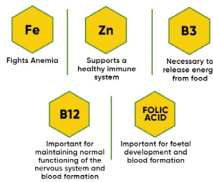
Abishek Agarwal
Director at STRM

Picture: STRM's five-micronutrient formulation creates a strong and credible health proposition

STRM also invested heavily in product design. Working with DSM-firmenich, the fortified kernels were engineered to match the local rice variety in size, shape, and colour. This ensured that fortified rice looked and cooked exactly like regular rice – an important detail in a market where visual differences can undermine acceptance.

Why Fortification Matters?

Fortification adds essential vitamins and minerals to staple foods like rice, helping fight hidden hunger – nutrient deficiencies that often go unnoticed.



“Nutrition is not only for the poor or for the rich. Like a strong immune system, it is a requirement for everyone – and fortified rice is one simple way to support that.”

Abishek Agarwal
Director at STRM

Picture: Examples of STRM's consumer-facing advertising explaining the benefits of fortified rice

Making Consumer Education a Priority

As the fortified brand gained traction, STRM began investing heavily in consumer education – spending approximately USD 100,000 per year on awareness and marketing. The focus was not on aspirational lifestyles, but on normalising nutrition.

Rather than celebrity endorsements, STRM works with clinicians and health-focused content creators to explain benefits in relatable terms. The message is consistent: micronutrient adequacy and immunity are not special-interest concerns; they are basic requirements for every household. This framing helps move fortified rice out of the welfare narrative and into everyday decision-making.



A Contribution Beyond One Brand



STRM's approach has implications beyond its own commercial success. By proving that fortified rice can succeed in voluntary, digital-first markets, STRM is helping create the conditions for long-term sustainability of fortification in India.

Government support for fortified rice is expected to continue until 2029. What happens next will depend on whether open markets can carry fortification forward. STRM's experience suggests they can.

For the wider milling sector — particularly the many third-generation entrepreneurs looking to modernise traditional businesses — this model offers a clear lesson: fortification can be a growth strategy, not just a compliance exercise.

By building demand where consumers actively choose fortified rice, STRM is helping move the sector toward a future where nutrition no longer depends solely on mandates and subsidies — but on markets that work.



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