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FSSAI issues gazette notification regarding shelf life of imported food

Friday, 16 February, 2018, 08 : 00 AM [IST]

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The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) issued a gazette notification stating that the shelf life of imported food products should not be less than 60 per cent or three months, whichever is minimum.

These regulations may be called the Food Safety and Standards (Import) First Amendment Regulations, 2018.

“Custom authorities shall not clear any article of food unless it has a valid shelf life of not less than 60 per cent, or three months before expiry, whichever is less, at the time of import,” stated the notification.

It added that another provision, stating that, “The importer shall submit a certificate of sanitary export from the authorised agencies in the exporting countries for the categories of food as may be specified by the food authority from time to time”, had also been inserted.

The above will help in the prioritisation of risks and effectively deal with high-risk products intended for import.

Ajit Lagoo, vice-president, business development, Envirocare Labs Pvt Ltd, is an expert on the subject. Analysing the scenario, he said, “Overall the notification is welcome, because it will ensure safer products for Indian consumers.”

“I checked with a couple of regular importers, who were following this already. The change they see is that now the system at the time of material entry will ask the importer to exactly provide the date of entry and best before date (BBD) or expiry date (whatever is applicable) and the system will calculate the remaining shelf life of the product. Import won't be permitted if it fails to meet the criteria of 60 per cent shelf life remaining on the day of the entry,” he added.

Lagoo said, “It will be beneficial to the industry, as it will eliminate malpractices considerably. Moreover, the products entering the Indian market will also be of a good quality.”

Explaining the past practices, he informed, “Earlier, importers were still allowed to

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get the products in, basis their self-declaration. That explained their internal mechanism for recall, in case it was required. So the system was not really foolproof and I am sure there must be importers, who took advantage of this.”

“Now the safety is ensured, since the product won’t be allowed to enter the Indian market. There is another aspect of this regulation, which is to motivate local manufacturers. This way the competition will be healthy,” Lagoo added.