



Packaged Food Labels Need To Display Details of GM Ingredients : FSSAI

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E-Paper

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has announced that all packaged foods must clearly state the details of the genetically modified (GM) ingredients if at all they contain any. This is a step towards introducing GMO labeling for the first time in India. The FSSAI also suggests that all packaged food items have a mandatory declaration of their nutritional information as in the number of calories, amounts of sugar, fat, salt, etc., on the front of the pack.

India does not have any provision for GM labeling as of now which means that consumers in the country do not have any idea if the food products they are buying have genetically engineered ingredients (GE) in them.

The 42-page draft notice that was released by the FSSAI last month titled 'Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018' has made it mandatory to label food products with genetically modified ingredients as "Contains GMO/Ingredients derived from GMO" in cases where the item contains 5% or more GE ingredients. The provision for the implementation of this regulation will be notified by the authority after analyzing the opinions of the stakeholders.

As per the regulations proposed in the draft, packaged foods with high fat, sugar, and salt will be colored 'red' in case the value of energy from total sugar is more than 10% of the total energy provided by the 100 grams or 100 ml of the product. The same provision applies for trans-fat and sodium content. This color coding will help consumers to know about the nutritional values and make their choice based on that.

This move, though sounding beneficial for the consumers, has gained mixed reactions from stakeholders. They are claiming that the move is inconsistent especially when GM foods are already not allowed for sale in India. "We need preventive action at this juncture rather than regulatory action", says Sridhar Radhakrishnan, co-convenor of the Coalition for a GM-Free India, stating that the GM labeling will pave way for the entry of GM foods in India.

On the other hand, Chandra Bhushan, deputy director general of the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), said, "The GM labeling is an important step but we need a proper system to check it. We need advanced lab facilities to check whether the foodstuff contain GM ingredients or not". Commenting on the FSSAI's approach, he added, "It has adopted a 'reductionist approach' towards nutrition. It allows a product to display nutrition benefits based on one attribute even if the product is bad on other attributes".