

“FDCA Gujarat is very strict, Rs 15 cr fine imposed”

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Gujarat has topped the Food Safety Index in the country, released recently by the FSSAI. Apart from that, the state has many achievements to its credit including the Kankaria Lake in Ahmedabad being declared as India’s first clean street food hub. **Dr H G Koshia, Commissioner, Food and Drugs Administration (FDCA), Gujarat**, in an email interaction with **Ashwani Maindola** spoke about the Gujarat model and future plans. Excerpts:

Gujarat has topped the food safety index in the country, on what count did FDCA Gujarat fare to get the top position and what do you think are the reasons for this achievement? Elaborate.

The Food Safety Index is awarded on the basis of following parameters: Human Resources and Institutional Data; Compliance; Food Testing- Infrastructure and Surveillance; Training and Capacity Building; Consumer Empowerment.

A. As far as human resources are concerned, FDCA, Gujarat, is having, full time Food Safety Commissioner, 33 Adjudicating Officers, independent Appellate Tribunal, 32 Designated Officers, 25 Senior Food Safety Officers, and 274 Food Safety Officers to implement food safety in Gujarat. Every year more posts are sanctioned.

B. More than 76,000 licences and 1,78,000 registrations are issued by FDCA, Gujarat, till date. IT-based management of licensing and registration gives better scope for fast and transparent executions. Fewer applications like FoSCoRIS enable FSOs for online submissions of inspections in order to make faster communications regarding inspections. State web portal for consumers and FBOs grievances provides opportunity to consumers as well as FBOs to file online grievances.

C. FDCA, Gujarat, is equipped with six fully operational laboratories of which four are NABL accredited and two are in progress. Moreover participation in INFOLNET i.e. Indian Food Laboratories Network makes these laboratories connected through online. Four Food Safety on Wheels provided by FSSAI and three more mobile testing and exhibition vans provided by state government to FDCA, Gujarat, which are constantly working in urban areas and remote areas of the state. We have better surveillance through targeting specific commodities for the sampling throughout the state in coordination with all circle offices and making special drives throughout the year in particular intervals of time.

D. As far as training and capacity building part is concerned we have projected more than 100 FoSTaC training sessions and nearly 5,500 FBOs possess FoSTaC certification. As Covid-19 pandemic is at its peak, FDCA, Gujarat, is keen to make FBOs learn about special trainings regarding precautions for Covid-19.

E. In Gujarat, double fortified salt, fortified oil, fortified atta, fortified milk is available in open market. ICDS is supplying fortified milk, DFS, fortified oil & products like

MatruBhog, Shakti Bhog, Bal Bhog made from fortified atta to 33 districts. PDS is supplying fortified oil and DFS, MDM is supplying food made from fortified staples to school children in six districts through Akshaypatra. In this way FDCA, Gujarat, is also looking into the matters empowering the consumers. Moreover FDCA always plays a vital role in execution of newly started schemes and initiatives of FSSAI viz. Eat Right Campus, Clean Street Food Hub, etc. SNF i.e. Safe & Nutritious Food is an initiative for providing good quality food in schools under which we have organised training in more than 145 schools. We have covered 34 temples under the BHOG (Blissful Hygienic Offering to God) initiative of FSSAI.

On many occasions, FSSAI has urged other state FDAs to follow the Gujarat model, like the disposing of PFA cases. What is Gujarat FDAs approach on such problems or challenges like enforcement, surveillance, action against errant FBOs, and disposal of the cases?

- To combat the challenge of adulteration, FDCA Gujarat is conducting special drives for commodities like milk, oil, spices, ghee, iodised salts, packaged drinking water, seasonal commodities etc. and based on that drives sampling, analysis and strict actions are taken against the FBO.
- FDCA Gujarat has 4 mobile testing vans to do surveillance in the state. These vans are equipped with many instruments like milkoscan, TDS meter, testo meter, refractometer, microscope, on the spot testing kits with chemicals. These vans continuously move into the city and interior areas and do surveillance activity.
- FDCA, Gujarat, is very strict against errant FBOs and till now more than Rs 15 crore fine is imposed on the errant FBOs in adjudicating cases.
- FDCA, Gujarat, has done a special project with the help of health and family welfare department and High Court to reduce the age-old PFA cases by imposing a fine to FBOs. Nearly 3,500 cases are run by a special court and disposed which is the big achievement.

Now, it's been 10 years since the FSS Act's implementation started in 2011, how do you assess the transition from the old regime to the new. What are the challenges faced by the FDCA and how did you overcome them?

- From August 5, 2011, the date of implementation of new Act, FDCA, Gujarat, has started working way before this date. In the old regime of PFA Act, there were only 35,000 licences but under the new Act we have issued more than 76,000 licences and 1,78,000 registrations. Digitisation of sampling, legal, licensing, inspection procedures are fully implemented in Gujarat so, challenges of unorganised sector is overcome up to some extent but still there is more scope to make the system more effective.

Manpower crunch is a fact that every state FDA in India has to deal with. What is the situation with respect to manpower in Gujarat? Elaborate.

- It is time that in spite of having more unemployment in the country, manpower crunch is observed in every sector but FDCA, Gujarat, is thankful to Gujarat Government by supporting to fill all the posts of Food Safety Officers, Senior Food Safety Officers and Designated Officers to work more effectively.

How is your FDA collaborating with the FBOs, which are an integral part of the food safety ecosystem and the consumers or general masses to ensure food safety?

FDCA, Gujarat not only looking into the enforcement part but also cares for the FBOs and common people for creating awareness regarding food safety.

As far as enforcement part is concerned in remote areas of the state, state is equipped with four Food Safety on Wheels, a special mobile testing van which is provided by FSSAI with the help of which constant monitoring and surveillance is achieved in remote areas. For the common people various IEC activities are organised in schools as well as different parts with a view to spread awareness regarding the food safety.

We organise training with two different views one deals with the enforcement part and second with the educational part. We deliver the training and workshops with a view to make FBOs understand about online processes of licensing and registration and FoSTaC certification training is also being organised with the collaboration of third-party FSSAI empanelled training partners.

FSS Act calls for creation of special courts for the purpose of food related cases. What is the situation in Gujarat vis-à-vis such provisions?

- All cases of adjudication are run by Residential Additional Collectors in Gujarat. Gujarat is the first state with established Food Safety Appellate Tribunal in the Country. FDCA, Gujarat, is still keen about speedy disposal of cases regarding food adulteration in court of law.

What are Gujarat FDCA's future plans?

FDCA Gujarat plans safe & wholesome food for all citizens of the state and for that IEC activities for the food safety are more of concern. The second main objective is to achieve 100% registration and licensing to every FBOs and manufacturers in Gujarat state. FDCA Gujarat has total four FSWs for food testing and surveillance, as we are planning to reach more remote areas of the state we are looking forward to have each district and even at taluka levels equipped with mobile food testing facilities. We are also looking to generate toll-free number with less digits and more effective solutions of complaint regarding food safety. The way ahead we are planning personal jackets to our Food Safety Officers, which is enabled with GPS tracker and it is suggested and developed by FSSAI for better enforcement and proper surveillance of state.