

Hygiene rating for eating joints on Punjab's platter

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Come May, food delivery apps such as Zomato, Swiggy and Foodpanda would not be allowed to deliver food in Punjab from unrated restaurants and dhabas. These apps will also be prohibited from sourcing food items from those outlets where the ratings are less than three out of five.

Coming down heavily on unrated food outlets, the state government will soon issue a notification to prohibit food delivery apps from sourcing food items from these outlets. The state had already invited objections from the food delivery apps in this regard but it didn't receive any objections.

"It has been observed that many food business operators or eating outlets overlook hygiene norms laid down by Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). Initially, we asked them to get rated by third party auditors. Since the move was voluntary, only around 500 outlets came forward to get themselves rated. Considering the interest of consumers, we have now made it mandatory for all eating outlets to get rated before April 30," said KS Pannu, Commissioner, Food & Drug Administration, Punjab.

These ratings and certifications will be visible on the app and website when a consumer places an order.

The food delivery apps have been asked to deploy third party auditors who are experts in their field and registered by the FSSAI to undertake such exercise. Out of over 6,000 restaurants listed on these apps, less than 500 are rated as of now.

According to the department, the mechanism of supply of food by food delivery apps has obliterated the system of responsibility of maintaining the quality of food, which till now was being directly verified by the consumers from the food business operators at his counter. So, it's important to have checks and balances.

Taking a step forward in this direction, the state department has already imparted training to all big and small food business operators (FBOs) in Punjab. The training covers all aspects of providing healthy and hygienic food, dos and don'ts for processing and cooking food, hygiene of the work place.

In May 2019, the system of hygiene rating for restaurants and other eating outlets was introduced and the FSSAI had empanelled various agencies to conduct the hygiene rating of these outlets. It was also advised all the food delivery apps to ensure that restaurants from where they source the food for distribution to consumers should be asked to get the hygiene rating done.