

## FSSAI

Food Marketing Technology | Jul 29, 2020



### **Mr Arun Singhal shared the intense efforts being made by FSSAI to regulate and organise the Indian food industry.**

The implementation of various schemes will serve and safe guard both the industry and consumers thus creating an element of trust and will encourage transparency in maintaining international standards for all players from roadside food vendors to 5-star establishments as well as industry manufacturers.

FSSAI under its current Head certainly means business.....the proof of the pudding will undoubtedly be in the eating of it!

**Being the new Head of FSSAI, please brief us about your priorities and vision for the food and beverage industry.**

FSSAI is continuously evolving across the value chain from making standards to developing quality assurance and testing infrastructure; capacity building of human resources; strengthening our compliance and surveillance efforts; enabling support to FBOs and awareness generation to the public through the Eat Right India initiative. As we move forward, FSSAI will continue to ensure provision of safe food and healthy food to consumers. Various initiatives such as Eat Right Campus for people at workplaces, hospitals and higher education institutions; Eat Right School for school children and the Eat Right Toolkit to reach people at the grass-roots level have been launched. Several benchmarking and certification schemes and cluster initiatives to improve the infrastructure and hygiene compliance levels in food establishments have been created that includes Clean Street Food Hubs, Hygiene Rating for restaurants etc. Food businesses are being encouraged to reformulate their products and gradually reduce their salt, sugar and fat content; several corporates have voluntarily signed a pledge on such reformulation. Fortification is being promoted by notification of standards for 5 staples, +F logo for easy identification by consumers. The focus is to scale-up these initiatives and increase the scope of activities under each of these.

FSSAI is working towards various regulatory reforms for enhancing efficiency with 'Ease of doing Business' including simplification in the processing of applications for licensing and registration and making it more user friendly for FBOs. IT-enabled resources are being deployed for improvement in existing portals of licensing & registration, portal of food imports and network of laboratories along with better e-Governance for delivery of various e-services including e-applications and e-inspections. FSSAI would also increase the scope of market surveillance to identify hot-spot areas of adulteration and conduct national-level surveys for milk, vegetable oils and other high risk commodities in future. Another core area involves improving the infrastructure to facilitate better functioning across levels including strengthening of food testing laboratories; development of new National Food Laboratories (NFLs) at Chennai/Mumbai; investment in training and capacity building efforts for FSOs and field staff as well as food businesses for self-compliance.

**What are the latest initiatives taken by the Government to improve the status of food safety for the people? Please elaborate on how you wish to engage with the industry?**

To ensure food safety for people, it is critical to target and work with food businesses that supply food. To build capacities of food businesses on food safety, FSSAI has initiated Food Safety Training and Certification (FoSTaC) – a unique program to ensure a trained and certified Food Safety Supervisor (FSS) on each food business premise. Several benchmarking and certification schemes to improve food safety and hygiene standards are in place. Clean Street Food Hub, Clean and Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Markets, Eat Right Station and BHOG (Blissful Hygienic Offering to God) for Places of Worship that are targeted to clusters of vendors. The Hygiene Rating scheme for Restaurants and Catering Establishments, Sweet and Meat Shops has been put in place for individual food service establishments.

FSSAI is implementing a Central Sector Scheme for "Strengthening of Food Testing Ecosystem in the Country with a total outlay of Rs. 481.95 Cr that includes Rs 300 Cr for strengthening the network of laboratories across the country as well as provision of Mobile Food Testing Labs and other related equipments. Under this scheme, 39 State Food Testing labs of 29 States/UTs and 10 referral labs have been taken up for upgradation with high end equipments to enable them testing of safety parameters viz. heavy metals, pesticides and antibiotics. Till date, 60 Mobile Food labs have been provided to 32 States/UTs for testing, training and awareness generation even in remote areas. During COVID-19 pandemic, a total of 179 online training programs have been conducted with ~ 37000 participants.

FSSAI is in process of strengthening its import clearance system by transforming the entire ecosystem to ensure efficient & effective import control, post clearance surveillance, robust monitoring infrastructure and simultaneously reducing the transaction time, cost & physical interface with importers. FSSAI is working to reduce the consignment clearance time at the port to facilitate the import trade as well as building capacities of customs officials and importers to ensure seamless import clearances. In the near future, new import offices at several locations like Kandla, Vishakhapatnam, Hyderabad, Krishnapatnam, Ahmedabad etc. will be started to facilitate the import trade.

**What are the most important challenges due to a prolonged Covid 19 epidemic and the solutions you envisage?**

In order to address concerns regarding the safety of food, FSSAI had constituted a committee of experts and clarified that there is no conclusive evidence for the food borne transmission of Corona virus and hence, dispelled myths regarding any food borne transmission. However, the CoVID-19 is posing a bigger challenge for the food supply chains worldwide due to a higher risk involved in human to human transmission for food handlers,

workers, suppliers and distributors across the value chain. FSSAI is consistently making efforts to ensure un-interrupted food services/supply, facilitate food businesses, and addressing food safety concerns.

FSSAI has ensured that National Food Laboratories at NCR and Kolkata remain functional for uninterrupted import of food. e-Inspections for ensuring food safety during the lockdown period and extensive use of digital technology has ensured FSSAI delivers services even in the lockdown. Various compliance requirements such as renewals of license/registration and returns have been deferred in view of the constraints faced by FBOs.

To train food businesses, FSSAI has initiated through its flagship FoSTaC program, an online training module for food handlers on the essentials of food safety and hygiene practices during COVID-19. Till date, ~62,000 people have been trained under this program. Further, a guidance note titled “Food Hygiene and Safety Guidelines for Food Businesses during Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic” has been released. This document covers best practices/ guidelines to be followed by food handlers to maintain high standards of personal hygiene, safe food practices, implementation of GHP and GMP practices as per Schedule 4 of FSS Act as well as ensuring necessary protocols of social distancing. An e-handbook on “Eat Right during COVID-19” for citizens has also been released which highlights safe food practices to be followed and simple tips on health and nutrition.

FSSAI is also using various communication tools to disseminate necessary information regarding COVID-19 in the interest of public. Extensive outreach through social media handles of FSSAI incorporating key messages of food safety, personal hygiene practices, healthy eating habits, social distancing and other valuable tips for citizens ensures regular engagement with citizens. The Food Authority has collaborated with MyGov platform to disseminate key messages in the form of small videos with endorsement from various experts in the field of food safety and nutrition including doctors, nutritionists, dieticians, chefs as well as Sports personnel. A COVID-19 specific page on the FSSAI website is created that incorporates various communication collaterals, guidance notes and press releases along with important notifications, directions and orders released by FSSAI.

**Could you please elaborate some of the key initiatives and achievements of FSSAI?**

The Eat Right India movement has been launched by FSSAI to protect the health of the people and the planet by transforming the food ecosystem of the country. It is based on three key themes- Eat Safe, Eat Healthy, and Eat Sustainable. It is inspired by the focus on preventive and promotive healthcare in the National Health Policy 2017 and flagship programmes like Ayushman Bharat and POSHAN Abhiyaan. It follows the Mahatma’s footsteps in mobilizing the nation as a people’s movement. It encompasses a bouquet of initiatives that targets food businesses and consumers to make the right food choices.

Various initiatives such as Eat Right Campus for people at workplaces, hospitals and higher education institutions; Eat Right School for school children and the Eat Right Toolkit to reach people at the grass-roots level have been launched. Various IEC and awareness activities are launched such as “Aaj Se Thoda Kam” to reduce salt, fat and sugar in the diet as well as promotion of safe food habits. To empower consumers to check food adulteration, the DART Book, The Food Safety Magic Box and a mobile food testing van called Food Safety on Wheels have been created. Food fortification is also being pro-moted on a large scale to address micronutrient deficiencies. To encourage and support sustainable food production and consumption, FSSAI is spearheading initiatives such as Jaivik Bharat to identify authentic organic food, Save Food, Share Food to reduce food waste and promote food donation, Safe and Sustainable Packaging in F&B Sector to reduce the use of plastics and Repurpose Used

Cooking Oil (RUCO) for safe & healthy use of cooking oil and repurposing used oil to make biodiesel.

FSSAI has recently launched an initiative of Food Safety Mitra to help FBOs with any queries related to licensing and registration of their businesses, hygiene rating audits and certification as well as training requirements. These professionally trained and certified Mitras by FSSAI shall assist FBO in their compliances on online portals of FSSAI. Since its launch last year, a very encouraging response has been received from the participants and as on date, more than 9142 participants have enrolled under the scheme.

FSSAI has worked on new testing methods for detecting adulteration in Honey and recently introduced that as part of the compliable standards. The two parameters introduced in the honey standards help determine the adulteration of honey with any other sugar syrups, especially rice syrups. With this, ensuring quality of honey, apart from enforcement, is made more robust.

The Food Authority is planning to bring out a comprehensive regulatory document called "Food-'O'-copoeia", much like the Indian Pharma-Copoeia. The Food-'O'-copoeia would be a collection of food category-wise monographs that would be a single point reference for all applicable standards for a specific product category; and, will be specifying complete standards, labelling and claim requirements for that product category, specific packaging requirements, any other regulatory provisions that need to be met. This would also provide the list of methods that a laboratory has to follow while analysing the samples of the specific food/food product category. This would contain a total of 16 product category specific monographs and 1 monograph which would contain all the general requirements to be met by all the food product categories.

FSSAI is working on a regulation (which would be voluntary to begin with) specific to menu labelling that would mainly be covering food service establishments and/or FBOs. This regulation would empower the consumers with information on food they eat as food service establishments would declare quality (type of preparation, composition, nutritional including any allergens and energy) and quantity (amount, number, size etc) of the products per serving.

FSSAI has made quick progress towards the use of advanced technologies for food testing since the year 2019. Several new rapid food testing devices/kits for detection of food-borne pathogens and toxins have been introduced. These devices ensure "faster, better, cheaper" real-time testing of food. FSSAI has so far, has approved 30 rapid food testing kits/devices under these regulations. There is a need to popularize these Rapid Tool kits to ensure they are widely used.

#### **Could you please share some details on the Food Safety Compliance System?**

FSSAI has recently launched its cloud based, upgraded new food safety compliance online platform called Food Safety Compliance System (FoSCoS, URL – <https://foscoss.fssai.gov.in>). It will replace the existing FLRS (URL – <https://foodlicensing.fssai.gov.in>). FoSCoS is conceptualized to provide one point stop for all engagement of an FBO with the department for any regulatory compliance transaction. FoSCoS has been integrated with FoSCoRIS mobile app and will soon integrate with present IT platforms of FSSAI such as INFOLNet, FoSTaC, FICS, FPVIS etc. Audit management system and other activities/ modules will be enabled in phased manner in future. It has been launched and rolled out in 9 States/UTs viz. Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Goa, Delhi, Odisha, Manipur, Chandigarh, Ladakh and Puducherry w.e.f 1st June 2020 and will be rolled out in the entire country in a gradual manner.

#### **Your message for the Food Industry in the wake of current crises?**

FSSAI, in the lockdown period, has ensured that it is available, in action and operational. It innovated to attend to challenges and dedicated itself to its motto “Inspiring Trust, Assuring Safe and Nutritious Food”. The Food Authority is consistently making efforts to ensure uninterrupted food services/supply as well as facilitate food businesses during the lockdown when the supply chains are adversely affected. On behalf of FSSAI, I acknowledge the contribution of silent workers in essential services, of which the major segment is that of our food businesses. My thanks and appreciation to the efforts of food industry, especially to their foot soldiers who are procuring, transporting, manufacturing, delivering and distributing the food, amidst difficult operating conditions.

As we progress forward, I expect the food industry to continue adopting necessary protocols for food safety, hygiene and sanitation practices at their premises while manufacturing food. I also expect businesses to nominate their staff and officers for the COVID-19 training as part of our FoSTaC program. The training content is based on the guidelines issued by FSSAI. Today, there is a need for businesses to come together and scale-up the COVID trainings with inclusion of their suppliers, distributors and retailers. Not only should they drive these capacity building efforts, but also help them by organizing such trainings covering their supply chains.

Last, but not the least, I sincerely expect food businesses to augment and support government’s efforts in these tough times – starting with its workforce and their families, to the people near their areas of operation, to areas which are difficult within the Government reach, as part of their corporate social responsibility efforts.