

## FSSAI considering 1% as labelling requirement for genetically modified food items

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The apex food regulator framing guidelines for labelling of genetically modified (GM) food items for manufacture, sale and distribution in India is considering a threshold value of 1% as labelling requirement. (Representative Image//HT File Photo)

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GM food items are those produced from genetically modified organisms or ingredients derived from them. Threshold level for labelling refers to the maximum permissible level of unintentional and technically unavoidable GM content in food that does not call for labelling.

While 5% was initially being considered for declaring the content on the lines of countries such as Japan, Canada, Thailand and Indonesia, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India is, in a recent development, considering making it 1%, according to sources familiar with the matter. The European Union prescribes a threshold of 0.9%.

“Ideally, it should be 1% but since it is not easy — and very expensive — to quantify a smaller value, there was a suggestion to make it 5%, at least to begin with. However, after a lot of brainstorming, it was decided that 1% should be proposed, and the labs can get equipped for testing gradually,” said a source requesting anonymity.

In July, the food regulator had come under severe criticism from the environmental watchdog, Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), after it detected the presence of GM

content in nearly three in 10 (32%) packaged food samples that were randomly tested. The products found to be GM-positive included infant food, edible oil and packaged snacks. In response, FSSAI released a statement saying it had started work on framing regulations that would lay down procedures for safety assessment and approval of food items. The draft regulations will, after formal approval from FSSAI's scientific panel, scientific committee and the authority, be notified in the Gazette to elicit comments of various stakeholders. Later, the regulations will be finalised with the approval of the government.