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FSSAI guidelines on labeling packaged food products face speed bumps

Companies are now proposing a two-color labelling, instead of the proposed tricolour method

Arnab Dutta | New Delhi June 27, 2019



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The upcoming draft norms from the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), proposing a tricolour labelling, is facing several speed bumps that may delay the process. From outright opposition against the proposal for simplifying health quotient of food and beverages through colour coding to suggestions for technical alterations, the draft guidelines are facing a bunch of challenges.

While both regional players and large multinational corporations (MNCs) have suggested amendments to the proposed norms, it is the wide gap between their demands that has further vitiated the process. The regional players are outrightly opposed to the idea, while MNCs are looking for procedural changes that, they say, will align the labelling criteria with global practices.

“Several main issues raised by the industry association, particularly with front-of-the-pack labelling, would also be considered at the time of finalisation of these regulations (after consideration of comments/concerns, if any),” the [FSSAI](#) said in an emailed statement.

Since the [FSSAI](#) began discussion with industry bodies, the proposed norms were under close scrutiny by manufacturers. The draft norms suggest marking food and drinks with red, yellow, and green, based on whether they contain high levels of sugar, salt, and fat.

While, the proposal was under consideration for at least two years, confusion arose when many local players cited the ‘unsuitability’ of the norms with ‘Indian conditions’. According

to them, labelling packaged goods, according to Codex Alimentarius norms — the global standards for food safety — will not be suitable for the Indian palate.

MNCs, on the other hand, are asking for a revised declaration method to be included in the norms that would also indicate low levels of any of the unhealthy ingredients used. “If a product is high on sugar but low on fat and salt, the labelling should also indicate the lower levels of the two ingredients with green colour, along with red for sugar, for example,” said an executive from a leading manufacturer.

Venkatesh Kini, erstwhile president of Coca-Cola India, had told *Business Standard* earlier that the beverages major was, in fact, keen on the tricolor labelling norm as it would give it a competitive edge over unorganised players in the market.

Companies like Nestlé, Coca-Cola, and PepsiCo have been working towards reducing the content of sugar, salt, and fat in their products for past three years. Nestlé has pledged to cut down added sugar by 6 per cent, salt by 10 per cent, and fat by 2.5 per cent by 2020, from the 2017 levels. Hindustan Unilever is reducing the use of sodium salts in 75 per cent of its offerings to the level of 5 grams per day.

A Nestlé India spokesperson said, “We place high priority on providing consumers with nutritional information on our [food labels](#) to help them make informed dietary choices. We voluntarily provide monochrome guideline daily amount on our food labels, which provide guidance of daily energy intake and key defined nutrients on the front of pack to enable consumers to evaluate a product’s composition in their daily diet”.

To overcome the deadlock, companies are now proposing a two-color labelling, instead of the proposed tricolour method, to begin with. Instead of labelling products with red, yellow or green, MNCs have suggested a white (for safe) or black (for unsafe) colouring.