

FSSAI planning to have presence in more entry points, especially ports

Saturday, 22 December, 2018, 08 : 00 AM [IST]

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With matter related to food safety taking centre stage in the country, and people getting more and more aware about the subject, the role of FSSAI and its presence is gaining importance. In fact, in recent times, the apex food regulator has made its intention clear to increase its presence particularly at the ports from where the food is imported into the country.

FSSAI operates through five regional offices in the country in Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Mumbai and Guwahati. Further it has import offices at six locations across the country that cover 20 ports of entry.

However there are 396 such entry points across the country where the FSSAI has allowed Customs officials to handle the food.

CEO FSSAI Pawan Agarwal says that the apex food regulator is planning to have its presence in more points of entry, which is currently under Customs. He informed, "We are reviewing our placements across the ports in the country and we wish to place more of our men on some of these ports currently managed by the Customs."

Not only this, FSSAI may consider making specific ports exclusive for the purpose of entry of food. This, however, the CEO says would only be possible if there was unanimity among the stakeholders.

"We're open to this idea that selective ports should be reserved exclusively for food imports. However, the matter is subjected to acceptance by all the stakeholders and it shouldn't be a cause of inconvenience for anybody," he said.

Sanctioning of 500 posts

Further, recently the FSSAI has got its recruitment rules notified and sanctioning of 500 new posts, mostly technical which now has raised the total posts close to 900.

These, however, certainly are not enough for a huge country like India but are seen as a

breakthrough and FSSAI is hopeful that in future more human resources would be added to its fold.

Experts feel that India is a large country with massive and unorganised food and hospitality sectors. The demand for manpower in FSSAI offices across all the states is justified on the grounds of ensuring public safety mainly.

But comparing India with other countries in terms of manpower and financial resources, India is well below international benchmarks, both in overall and per capita terms. India has a population base of over 1,252 million compared to base of approximately 324 million, 36 million, 64 million and 4.75 million vis-à-vis other major countries like USA, Canada, the United Kingdom and Ireland respectively.

The annual budget allocated to Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (principal organisation for administering Food Standards) is merely \$8.2 million approximately which is quite low compared to annual budget of \$1.5 billion, \$650 million, \$106 million and \$16.7 million of counterpart organisations in USA, Canada, the UK and Ireland respectively.