

## Reports from govt-recg labs accepted for hygiene ratings to FBOs: FSSAI

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The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has written to the state Food Safety Commissioners and Regional Directors that food and water testing reports from government recognised laboratories for the purpose of hygiene ratings, are accepted.

The apex food regulator in this regard, issued an order saying that in absence of a NABL-accredited (National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories) laboratory, the certification from a state government recognised lab can be considered for hygiene rating.

The order reads, "It has been decided that food and water testing reports from government recognised laboratories (other than FSSAI recognised laboratories) can be considered for the purpose of awarding hygiene rating certificates to the eligible food business."

Dr Shobhit Jain, Executive Director, Compliance Strategy, FSSAI, meanwhile, clarified that such acceptance was for the limited purpose of hygiene rating only.

The matter, which came before the FSSAI, was related to hygiene rating scheme guidance document that stipulates the requirement of food and water testing report from an NABL accredited laboratory for licensed food businesses applying for hygiene rating certification.

Hygiene Rating Scheme is a certification system for the food service and retail establishments providing food directly to the consumers. The food businesses are rated based on food hygiene and safety conditions observed at the time of audit/inspection. The hygiene rating certificate will be displayed prominently in the food service area to create demand of high levels of food hygiene standards.

According to the Guidance Note issued by the FSSAI, the 'rating' reflects the standards of food hygiene found on the date of inspection by the local authority or recognised audit agency.

The guidance document represents the key components to implement the Hygiene Rating Scheme in India. The document is divided into 7 chapters and annexures which introduce the scheme and key requirements to implement it.

It also discusses in detail the process of scoring through self-assessment of compliance with food hygiene and safety procedures and structural requirements by FBOs followed by verification by various agencies or professionals.

Concept of re-verification of hygiene ratings was also introduced for helping FBOs in improving food hygiene and safety and add their bit to promote healthy eating and sustainability.