

## Odisha plans to bolster food testing capacity, manpower

**Bhubaneswar:** The State Food Safety Department which had been struggling with the shortage of staff and food testing labs has now planned a facelift, aiming to bolster the food safety capacity of the state.

The department officials told this reporter that it has started working on improving the staff strength and also increase the penetration of food testing labs in the days to come.

“We are going to recruit 35 more Food Safety Officers (FSOs) in the days to come. We plan to have adequate FSOs to boost food safety in the state. Now with more FSOs we can start having such officers at sub division levels,” Dr Pradip Mohapatra, Director, Food Safety Department said.

Currently, not all districts have a full time FSO. Some FSOs have been given additional charges for districts like Koraput and Kalahandi. The department has now also planned to get four more food testing labs in the state to boost the food testing capability of the state.

“Right now we are taking aid of one government food testing lab and one private lab for testing of food for adulteration. Now, we have planned to set up four new food testing labs at Mayurbhanj, Jajpur, Sundargarh and Keonjhar,” Mohapatra said.

The state government has now also allowed mining development funds in mining areas to boost food safety exercise. The department, meanwhile, plans to start adding new testing equipment to these labs to bolster its virtues of tracing other adulterants that could not be tested earlier.

The new machines are likely to pave the way for testing of heavy metals, antibiotics, pesticides and virus in the food and beverage samples. The food safety director said as per the Food Safety Standards Act 2006, the people are also entitled to get their food samples tested for adulteration or contamination on a payment basis. He said that people had used the services for testing of water but now more labs can open fresh avenues.

The department has also been working to bring special books on food safety in Odia language which could be distributed at schools to make the students aware of food adulteration and other related details of the same.

A Food Safety Officer requesting anonymity said they have also increased the raids with the help of police. It is said that 25 raids in Cuttack and six raids in Bhubaneswar have been executed in the last six months alone.