

FSSAI constitutes expert panel to look into draft labelling regulations

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FSSAI has announced the formation of an expert panel to look into the draft Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018, which were announced by the country's apex food regulator in April 2018.

The regulations currently are at the stage of consideration by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Pawan Kumar Agarwal, chief executive officer, FSSAI, said that labels formed an important part of the packaging and are required for people to make aware choices about food, while addressing a stakeholders' consultation meet organised by CUTS International in participation with FSSAI.

Stating that India was still at a comfortable stage where it could control the menace of unhealthy eating by working on public policy, unlike countries like the United States, where a huge amount of money is spent just on tackling diseases like obesity in public health, Agarwal highlighted the fact that India was the only developing country where industry representatives have come forward and taken voluntary pledges to work for healthy and safe food for all.

"To push the industry to meet their voluntary commitments, FSSAI will be coming up with a monitoring system. The details of this will be disclosed later," he added.

George Cheriyan, director, CUTS International, opined on how the front-of-package label (FoPL) designs, which are clear and impactful, play an important role in increasing awareness and shifting food-eating norms.

"Mandatory FoPLs are considered by governments around the globe as an effective and evidence-based way to improve diets. At least 16 FoPL systems are operating in 23 countries, with another 14 schemes proposed," he added.

Cheriyan also stressed how India can learn from best practices from Nordic countries with Keyhole Labels, Iran with Apple Labels and countries like Denmark, Chile, Norway, Singapore, South Africa and Ecuador, which are leading the fight against trans-fats, foods with a high fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) content and unhealthy food consumption.

The panellists who participated in the consultation put forward various recommendations on how the final regulations shall look like, keeping in mind the interests of the consumers. Their common demand was that simple, interpretive and understandable FoPLs, taking into consideration the consumer behaviour, literacy level, regional diversity and buying

patterns, be put on food products.

FSSAI was represented in the consultation by Rajeev Kumar, director, non-communicable diseases (NCDs), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Government of India; Anil Kumar, advisor, standards, and N Bhaskar, advisor, quality assurance.

Other panellists included Satish Kulkarni, former head, National Dairy Institute, Bengaluru; Dr Nikhil Tandon, head, department of endocrinology, All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS); G M Subha Rao, scientist E and deputy director, National Institute of Nutrition (Indian Council of Medical Research) [NIN (ICMR)], MoHFW; Kanchan Zutshi, secretary, Federation of Biscuit Manufacturers of India, Amit Khurana, Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), and Raj Kapoor, managing director, Assocom Institute of Bakery Technology and Management (AIBTM).