

## **With the Eat Right India movement, we seek to secure a healthy future**

Transforming our food system poses one of the greatest leadership challenges and opportunities of our time

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Food systems around the world are delivering unhealthy diets, raising the risk of death and disease, malnutrition, and rising obesity. Building a world where safe and nutritious food is available for everyone and everywhere requires transformation of the food systems(Getty Images/iStockphoto)

We are what we eat, and we eat what we get. But we do not get what we need. We get what our food system provides.

Food systems around the world are delivering unhealthy diets, raising the risk of death and disease, malnutrition, and rising obesity. Building a world where safe and nutritious food is available for everyone and everywhere requires transformation of the food systems.

Food systems lie at the interface of agriculture and rural economy, industry and commerce, public health and environment. Transforming them requires cooperation, partnerships and alliances, with public-private collaborations cutting across traditional silos. This poses one of the greatest leadership challenges and opportunities of our generation.

Food systems are critical to many of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Recognising this, the UN will host a Food Systems Summit in 2021 as part of the Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs.

At the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI ), we are leading a movement called Eat Right India, to provide safe and wholesome food to people everywhere. This requires a mix of regulatory, capacity building, collaborative and empowerment tools. By combining supportive actions to its primary regulatory mandate, we are taking a “food systems approach” to address these issues in a holistic manner. FSSAI was applauded for it by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Mann Ki Baat radio address in December last year.

The Eat Right India movement is a collective effort based on three pillars: Safety (if it’s not safe, it’s not food); Health (food should not only serve the palate but the body and mind); and Sustainability (food has to be good both for people and the planet).

There are five concrete actions under each pillar. Under safety, the focus is on ensuring personal and surrounding hygiene, maintaining hygienic and sanitary practices through the food supply chain, combating adulteration, reducing toxins and contaminants in food, and controlling food hazards in processing and manufacturing processes.

Under the healthy diet pillar, we promote dietary diversity and balanced diets, eating less and timely, eliminating toxic industrial trans fats from food, reducing consumption of salt, sugar and saturated fats, and promoting large-scale fortification of staples to address micronutrient deficiencies.

The sustainable diet actions promote local and seasonal foods, preventing food loss and food waste, conserving water in food value chains, reducing use of chemicals in food production and preservation, and the use of safer and sustainable packaging.

These actions aim to achieve three things: inspire public trust in food available to people in the market or through government programmes, through improved safety and quality of food; second, to build a strong culture of self-compliance in all food businesses across the supply chain, with better ease of doing business; and finally, to promote safe, healthy and sustainable diets through both demand and supply side interventions, to protect the health of the people and the planet.

There is action on the ground as well. This includes certification of clean street food hubs, fruit and vegetable markets, hygiene rating of halwai shops, meat shops, safety of food served in religious places, and so on. Eat Right India’s home, school and campus initiatives

are settings-based approaches to providing the right food environments so that people get what they need.

Mass campaigns with celebrity influencers like Virat Kohli, Raj Kumar Rao, Juhi Chawla and Sakshi Tanwar are triggering behavioural changes for informed food choices. A rich repository of content and messaging (print, digital audio and video) has been created and disseminated. A nation-wide scaling up of the Eat Right India movement is now planned.

The Eat Right India targets people across ages, gender, regions, and socioeconomic groups. It brings together food-related mandates of the agriculture, health, industry and environment ministries, with a “whole of government” approach. As a platform for collective action of stakeholders — consumers, food businesses, community organisations, experts and professionals, and the government — it is in fact a “whole of society” approach. It connects with other flagship programs — Ayushman Bharat, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Poshan Abhiyaan, Fit India movement — to institutionalise preventive health care as a way of life.

The Eat Right India movement has forged partnerships with food and nutrition professionals: dietitians, nutritionists, medical doctors, chefs, food scientists, technologists and analysts. They support outreach in collaboration with state food authorities.

FSSAI is gradually transitioning from enforcer to enabler and reformer. This integrative approach is unique for a developing economy like India, with its challenges in size, complexity, food diversity and the large unorganised sector. Eat Right India will be a good template for collective attention in the UN’s 2021 Food System Summit.