

Global Food Regulators Summit 2023 shows new direction for transforming global food regulatory landscape

Wednesday, 26 July, 2023, 08 : 00 AM [IST]

The first-ever Global Food Regulators Summit (GFRS) 2023, that concluded on Friday, July 21, 2023, has paved the way for a more robust food safety and regulatory ecosystem. This ground-breaking initiative has garnered global acclaim for its potential to transform and strengthen the world's food safety systems. The discussion and outcomes of the sessions have laid a strong foundation for collective action in tackling regulatory challenges and ensuring the well-being of the consumers worldwide.

The first technical session of the summit focused on food regulatory systems in different countries, key strategies adopted by food regulators to mitigate various risks associated with foods, challenges faced by the regulators globally and exchange of perspectives on strengthening food safety systems across the food value chain through a cohesive approach.

Dr V K Paul, member, NITI Aayog, India delivered the special address during the opening session. He deliberated on the importance of national regulatory framework for effective food safety control system. He said, "Harmonised global regulator regimes can play a crucial role in setting and enforcing standards & regulations to protect consumer health, promote fair trade practices and maintain public trust in the global food control system."

Raj Rajasekhar, vice chairperson, Codex Alimentarius Commission emphasised on the initiatives taken by Codex in addressing emerging challenges in the area of food safety. Appreciating FSSAI's efforts for organising the maiden Global regulators summit. He said, "This platform allows cross fertilisation of ideas from experts belonging to different countries and can help in developing a Global model for food safety."

Rajesh Kumar Singh (IAS), secretary, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry addressed the participants and emphasised on the need for providing an enabling environment for food industry having simpler regulations and decriminalisation of minor offences, without compromising on the food safety.

Professor Susan Jebb, chair, Food Standards Agency, UK and Isabelle Laberge, senior director and chief food safety officer, Canada, shared their insights on innovations in standards setting and quality assurance and role of modern food regulations in creating a balance between innovations and food safety.

Rachel Broking, minister for food safety, New Zealand, addressed the participants virtually, laying a greater emphasis on food safety across the globe.

S. Gopalakrishnan, special secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare presented the regulatory system being followed by FSSAI which set a platform for the panel discussions.

The opening session was followed by a panel discussion on 'Global Regulatory Framework', with panellists from eight different countries including Brazil, Bhutan, Chile, Ethiopia, Mauritius, Mozambique, US and New Zealand. During this session, moderated by Sanjeev Chopra, secretary, Department of Food and Public Distribution shared their experiences and successful initiatives from different countries, inspiring others to adopt similar approaches..

The discussions revolved around the importance of collaboration and cooperation among global food regulators to maximize regulatory effectiveness and efficiency. Notably, the emphasis on harmonising regulatory standards was highlighted as a key measure to ensure consumer safety and facilitate international trade. The best practices and success stories were shared by different countries which have the potential to be adopted by other countries in strengthening their food regulatory system.

The discussions also centred around exploring possible opportunities for collaboration and co-operation among global food regulators for harmonizing regulatory standards and to enhance regulatory effectiveness and efficiency, protect consumer health and facilitate international trade. The Panel also suggested strategies for collaboration among multiple agencies/stakeholders to develop robust national food control system with strong emphasis on safety parameters. The deliberations also focused on involvement of all the stakeholders while developing any new or amending any existing food regulation.

The second technical session, 'Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR): Challenges and Solutions,' addressed the complexities surrounding antimicrobial resistance. Discussions focused on the potential solutions, best practices for countering AMR globally, collaborative efforts, effective policies and the establishment of a global task force to address AMR issues. While setting the context, Lav Agarwal, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare highlighted on the concerns of AMR, emphasising on the role of National Action Plan (NAP) on AMR. He also said that NAP must be taken up by all countries along with the One Health approach and that collaboration is the key to tackle the inter-sectorial issue of AMR.

Dr Sridhar Dharamapuri, senior food safety and nutrition officer, FAO Regional Office, Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok and Dr Emmanuel Kabali, AMR project coordination and technical support consultant/global project coordinator, FAO, Rome also addressed the gathering emphasising on the importance of food security and alternatives to antibiotics using emerging technologies.

The panel discussion on AMR aimed to enhance knowledge through stakeholder consultation and experiences shared by invited countries and organisations. The discussions enabled the formulation of possible policy recommendations to better contain AMR, leveraging insights gained from India's National Action Plan (NAP) on AMR and the forthcoming NAP-AMR 2. Encouraging other countries to develop their NAPs became a key focus of discussions to tackle AMR comprehensively.

The session also highlighted on the importance of increased networking, collaboration and partnerships among regulators and organizations, such as Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Health Organization (WHO) and World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) to collectively combat AMR. As an essential aspect of the discussion, exploring alternatives to antibiotics through emerging technologies like nanotechnology and other innovative approaches was emphasised.

The concluding day of the GFRS 2023 began with a plenary session address by Dr Chris Kebbel, chief food safety officer, New Zealand Food Safety. Dr Kebbel emphasised on food safety as an important element in building consumer trust and confidence. He also said that the important aspects for robust standard setting include an articulated operational regulation management, well documented food safety management and effective quality control. He also underscored that safe and nutritious food should be accessible to everyone, no matter where they live.

While setting the context, Anita Praveen, secretary, Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI), mentioned that anything and everything which comes in contact with food should be safe. She said, “The important to frame science based standards but also mentioned that the periodic review of standards is equally important. It is strong enforcement and capacity building programme that helps in building a robust food safety ecosystem.”