



FSSAI's new tool to make states compete based on food safety performance

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The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) will soon initiate a programme for setting up a Food Safety Index in the country. Under the programme, each state would be judged on various parameters vis-à-vis the food safety ecosystem, from enforcement to consumer awareness.

The country's apex food regulator is working on the contours of the programme, which is aimed at benchmarking the performance of the state food safety departments and expected to be launched in the next six to eight weeks.

Explaining the programme in an exclusive chat to F&B News, Pawan Kumar Agarwal, chief executive officer, FSSAI, said, "This is being done to make the states feel the need to recognise the food safety challenges and gear themselves up for any situation."

He said, "As we all know, the issues of food safety and nutrition are getting priority and taking centrestage. In some states, the work has been commendable, while some states are lagging behind."

"So in terms of the Food Safety Index, we expect to capture the performance of the state food safety departments in terms of manpower, enforcement activities, consumer focus, etc.," Agarwal said.

He added, "It was for the benchmarking of the states. Within a matter of 6-8

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weeks, we expect the details of the programme to be out.”

“This is to capture what the states are doing in terms of food safety. We will ask the states to provide information about their work to analyse where they stand in terms of the food safety ecosystem, what are the gaps, what is it that they do well, what is lacking and what innovative ideas the state authority is coming up with to further up the food safety mechanism,” Agarwal added.

This would also include the basic information about the state machinery like infrastructure facilities states have or would add, including laboratories and staff. And FSSAI would also constitute a panel at its headquarters to guide the states in achieving the goals of the food safety index.

In response to the development, Dr H G Koshia, commissioner, Food and Drug Control Administration (FDCA), Gujarat, said, “If the state-wise benchmark parameter is implemented, it will act as a motivational move.”

“All the state food and drug administrations (FDAs) and food safety officers (FSOs) will work hard to maintain food safety in their regions. However, this move will enhance their performance, as everyone will work better if their hard work is appreciated,” he added.