



## Packaged food firms will soon have to disclose GM content: FSSAI

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Pages: 2

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is working on the final guidelines on the labelling of GM foods



**New Delhi:** Soon, packaged food companies will have to disclose details of genetically modified (GM) ingredients used in processed food on the labels. The country's food regulator, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), is working on the final guidelines on the labelling of GM foods, its chief executive officer Pawan Kumar Agarwal said.

“Genetically modified items are being used in a lot of processed foods. Consumers have the right to know which products may have GM items. The scientific panel has already started work on this, and we’ll soon finalise the labeling norms,” said Agarwal.

Earlier this month, officials of FSSAI and members of the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), which regulates GM foods in India, had a meeting on the issue. FSSAI has the responsibility of regulating GM products used in processed food but those GM products have to be approved by GEAC, according to the Food safety and Standards Act, 2006.

At present, companies are not required to declare presence of GM ingredients in a food item in India, and a lot of imported processed foods have GM items. GEAC

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had, in April, expressed concern on the absence of regulations on processed GM foods, *Mint* reported on 9 May.

Last month, GEAC had approved commercial cultivation of GM mustard in India which the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change will have to clear. To date, India allows commercial production of GM crop Bt cotton only. While Bt brinjal has the approval, the government did not introduce this due to widespread protests against the technology.

Till recently, India did not allow import of GM foods. In a written reply to the Lok Sabha last July, Nirmala Sitharaman, minister of state, ministry of commerce and industry, had said that the customs can clear GM food products after necessary approval by FSSAI, and the food regulator had not cleared import of any GM food. According to norms, import of GM foods requires prior approval from the GEAC.

In an unrelated development, FSSAI allowed import of 72 special food items meant for children with 'Inborn errors of Metabolism' last week. These food items, which can only be consumed under the supervision of healthcare professionals, are manufactured by only a handful of companies worldwide. The makers of these products include the local arm of US-based baby food maker Mead Johnson Nutrition Company, French Dairy firm Danone SA-owned Nutricia International Pvt. Ltd, American healthcare firm Abbott Healthcare Pvt. Ltd and Swiss packaged food company Nestle SA's local entity Nestle India Ltd. FSSAI has allowed import of these products for two years, or till it comes out with standards for them.