



Government focusing on setting up mini food processing units pan-India

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The government of India is focusing on creating mini food processing units across India. This was stated by Sadhvi Niranjana Jyoti, minister of state for food processing industries, who inaugurated the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) Fast-moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) Summit 2017 in New Delhi recently.

She added, "There is a need to set up mini food processing units in large numbers, as that would encourage farmers to produce high-quality farm output." The minister also urged the food processing industry to buy raw material directly from farmers is the only means to double their incomes. Moreover, it would also encourage them to come up with quality produce.

"If the industry directly buys the farmers' produce from them, it will get top-quality raw material for processing purposes at a cheaper rate, which will also help the farmers in realising their actual cost," Jyoti said, adding, "When the farmers get to know that their produce is going to be sold in such (food processing sector) markets, they will automatically work upon producing high-quality farm output."

The minister also assured the industry that she would take up all the concerns and demands of the food processing sector pertaining to the Goods and Services Tax (GST) to the highest level. She also appreciated the fact that the youth is coming

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forward in large numbers from across India to participate in the food processing industry.

Jyoti, however, lamented that post-independence, the private food processing industry worked extremely well on its own, but there was little support extended by the government until 2014. "It is the responsibility of the government to encourage the industries," she added.

In his address at the Summit, Pawan Kumar Agarwal, chief executive officer, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), said, "Creating an ecosystem for safe foods rests on three pillars, viz. responsible citizen, food businesses and the regulator."

"We have to go a long way in basically figuring out, educating our consumers and citizens as to what food is safe and how to have it. These are issues we are working on with a lot of stakeholders to create demand for safe food," he added.

Agarwal explained that the idea of the food regulator was to curb the tendency of consuming undesirable food items, enable the industry to produce safe and wholesome food, which is also expected of them, and, finally, ensure constant improvement in food standards.

"While our effort has been to provide a light-touch regulation in the food sector, we have worked relentlessly over the past three years to provide standards that are globally benchmarked, and I am happy to share with you that most of the food standards have either been released or are in the final stages of being released," he added.

Talking about the compliance of food standards, Agarwal said, "Ensuring compliance with these standards is an extremely weak area. We are aware of the problems in this space, and particularly because though the Food Safety and Standards

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Act, 2006, expects the uniform application of the food law across the country, this is really not happening.”

He added that going ahead, FSSAI would focus on compliance with the food safety laws in letter and spirit.

“The expectation from food businesses is also that engagement with the government and the regulator is not only confined to the pain points that food businesses have, but engagement is more of a 360-degree approach wherein they work with the government and the regulator to ensure that together, they create a more robust and safe ecosystem for the food sector in our country,” stated Agarwal.