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FSSAI asks for comments on need for BIS certification for sale of F&B

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The Food Safety Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has asked the stakeholders to submit their comments on whether such certifications are required and should be continued. The step followed the country's apex food regulator's decision to review the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) and Agmark certifications that are mandatory for sale of certain food/beverage products in India.

FSSAI issued a notice, stating, "Several food products are required to be sold with the mandatory certification from either BIS or Agmark, as per the relevant provisions in the Regulations notified under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.

"The authority is in the process of reviewing these provisions to take a view whether such provisions are serving any benefit to the industry and the consumers or not, and hence, are required to be continued or not," it added.

Apart from an explanation whether these provisions should continue or not, the notice, which was uploaded on the regulator's website on January 17, 2018, stated that the comments must include a justification for the same to enable the authority to take a view. It has stipulated that the stakeholders submit their comments within three weeks from the date on which the notice was uploaded on the regulator's website.

According to an FSSAI official, "This is a proposal we have put forward for the industry, in order to ease the current set of regulations. It will help the industry to get a clearer and better picture about the food safety regulations."

The notice has generated a mixed response in the industry. One industry representative stated that the certifications were vital, as they reflected the quality assurance. "The symbols for BIS and Agmark reflect quality assurance. And, therefore, it should remain," he said.

However, Amit Dhanuka, former president, All India Food Processors' Association (AIFPA) was of a contrasting view. He said, "Agmark and BIS are slightly primitive standards, and therefore, need to be withdrawn."

"If you talk about honey, there is hardly a company that uses Agmark certification. And I feel that there isn't a need to follow these certifications, as they restrict innovations in products. Moreover, these standards are very old," Dhanuka added.

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FSSAI also listed out the details of the products that are mandatorily required to have BIS and AGMARK certifications.

BIS items

The BIS products included infant milk food, infant formula, milk cereal-based weaning food, processed cereal-based weaning food, follow-up formula under Clause 4 of Sub-regulation 2.3.14 of the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restrictions on Sales) Regulations, 2011.

Under Clause 5 of Sub-regulation 2.3.14 of the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restrictions on Sales) Regulations, 2011, the list comprised condensed milk sweetened, condensed skimmed milk sweetened, milk powder, skimmed milk powder, partly-skimmed milk powder and partly-skimmed sweetened condensed milk.

Under Clause 17 of Sub-regulation 2.3.14 of the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restrictions on Sales) Regulations, 2011, the items included packaged drinking water, and under Clause 18 of Sub-regulation 2.3.14 of the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restriction on Sales) Regulations, 2011, the items included mineral water.

Agmark list

For Agmark, the products included blended edible vegetable oil [which is mandatorily required to be sold under the Agmark certification as per Sub-regulation 2.1.1.5 and Clause 11 of Sub-regulation 2.3.14 of the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restriction on Sales) Regulations, 2011] and fat spread [which is mandatorily required to be sold under Agmark certification mark as per Clause 3 of Sub-regulation 2.2.5 of the Food Safety and Standards (Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Regulations, 2011, and Sub-regulation 2.3.14 (13) of the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restrictions on Sales) Regulations, 2011].

Carbia callosa and honeydew are mandatorily required to be sold under the Agmark certification as per Sub-regulation 2.3.2 of the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restriction on Sales) Regulations, 2011.

Kangra tea is mandatorily required to be sold under the Agmark certification as per Sub-regulation 2.3.10 of the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restrictions on Sales) Regulations, 2011.

Til (sesame) oil obtained from white sesame seeds, grown in Tripura, Assam and West Bengal having different standards than those specified for til oil is mandatorily required to be sold under the Agmark certification as per Sub-regulation 2.3.9 of the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restrictions on Sales) Regulations, 2011.

Ghee having less Reichert value than that specified for the area where such ghee is sold is mandatorily required to be sold under the AGMARK certification as per Clause 1

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of Sub-regulation 2.3.8 of the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restrictions on Sales) Regulations, 2011.

And light black pepper is required to be sold in packages bearing the Agmark label as per Sub-regulation 2.4.5.9 of the Food Safety and Standards (Packaging and Labelling) Regulations, 2011.