

# THE TIMES OF INDIA

## How 12,000 food retailers were forced to register

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CHENNAI: In two months, the food safety department achieved what it couldn't in the past six years – it got more than 12,000 food businesses in the city to apply for registration and licences. All it took was 63 legal notices after half-a-dozen deadline extensions.

Of the total 32,002 food business operators in the city, around 92% are now either registered or licenced. This includes restaurants, street food stalls, fruits and vegetable shops, hostels, anganwadi centres, midday meal kitchens in schools, packaged water manufacturing units, Tasmac outlets, Ammacanteens and other retail outlets where edibles are cooked or sold.

The Food Safety and Standards (Licensing and Registration of Food Businesses) Regulations, 2011, mandates a licence for any food business with an annual turnover of more than Rs 12 lakh. Those with a lower turnover must register with the food safety department. After nine extensions, the last deadline set by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) for getting licences expired in February 2017.

Until last December, the process remained sluggish. Officials faced resistance from retailers who

## FSSAI IN NEWS

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comprise 25% of the food businesses in Chennai. “Many were reluctant as they source provisions from unlicensed manufacturers. This is where the maximum adulteration happens,” said an official. There was also opposition from a section of traders who felt the Act was too stringent. A vendor who fails to register or procure a licence could be forced to shut shop, pay a fine of up to Rs 5 lakh and imprisoned for up to six months.

But the prospect of a hefty penalty finally fuelled the licensing drive. In early February, state food safety commissioner P Amudha gave the go-ahead to issue legal notices to 63 establishments. “We gave them 15 days’ time to comply, failing which, we told them, a criminal case would be filed,” said designated food safety officer R Kathiravan. The number of applicants rose from 17,121 to nearly 29,400.

Consumer activists said another reason for the number of registrations going up could be the FSSAI’s draft of the amended version of the 2011 regulations. “The Centre has relaxed some of the norms related to hygiene and sanitary practices. They have also simplified the process of application,” said Somasundaram M of Consumer Association of India.