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New norms for labelling food planned Jacob

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All packaged food with at least 5% content from genetically engineered sources need to be labelled so. Moreover, foods that exceed norms of sugar and fat will need to carry 'red' and 'green' labels specifying the extent to which they do so, according to draft regulations by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).

This is the first time that the Centre has laid down guidelines for labelling genetically modified food. Officials say they are awaiting public comments. "This isn't the final draft. There will be one more version and that will be reviewed for 30 days," said Pawan Agarwal, CEO, FSSAI.

FSSAI IN NEWS

The government has been contemplating a system for labelling genetically modified foods for at least 2 years. Current laws, however, prohibit any GM food—unless cleared by the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee, a Union environment ministry body—from being sold in India. Through a 2007 notification, the environment ministry had exempted processed foods from this requirement; this has been stayed by the courts. There was also dispute between the FSSAI, a Union health ministry body, and the environment ministry on who checks if a particular food had a GE provenance. “The companies will check the GM content and we will be conduct further testing and checks,” said Agarwal.

The draft also defines safe levels of fat, sugar and salt in processed food. Food packs would have a designated space coloured RED in case the value of energy from total sugar was more than 10 per cent of the total energy (kcal) provided by the 100 g/100 ml of the product; the value of energy (kcal) from trans-fat is more than 1 per cent of the total energy (kcal) provided by the 100 g/100 ml of the product; and total fat or sodium content provided by the 100 g/100 ml of the product is more than certain specified threshold values.