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E-Paper

FSSAI asks packaged food labels to display clearly the GM ingredients

Every food packet should also mandatorily provide nutritional information about the product on the packet, as per one suggestion by FSSAI. In a first for India, food regulator, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), has proposed to all packaged food labels to state clearly on the packets if the food contains Genetically Modified (GM) ingredients, reportedTimes of India.

Every food packet should also mandatorily provide nutritional information about the product on the packet, as per one suggestion by FSSAI. Details such as calories, total fat, trans fat, sugar and salt should be written on the packet.

India has never had a provision to specify GM details on the packet; consumers would not know if the products they are consuming contain genetically engineered materials. Recently, there have been concerns about the health effects of genetically modified food, although nothing has been proved yet.



In a draft notice, FSSAI made it mandatory to make such food items have the labels 'Contains GMO/Ingredients derived from GMO', if there is 5 percent or more of these ingredients. Stakeholders will be consulted, after which implementation provisions will be floated out for the companies. The draft further proposes a 'red' colour code for high fat, sugar and salt

content on food packets, in case energy from sugar is more than 10 percent of the total energy provided by 100 gm/ml of the product.

Some stakeholders have criticized this move by the regulator saying that GM foods are anyway not sold in India. Sridhar Radhakrishnan, co-convener of the Coalition for a GM-Free India, said that this rule will, in fact, help the GM foods to enter India when it is currently illegal to sell them in the country.

Some, however, agree with the FSSAI and think that it is an important step. Chandra Bhushan, deputy director general of the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) said, "The step is crucial but we need a proper system to check it. We need advanced lab facilities to check whether the food stuffs contain GM ingredients or not."

He added that one thing to be worried about is that the FSSAI has adopted a 'reductionist' approach towards nutrition. "It allows a product to display nutrition based on one attribute even if the product is bad on all other attributes."