



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Food regulator to persuade firms to cut salt, sugar in products

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E-Paper

NEW DELHI: India's food safety regulator the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is launching a campaign to persuade firms to reduce the use of salt, sugar and eliminate trans-fat in their products. With its "Eat Right Movement" being launched on Tuesday, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India is looking to get the firms to make "voluntary commitments" to reduce the content of the ingredients said to be harmful to health.

The draft Food Safety and Standards (Labeling and Display) Regulations 2018 released in April made labelling of salt mandatory, introduced a special red label for high in fat, sugar or salt (HFSS) foods, introduced front of pack labelling among others. But according to officials, food businesses including India's leading FMCG companies were hesitant of such labelling regulations.

After discussions with industry, FSSAI now hopes voluntary commitments by them will pave way for a consensus and implementation of the labelling regulations. Pawan Kumar Agarwal, CEO, FSSAI said there is a need to manage "both the supply and demand side. So we are trying to create a movement where consumers demand healthier food. For now, businesses will make broad commitments and see how they can deliver. Their commitments will depend on the products. They will self-monitor compliance with commitment."

The concept of voluntary commitment, however, is not there in the draft labelling regulations. According to senior officials in FSSAI, food industry is not willing to accept a separate labelling for HFSS foods citing that there is no demand for low sugar-salt foods.

About 15 packaged food companies, 10-15 retail companies, 10 quick service restaurants, 8 to 10 edible oil companies will make voluntary commitments and be part of FSSAI's movement launch. According FSSAI, the eat right movement whose catch line is "aj se thoda kam" (reduce sugar and salt. start from today) led by actor Rajkumar Rao in TV and social media, has seven broad areas of action—to increase demand for healthier food, set standards in schools, restriction on marketing to children through a suitable regulation, higher taxation for unhealthy food through differential GST rates, appropriate menu labelling, redesign choices available at points of sale, food processing industry to formulate their food products by reducing unhealthy ingredients.

The GST rates are already higher for carbonated drinks but the Centre will assess whether such differential taxing can be enhanced for other unhealthy foods.

The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) had recently critiqued FSSAI's labelling regulation. One of the significant gaps that CSE pointed out is that the draft Regulation does not provide for labelling of added sugar and dietary fibers.