FSSAI asks food companies to voluntarily cut salt, sugar, fat in packaged products

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To promote safe and healthy food, regulator FSSAI today asked industry to voluntarily reduce salt, sugar and saturated fat in packaged food products as it would take about an year to make labelling norms operational.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) today launched a national campaign ‘The Eat Right Movement’ to improve public health and combat lifestyle diseases.

Edible oil industry, bakeries and FMCG companies, including Nestle India, HUL and Patanjali, took pledge to reduce the level of salt, sugar and fat in food products.

To kick start and popularise the movement, FSSAI has roped in film actor Rajkummar Rao for a short video that encourages citizens to reduce salt, sugar and fat. The video would be telecast on television channels and circulated through other mass media including social media.

"We have come out with draft food labelling regulation. It is with the Health Ministry now," FSSAI's CEO Pawan Kumar Agarwal said at the launch of this movement which was attended by top officials of Nestle India, Patanjali and HUL among others.

"It will take at least one year to be operational. Until then, this is the opportune time for the food industry to reformulate their products," he added.

Agarwal said the regulator would get an actual feedback from the industry while finalising the labelling norms if food business operators start following the draft rules.

The FSSAI CEO said that it would take about 4-5 months to finalise the packaging and labelling norms and then at least six months would be given to the industry for compliance.

While launching 'The Eat Right Movement', he said the campaign is built on two broad pillars of 'Eat Healthy' and 'Eat Safe'.

On the demand side, the movement focuses on empowering citizens to make the right food choices. On the supply side, it nudges food businesses to reformulate their products, provide better nutritional information to consumers and make investments in healthy food as responsible food businesses.
While the edible oil industry, bakeries and halwais’ committed to phase out trans-fats by 2022, major food companies pledged to reformulate packaged foods to reduce the level of salt, sugar and saturated fat.

The food services sector promised to provide healthier food options and introduce menu-labelling, even as major food retail players including e-commerce players agreed to promote healthier food options and responsible retail practices.

This movement could not have come at a better time, with Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) accounting for 1 in 5 disease-related deaths, widespread anaemia and other micronutrient deficiencies on the rise and India becoming the diabetes capital of the world, the FSSAI said.

Speaking on the occasion, K Vijay Raghavan, Principal Scientific Advisor to the government, said there is a need to complement reduction of salt, sugar, fat with lifestyle changes such as eating a more plant-based, natural diet.

The industry is a big player in supporting this movement therefore synergy between government, civil society and the industry is critical to its success, he added.

Suneeta Narain, DG, Centre for Science and Environment, said the FSSAI should "move ahead with the labelling regulations as fast as possible." She favoured government regulations to deal with junk foods and not voluntary commitments from the industry.

FSSAI Chairperson Ashish Bahuguna said these voluntary nutrition commitments are a giant leap forward to combat negative nutrition trends in society.