

“The future plan is to get Eat Right certificates for jails of Gujarat”

Monday, 04 January, 2021



The Gujarat FDCA (Food and Drugs Control Administration) is at the forefront in implementing various rules and norms under the Food Safety and Standards Regulations, 2011. Among its initiatives are clean street food hub, open kitchens and quality of temple prasad. FDCA's latest initiative is unique – to get Eat Right certificates for jails. Dr H G Koshia, Commissioner, FDCA, Gujarat, in an email interview with Manjushree Naik shares insights into the food safety scenario in the country and the various initiatives taken up by Gujarat FDCA. Excerpts:

FSSAI is amending the FSS (Licensing and Registration) Regulations. What difference will it make to the procedure?

The new system for licensing and registration is very user-friendly. In this system the payment gateway is online, so it is more comfortable. The FBO doesn't have to go to office for document submission. The reporting dashboard is very effective and prominent for state authorities to monitor the system.

There have been several norms regarding edible oils and India largely depends on imports of oils. Are the new regulations adequate to tackle this?

The standards prepared by FSSAI standardisation committee are published after complete brainstorming, so I don't see any issue regarding adequacy of regulation.

In spite of several new regulations, lack of manpower and infrastructure in regard to collection of samples, testing, adjudication and adherence to food safety and hygiene are major drawbacks. What can be done in this regard?

In Gujarat there is adequate manpower and infrastructure for collection of samples, testing, adjudication and adherence to food safety and hygiene. Gujarat has appointed 190 Food Safety Officers. Gujarat has infrastructure of 06 laboratories out of which 04 are NABL accredited, 32 adjudicating officers are constantly running the cases and till now nearly Rs 17 crore fine is imposed for more than 2,500 cases in Gujarat. It is the first state to establish appellate tribunal. To maintain proper hygiene in hotels and restaurants, FDCA Gujarat has taken the lead to allow consumers to see the kitchens in hotels and restaurants. Looking forward to these points, 28 districts of Gujarat have taken part in “Eat Right Challenge.”

Gujarat has been at the forefront in regard to initiatives like clean street food hub, open

kitchens

etc.

Elaborate.

Gujarat is always at the forefront in regard to many initiatives. Gujarat has received the highest number in 2019-20 as large state of the country in the food safety index. Total 09 streets are declared as “clean street food hub” in Gujarat and 04 more recently audited and will be declared soon. The concept of open kitchen is the idea of FDCA, we have asked all hotels and restaurants to keep the transparency between kitchen area and dining area in such a way that the consumer can have a look into the kitchen from dining area. More than that, Gujarat has worked for the quality of prasad being distributed in temple under project Bhog. Quality of food served in the schools, universities, and received Eat Right campus certificates for 06 universities. The future plan is to get Eat Right certificates for jails of Gujarat.

Standards and norms keep changing as FSSAI is constantly updating them. How will the unorganised sector be able to catch up with these constant changes? Won't this affect our food safety scenario in the country?

To keep unorganised sector of food with pace of current changes in standards and norms by FSSAI, the IEC activities like training, seminar, webinar are very effective tools. Gujarat is at the forefront in this sector also. During this Covid-19 pandemic era, Gujarat has trained more than 4,300 FBOs under FoSTaC programme.

There are several products that cannot be categorised as either drugs or food though they are not nutraceuticals. How do you overcome this challenge?

There are few traditional products e.g., Amla powder, curcumin etc. are concentrated foods and FSSAI is constantly looking after for novel type of food businesses to bring them under the umbrella.

The product approval process has always come under fire. Comment.

The product approval process is mainly looked after by FSSAI Zone offices and they are constantly working on it.

There are new norms for imported foods. How these have made a difference to allowing these foods?

The norms prepared for imported food are prepared by FSSAI and FSSAI is continuously working on different kinds of food imported in India.

What about harmonisation of standards with Codex and ensuring our norms are at par with developed countries?

Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 and Rules, Regulations, 2011, are continuously getting updated. These standards are mainly matching with Codex.

What new initiatives will you be taking in the near future?

As I have said earlier 28 districts of Gujarat have applied for “Eat Right Challenge.” Gujarat has looking forward for food safety at 360 degree we are working on enforcement, surveillance, inspection, training, awareness, certification, mobilisation, rapid testing, trans-fat free.