

Tough task ahead for FDA officials checking fish for adulterants

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NT NETWORK

MARGAO

Even as the Food and Drugs Administration (FDA) officials have begun testing the fish arriving into Goa from the neighbouring states for adulterants, challenging times lie ahead for the food safety officers deployed at the check posts.

Highly placed officials at the Polem check post said that vehicles carrying fish from other states arrive at the state's borders between 1 am and 4 am. With nearly 50 to 60 vehicles reaching the check post, the challenge for the food safety officers is to conduct the spot tests of fish samples and clear the trucks that wait in a long queue. The officials are able to clear three vehicles in one hour with each test lasting for around 20 minutes.

“We do not know as to how the FDA will cope up with the workload, as these are early days and we will have to see if the FDA works out a plan to cope with the workload as the days pass by,” said Polem check post officials, who fear clashes due to the delay in release of the fish-carrying vehicles.

The FDA has a total of 18 food safety officers, who have been deployed in teams of three each to monitor the state borders for adulterated fish at Polem and Patradevi check posts. Highly placed officials at the FDA, requesting anonymity, said that the department has made makeshift arrangements for the time being. They said that they are not aware of what measures will be taken in the days to come.

The officials said that the tests are being undertaken using test kits developed by the Kerala-based Central Institute of Fisheries Technology. They said that the FDA officers need to first verify the documents with the fish-carrying vehicles including the FDA approval of the respective state before collecting the samples. The technology used, however, cannot test shellfish and samples need to be sent to the FDA's central laboratory at Bambolim. The officials also said that if they come across a suspected case, the vehicle has to be detained and the fish destroyed and added that so far they have not come across such suspect cases.

Food items seized in Kohima, Jalukie

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Kohima District Food Safety Team seized 37 packets of local chilli powder, found to contain colour additives, and 850 gms of salted dry fish which tested positive for formalin during its inspection drive carried out at P.R. Hill T. Khel market and Super Market Kohima on Saturday.

The team seized 15 packets of local chilli powder at P.R. hill, 22 packets of local chilli powder sold by local mothers and 850gms of salted dry fish which were reportedly brought from Moreh (Manipur) at Super Market Kohima. At P.R. hill T. Khel market, the team tested apples, tomatoes and fresh fish brought from Imphal for preservatives with negative results. The team also tried to test the presence of carbide in fruits at Super Market, however the team said that the fruit dealers/distributors had gone to their villages two weeks ago and so the tests could not be conducted.

The inspection drive team consisted of an analytic enforcement team and a food technician team along with the Food Safety and Standard Authority of India mobile van tested the food items on the spot.

The food safety team expressed gratitude to Angami Youth Organization for their presence during the drive and assisting the team. The department informed this correspondent that such inspection drives would continue to be conducted in the coming days for other food items also.

Food Safety inspection conducted at Jalukie town

Food Safety Wing under CMO Peren inspected shops selling food items on August 3 led by the District Food Safety Officer, Samlamgwamlie Michui with the help of district administration led by Dobashis and police personnel at Jalukie town.

A press release issued by Food Safety Wing under CMO Peren stated that the Food Safety officials inspected various shops and informed the food business operators about the importance of selling safe and wholesome food to its buyers which is, the release said, not only their duty according to the FSSA but also an ethical responsibility. They were told to make sure that the team does not find expired items in their shops. They were also directed to properly label products that had no labels. The food business operators were asked to duly check their own shops, dispose off expired items to avoid seizure and penalties in the future.

Large quantities of goods were seized during the inspection, especially cold drinks and cooking oil, which were being sold beyond the "best before" dates. Others items such as masalas and biscuits were also seized but in a lesser quantity. The release stated that the public should also remain aware and check the best before date when they purchase any item from shops.

After the inspection, the team took all the seized items and destroyed them in the presence of Food Safety officials.

DNA

Malnutrition: Can govt begin to change ground realities?



Shweta Khandelwal

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Even with the rising per capita income, sustained economic growth and increased agriculture production, malnutrition continues to strike India in multiple forms. Spanning from under-nutrition, stunting, wasting to being overweight and obese, malnutrition often comes with a package deal of multiple micronutrient deficiencies. With improved methods and technology use, our statistics show that only 1 in 10 children in India actually get adequate diets (NFHS-4). But using this same advancement in science and technology, we are unable to make a substantial impact in improving the ground reality.

India is still home to preventable starvation deaths, numerous hungry children and a large nutritionally insecure population. While under-nutrition hovers nationally around 40 per cent, rising overweight/obesity is escalating to more than 20 per cent in some states. Maternal child health and nutrition (MCHN) in India needs to tread a long path as we still are home to 30 per cent low birth weight (LBW) babies. India's maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live births is 130, one of the poorest among other developing countries. Only about half of our babies are exclusively breastfed (huge interstate variation 35.8 per cent in Meghalaya, to 77.2 per cent in Chhattisgarh).

It is important to understand the aetiology and ramifications of malnutrition if we need to prepare better strategies to tackle it. Evidence shows that malnutrition can creep in at any stage in the life cycle but there are some vulnerable periods like the first 1,000 days including pregnancy and lactation etc. If a woman enters her pregnancy malnourished, she is more likely to give birth to a malnourished child. Our own data from Indian birth cohorts demonstrate that if LBW baby becomes an overweight adult, he/she will be at higher risk to develop Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). Additionally, the interplay between several domains like food, agriculture, environmental factors (climate change, pollution, WASH) and public health is crucial to the origins of malnutrition. For example, air pollution causes depletion of vitamin D absorption by human beings; every 1 degree rise in temperatures cause a 10 per cent reduction in the yields of staples; poor hygiene and sanitation compromise immunity and result in malnourished individuals; malnutrition impacts cognition to productivity thereby affecting nation's GDP in long run; mere calorie sufficiency does not guarantee nutrition security; both under and over-nutrition paradigms beget NCDs faster etc. If we analyse each of these seemingly separate issues, it will not be surprising to find them inextricably linked at several stages of health and nutrition.

Nutrition swings mainly between the ministries of women and child development (MWCD) and health and family welfare (MoHFW). The integrated child development scheme (ICDS) under the MWCD, set up more than 40 years back, no doubt has been instrumental in setting up a

huge infrastructure and personnel to cater to the vulnerable populations but is still seen fraught with several challenges and limited success in improving MCHN indicators. The mid-day meal programme (MDM) with dual objectives to improve school attendance and provide partial nutrition to children is under the Human Resource Development (HRD) ministry.

The MoHFW oversees the Food Safety Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) which ensures safe and nutritious food to the public by regulating the food quality (and its various ingredients /fractions) in food systems. Making all accountable stakeholders in these overlapping goals to reduce poverty, improve nutrition and public health will need empowering of this joint mandate.

Thus if we are gearing towards a malnutrition free India, we must realise the contributions of all three pillars simultaneously i.e. nutrition-specific like feeding programs, supplementation, breastfeeding etc; nutrition-sensitive like poverty reduction, education, agriculture, women empowerment etc; and enabling environment like subsidies, taxation, governance issues, etc. Our own success stories like Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh can be leading examples in the fight to curtail undernutrition of under-fives. Attentive dedicated governance, community engagement, sustained focus on under-performers or weaker districts, repeated monitoring and surveillance etc. have been some key features which have saved many children in these states from falling in the malnutrition demon's mouth.

Policy and programmatic initiatives like the recently launched Poshan Abhiyaan or National Nutrition Mission (NNM) envisage tackling these issues upfront mainly by addressing three core issues: inter-sectoral convergence/coordination, monitoring and implementation. This line of thinking is excellent and urgently needed but warrants close inspection and a periodic feedback loop from all sectors to tackle teething issues. NITI Aayog has a huge leadership role to fulfil in this aspiration. The ultimate aim to drive this malnutrition demon from our country will not materialise unless we have a sound bedrock of scientific credibility supported by operational feasibility, financial viability and relentless cooperation from all stakeholders topped by political will.

FSSAI's Guidance Note "Safe Ground Spices" Aims At Ensuring Purchase Of Unadulterated Spices

FSSAI's Guidance Note "Safe Ground Spices" Aims At Ensuring Purchase Of Unadulterated Spices

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has issued a guidance note that guides consumers on how to avoid purchasing adulterated products, spices in particular. Safe Ground Spices – as the notice is named, tells consumers how to ensure that spices are not adulterated and contains key points which must be kept in mind while buying spices.

THE HOW-TO'S

They include avoiding the purchase of powdered spices in the loose form i.e. the unbranded varieties which have already been banned by the FSSAI on account of the high probability of adulteration; checking if the ground spices have the AGMARK logo and certification, checking for the FSSAI license number on the package's label, etc.

Ground spices are commonly adulterated with substances like artificial colors, starch, chalk powder, etc., in order to increase their weight and enhance their appearance. The consumption of such adulterated spices can cause a number of diseases, including skin allergies and liver disorders to start with.



The notice instructs consumers to purchase whole spices as opposing to powders since they have a lesser chance of being adulterated and to look for the FSSAI's organic logo – Jaivik Bharat – on the pack of organic spices.

The note also instructs the ways to detect adulteration in ground spices at home and how and whom to report the sale of ground spices in loose forms and adulteration.

“It is **important to control adulteration in spices**, but the bulk of the spices is sold in the open as non-packaged products, and it is elitism to insist that all consumers should buy only packaged spices,” an official from LocalCircles, a social media platform connecting organizations and the community, told the publication. “When the corporate sector makes a policy for regulators, such oversight is natural. That is why such policies will not help in removing adulteration. These rules are basically built to push consumers towards the expensive option, i.e. packaged products,” he added.

“This does not only have an adverse effect on prices but also on trade and jobs, especially small and medium enterprises that dominate spice trade. It is important that policies are made taking into account how the Indian market functions and how the spice trade is conducted, instead of letting it be dictated by a lobby,” the official said.

NEED FOR COLLOQUIALISM

“This note is definitely going to **help the consumer to get good-quality spices** without any adulteration. The only worries will be for those who are not literate. So in my opinion, it should be prepared using colloquialisms in every language,” FnB News reported Usha Sisodia, dietitian, Nanavati Super Speciality Hospital, as saying.

“The apex regulator should also consider preparing a brief advertising note for television, using social networking sites such as Facebook, and arranging common education programmes at various public places,” Sisodia added. “Adulteration of spices cannot be easily stopped. It can directly affect the business of many people. So the government should impose hefty fines on those who prove to be culprits.”



FSSAI gives food delivery cos 2 weeks to de-list unlicensed restaurants

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Regulator FSSAI on Thursday said it has given a two-week deadline to online food delivery companies to de-list unlicensed restaurants.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has also decided to conduct audit of online platforms of food aggregators to check if they are complying with food safety and hygiene norms, it said in a statement.

In a review meeting held on Wednesday, the regulator found that more than 30-40 per cent of food businesses listed on the online platforms do not possess a valid licence despite the companies being told to comply with the norms by July-end, it said.

In many cases, listed food businesses have recently applied for the FSSAI license/registration but still do not possess them. To ensure compliance of the food safety norms, the regulator has given "two-weeks time to these food aggregators" to delist unlicensed/unregistered food businesses and submit a detailed report, FSSAI CEO Pawan Agarwal told.

"This is part of a special drive by the regulator to bring in all food businesses under the FSSAI licensing regime and ensure compliance of the food safety laws," he said.

The FSSAI had recently notified regulations bringing e-commerce aggregator platforms within the purview of the food safety law. He hoped that these platforms will now begin to take food safety seriously from a regulatory standpoint.

Agarwal also appealed to the aggregators to begin to use some of their resources in training and capacity building of restaurants for improving food safety and hygiene rather than focusing only on deep discounts and aggressive marketing.

Last month, the FSSAI had directed leading e-commerce food service providers like Swiggy, Zomato, Foodpanda and UberEats to delist non-FSSAI licensed food business from their

platforms by July 31 after receiving consumer complaints. The aggregators were advised to display FSSAI license number on their platform along with name and location of the restaurants.



Aug 5, 2018

TANDARUST PUNJAB MISSION

Civil, railway authorities join hands to check adulteration



Health team collects milk samples in Jalandhar on Saturday. A Tribune Photograph

Tribune News Service

Jalandhar, August 4

Under the 'Tandarust Punjab' Mission, as per the directions of newly-appointed Commissioner Food and Drug Administrator S Kahan Singh Pannu, a special drive has been initiated to curb adulteration of milk and milk products. Two milk, two paneer and one dahi sample from various milk dairies and milk vendors were collected by Rashu Mahajan, Food Safety Officer.

A meeting was also held by Dr Balwinder Singh, DHO, Jalandhar, with the Railway Station Superintendent, Chief Parcel Officer, Railway Health Inspector and SHO, GRP, to inspect the trains for any perishable food items or any spurious milk, milk products and sweets arriving or being unloaded at the Jalandhar city and cantt Railway Stations.

The railways authorities assured that they would inform civil food safety teams about such consignments and hand over to the receiver, only after samples collected by the food teams.