

Greater Kashmir

Equipment, manpower deficit hobbles Valley's Food Safety on Wheels program

Program will become functional in a month: Commissioner

ZEHRU NISSA

Srinagar | Posted : Aug 7 2018 1:49AM



Representational Pic

The food safety vans, which are meant to provide instant and mobile food testing service in J&K to ensure quality of commodities in market, are not being put to use since March 2018, due to lack of proper equipment and manpower shortage.

A report by Food Safety and Standards Association of India (FSSAI) has revealed, no monthly progress report (MPR) has been sent by the DFCO to FSSAI, the central regulatory authority, in past six months as mandated under food safety laws.

The progress report of states uploaded by FSSAI on 25 July, latest one available, states "MPR pending for May and June 2018" for J&K. In May, the FSSAI report stated "MPR pending for March, 2018".

When contacted Commissioner food safety J&K, Dr Abdul Kabir Dar agreed that work output of food safety on wheels was low. "There was some problem with technical staff as well as drivers," he said, adding that the issue had been "sorted out recently".

He said the department had sourced technical staff from health department to run the mobile labs and to "fill the gaps".

"We have roped in an agency to train the staff and the vans will become fully functional in a month," the commissioner said.

Currently, he said the vans were being used for “transportation of samples, do basic testing and create awareness, especially in peripheral areas”.

A source in the department said the reports were not being sent on a regular basis because of “inadequate output” of these testing labs.

“These are merely vehicles without requisite equipment and manpower for testing. That is a big hurdle,” the source said.

Sharing details he said the equipment that has been fitted in the van for milk testing was able to give a report only on whether water has been added to it or not.

Moreover, the machine is not fit to test processed milk available in market, local and from other states. “It can only test solid fat and non solid fat in raw cow’s milk,” he said. He said other types of milk, toned, pasteurized, packaged, was out of the ambit of testing due to lack of facility.

Similarly, for testing edible oil, the equipments fitted in the vans have provision to give only refractive index of oil. It cannot detect impurities and adulteration. The same is case with water testing.

An official of the department said that manpower engaged to run the equipment in mobile vans was also not “adequately trained”.

This has also been corroborated by FSSAI, which in its May status report stated that in J&K “Training and awareness programs (for mobile testing vans) are also not being undertaken”.

The program, which cost state Rs 2.4 crore, was flagged off in J&K in March 2017 to improve infrastructure for food testing in state.

While Rs 1.75 crore had been allocated by the state government for procurement of five testing vans, Rs 60 lakh was given by FSSAI for two of the mobile labs fitted with “high tech” equipment to detect adulteration and quality of food samples on the move in market and food business operators.