

## **FSSAI commences framing of regulations for genetically-modified foods**

Thursday, 02 August, 2018

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FSSAI, which was under pressure from several quarters for its alleged failure to restrict the import of food with genetically-modified organisms (GMOs), has initiated the work on framing regulations for genetically-modified (GM) food.

In a statement, the country's apex food regulator, said that the intended regulations would essentially lay down the procedures for the safety assessment and approval of foods, including imported foods, derived from genetic modification processes based on the internationally well-established and accepted scientific principles, procedures and best practices, before they are approved for food purposes.

"The draft regulation, after the formal approval of FSSAI's scientific panel, scientific committee and the authority, shall be notified in the Gazette to elicit the comments of various stakeholders, which will be duly considered. After this, the regulations will be finalised with the approval of the Government of India," it added.

Recently, the FSSAI draft on labelling regulations made it mandatory for the food business operators (FBOs) to declare the labelling of genetically-engineered (GE) or modified foods.

The draft stated that all food products having total GE ingredients five per cent or more shall be labelled. The total GE ingredients shall be of the top three ingredients in terms of their percentage in the product. The labelling shall be as follows: "Contains GMO/ingredients derived from GMO".

Countries such as Japan, Canada, Thailand and Indonesia prescribe a threshold value of five per cent by weight. The European Union (EU) prescribes threshold of 0.9 per cent.

A senior official with FSSAI stated, "Irrespective of the threshold, the safety of every GM product needs to be well-established and the products must be proven to be as safe as non-GM products. The proposed labelling of GM foods in India falls within the range of the internationally-followed threshold level and seems to be practical and cost-effective."

Meanwhile, assessment prior to the approval of such foods by FSSAI would be in respect of the food safety, while aspects related to their environmental impacts would be duly assessed by the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) prior to their approval as food by FSSAI.

The imports of GM food need approval under laws, i.e. clearance from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, under the Environment Protection Act, 1986, which assess the impact of GM products on biodiversity and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, which endorses that GM products are safe for human consumption under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.