India’s food safety authority to set rules for gluten-free claims

By Gill Hyslop
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The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is developing directives on the labeling of gluten-free products to correct the lack of information of the wheat allergy in the country.

According to Pawan Aggarwal, CEO of FSSAI, currently many producers incorrectly label their products as ‘low gluten’ in order to increase their sales.

“A food product meant for wheat allergy patients has to be gluten-free. It can’t have low gluten and that’s why we have proposed to ban such labeling,” he said.

He added the FSSAI plans to conduct surprise inspections to verify whether producers are selling totally gluten-free products, when using the claim.

“We have to ensure there is no cross contamination,” said Aggarwal.

Impending epidemic

Once considered a Western disease, wheat intolerance has now become an ‘impending epidemic in India’ by health experts.

A study published in International Archives of Allergy and Immunology found 22% of patients tested for food allergies in Kolkata, India, showed a positive response to wheat allergens.

According to Celiac India, the disease is virtually non-existent in southern Indian but prevalent in the North Indian population where wheat is primarily grown and eaten as a staple.

In 2010, a study revealed the prevalence of celiac disease in the north Indian community was one in 96 persons, but there is an increasing incidence of the disease in India.

“Celiac disease is more common than is recognized in India,” wrote the authors.