

Thirty-one state food labs in 25 states & UTs taken up for upgradation

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E-Paper

Under the Central sector scheme of lab upgradation, 31 state food safety laboratories of 25 states and Union Territories (UTs) have been taken up for upgradation. This includes the setting up of 12 microbiology laboratories in 11 states and UTs until February 2019. This was stated by FSSAI, India's apex food regulator, in a statement. "The proposals for the setting up of 11 microbiology laboratories in 11 states and UTs are under consideration," it added. Also, a total grant-in-aid of Rs 172.60 crore has been sanctioned for the upgradation of these laboratories. Out of this, Rs 127.45 crore has been released so far.

FSSAI has been aggressively putting in efforts to upgrade the lab infrastructure across the country, particularly since the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report as well as a report by a parliamentary panel rapped it for the lack of lab infrastructure in the country. Although the progress is sluggish, a senior official with the FSSAI said that the situation was satisfactory and the food safety ecosystem was moving in the right direction. "State governments are coming forward and accepting the proposals to upgrade the lab infrastructure, which is key for food safety," he added.

Previously, 29 state food safety laboratories in 25 states and UTs have been taken up for upgradation while there were approved proposals of nine microbiology laboratories in eight states and UTs till September 2018. FSSAI is implementing a Central sector scheme for the strengthening of the food testing system in the country, including provision of mobile food testing labs (SOFTeL) with a total outlay of Rs 481.95, while the time frame for the implementation of the scheme is between 2016-17 and 2018-19.

The scheme envisaged an outlay for strengthening of 45 state food testing labs in total with assistance given to at least one food testing laboratory in each state and two in larger states. A non-recurring grant of around Rs 10 crore each for upgradation of state food laboratories for procurement of three major equipment, namely ICP-MS, GC-MSMS and LC-MSMS; setting up of a microbiology lab, creation of infrastructure for sophisticated equipment and setting up of microbiological laboratory, is being given, besides a recurring grant of Rs 35 lakh per year for professional services, consumables and contingencies as per the requirement of the respective state lab. For the North-Eastern states which do not have any food testing laboratory, the scheme provides a grant of Rs 3 crore each for setting up new food testing laboratory there. FSSAI opined that the upgradation of the labs would help the state food safety apparatus to do regulatory and surveillance in a more efficient manner, as samples taken by the FSOs will be analysed within the shortest possible time. The regulator also aims at introducing online laboratory data management system through the Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS), once the upgradation work is complete.

Meanwhile, there is a Central Sector Scheme of Food Safety on Wheels (FSW), that envisages the establishment of 50 mobile labs – one in every 20 districts, with at least one mobile lab in each state and UT. Under this component, a fully fabricated vehicle (along with equipment) costing about Rs 30 lakh (approximately), excluding GST (Goods and Services Tax), are being provided besides a recurring grant of Rs 5 lakh per year. "So far, 44 FSWs have been sanctioned to 31 states and UTs. Of these, 35 FSWs has been delivered to 25 states and four FSWs to four UTs," said FSSAI in a statement.