

## Unlicensed FBOs on e-commerce food service portals under FSSAI scanner

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Food business operators (FBOs) who do not have licenses to operate and doing businesses through e-commerce platforms have come under the scanner. FSSAI, the country's apex food regulator, has issued a direction to 10 e-commerce businesses, viz Box8, Faasos, FoodCloud, Foodmingo, Foodpanda, JusFood, LimeTray, Swiggy, UberEats and Zomato, to debar unlicensed FBOs from operating.

This decision was taken following a series of complaints related to sub-standard food being supplied by food businesses listed on these e-commerce foodservice platforms.

Taking a cue, state food safety departments are also gearing up for a survey on the trade taking place via such platforms. In fact, a number of states have even started tracking such food trade websites and examining the status of FBOs registered with them.

A senior Food and Drug Administration (FDA) official in Uttar Pradesh said, "The state food safety authority has decided to take a closer look into the list of FBOs with the errant sites, and a checklist is being prepared to see whether they are operating with or without licenses or registration, whichever is the requirement of their businesses."

The food safety department in Gujarat has also decided to launch a drive to check FBOs' status with respect to licensing and registration regulations of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.

H G Koshia, commissioner, Food and Drug Control Administration (FDCA) Gujarat, commented, "FSSAI's step to debar non-FSSAI licensed/registered FBOs on e-commerce food service platforms is very positive."

"Nowadays, ordering from e-commerce platforms is very easy and consumers also opt for it. It is the responsibility of FBOs to comply with the regulations and register themselves or obtain proper licenses, based on their turnover criteria," he added.

"Food operators should ensure that the food safety rules and regulations are complied with. As FDA, we will keep a check on any FBOs who are selling food items on e-commerce portals without proper licenses, and necessary action will be taken against them," Koshia said.

In February 2018, FSSAI operationalised the guidelines for e-commerce FBOs, which, inter alia, provided for the display of the FSSAI license numbers of listed FBOs on e-commerce platforms and an agreement between the e-commerce platforms and FBOs to comply with the Food Safety and Standards Act and Rules and Regulations, 2011.

In a statement, the country's apex regulator said that the compliance to these guidelines was patchy, and there were complaints of restaurants/hotels without FSSAI licenses being listed and allowed to offer/sell food products on e-commerce food service platforms. There were also several complaints of sub-standard food being delivered to consumers through online market aggregators.

FSSAI, in its directive to e-commerce food service platforms, has asked that immediate action be initiated to delist the defaulting food businesses and an action taken report be submitted along with the details of FBOs listed on their platforms by July 31, 2018.

They have also been directed to furnish their FSSAI license, agreement signed with FBOs and their internal checks to ensure that their FBOs hold valid FSSAI licenses.