

FSSAI nudges food firms to disclose accurate nutrition value

FSSAI has taken steps to push companies and restaurants for lower levels of fat, sugar and salt in packaged foods. It has also roped in Bollywood actor RajKummar Rao as ambassador.

By: **Shinmin Bali** | Mumbai | Updated: July 17, 2018 5:59 AM



Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has recently launched the Eat Right Movement in a bid to encourage food companies to make accurate disclosures of the nutritional values or calorific value of foods. Additionally, the movement also aims to make consumers aware of the salt, sugar and sodium levels or fat content in the products they purchase or foods they consume.

The positioning statement adopted to forward the movement is Aaj Se, Thoda Kam (which encompasses the 'Eat Healthy and Eat Safe' idea). FSSAI has roped in **Bollywood** actor RajKummar Rao as its ambassador for the campaign. Apart from creating awareness among consumers, the movement is looking to push food businesses to reformulate their products/foods to a newer, healthier variety. In addition to players from FMCG corporations, QSRs and restaurants pledging their support and involvement to the movement, the edible oil industry, bakeries and 'halwais' have committed to phase out trans-fat from their products by 2022.

Pawan Agarwal, CEO, FSSAI, shares that companies are also being advised to take it upon themselves to self-assess and monitor. FSSAI is also looking at plugging loopholes in advertising that companies can leverage with regards to the claims they make. He points out, "Voluntary commitment does not mean the regulations will not come in. Regulation will come in nevertheless. But when this does happen, the transition will be quicker and less painful for food businesses."

But not all stakeholders are onboard with the blanket approach of recalibrating ingredient quantities of their products. This is truer for companies that already have comparatively low levels of salt, sugar and fats in their products. Anil Talreja, partner, Deloitte points out that one of the main reasons why some of the brands are hesitant to implement the movement is because they believe that it simply adds another layer of regulations to the existing heavily regulatory framework governing food products. He says, "The proposed measures will not only cause an increase in the costs of additional compliances but will also lead to more complexity in so far as regulations like labelling are concerned." Companies will have no option but to comply with any changes in the regulations proposed.

In case of restaurants, unless checks and balances are strictly maintained and recipes don't largely change over time in terms of the quantities of salt, sugars and fat levels or calorie counts in them, standardisation can be an issue. Beyond a point, people want to have fun and they will eat what they really feel like, points out Anjan Chatterjee, founder and managing director, Speciality Restaurants.

Speaking on belonging to the segment of restaurateurs that are proactively achieving recipe standardisation, Chatterjee says that companies just need to go the extra step and say that they will also seriously start looking at the calorie value of their foods.

"Whenever governance comes in, obviously, there are going to be some people that won't care for it. But it is going to be the next step in the industry," he says.

However, it may be prudent to say that the chain of events could go from taking the stakeholders, institutions and bodies along, educating them and then putting governance in play.