

# Business Standard

## Govt sanctions nearly 500 additional posts for food regulator FSSAI

With food regulator FSSAI facing manpower shortage, the government has sanctioned an additional 493 posts for the authority to discharge its responsibility effectively for ensuring safe and nutritious food to people.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), which currently has 356 sanctioned posts, will now be able to conduct food safety inspections, besides law enforcement for central licensees directly instead of being fully dependent on the states.

Ministry of Health and Family has issued orders to create 493 additional posts for the authority, the FSSAI said in a statement. It has been functioning with merely 356 sanctioned posts and most of its staff is on short-term contract or on deputation.

Thanking the government for creation of these posts, FSSAI's CEO Pawan Agarwal termed it as a "big milestone in the evolution of food safety system in the country".

With increased staff and resources, he said the FSSAI will be able to discharge its responsibility more effectively so as to inspire trust and assure safe and nutrition food for all citizens.

By more than doubling the staff strength of FSSAI, the Centre has addressed one of the key concerns raised by the CAG in its performance report of FSSAI and also by the Parliamentary Standing Committee in its latest report, the statement said.

"A large majority of the newly created posts are for technical functions, particularly at the cutting edge, that of Technical Officers (255 posts) and Assistant Director Technical (60 posts), where the staff shortage is particularly acute," the statement said.

In addition, 74 new posts of Central Food Safety Officers have been created.

"With this, FSSAI would now be able to handle food safety inspections and enforcement for Central licensees directly instead of entirely depending the states," FSSAI said.

The authority was established under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 that unified nine existing regulations through this umbrella legislation. The regulator is responsible for domestic regulation of food as well regulation of imported food in the country.

The FSSAI has headquarters in New Delhi and five regional offices at Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Kolkata and Guwahati. It also has offices at 20 ports of entry for checking imported food.

Currently, FSSAI has two large food labs in Kolkata, Ghaziabad and two small ones at Sanauli and Raxaul on Indo-Nepal border. Two new large food labs are under development in Chennai and JNPT, Mumbai. In addition, FSSAI provides oversight for over 250 food labs notified by it.

To ensure that the country has a modern and robust food control system, the government has created posts for new functional areas like social and behavioral change communication, training and capacity building and new technologies.

FSSAI said it will be able to attract a diverse talent pool with special skill sets required for multifarious activities that have been taken up in recent years.

The regulator has launched many initiatives in the last few years. Through food safety training and certification (FoSTaC), a large scale training programme for food safety supervisors/handlers, more than 40,000 persons have been trained.

It has started the Safe and Nutritious Food (SNF) initiatives @ Home, School, Workplace etc. and also Eat Right movement.

"Having dedicated staff for such activities will help FSSAI to institutionalise these activities for sustainable change on food safety and healthy nutrition," FSSAI said.

Globally, food control systems in advanced nations have much more staff and resources. For instance, the United States has a staff of 14,200 in its two agencies, the USDA and FDA to look after food safety and Canada has over 4,000 staff in its food safety inspection services.

"Compared to these numbers and international benchmarks in terms of the number of staff deployed in the food regulatory bodies of other countries, India has fewer staff for food safety," the statement said.