

DNA

Procuring samples to establish truth: Food watchdog



The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is tasked with keeping a hawk's eye on food products to check for adulteration and contamination. Armed with the FSSAI Act, 2006, the authority lays down standards for food articles and regulation of their manufacture, storage, distribution, availability of safe and wholesome food for human consumption amongst other things. DNA spoke to Pawan Agrawal, chief executive officer, FSSAI, about the contaminated vegetables being grown and sold, measures to arrest the practice and how deep the problem is. Are you aware that vegetables from Yamuna floodplains are detrimental to human health?

We have come to know that they are contaminated with toxic chemicals but we still do not have concrete evidence. The FSSAI has started surveillance, we are procuring samples to find out the truth. It is rife with challenges — right from

identifying markets where such vegetables are sold to the extent of pollution in water used for irrigation.

What could be a possible action plan to deal with the problem?

The issue is primarily about farming practices. The FSSAI comes very late in the picture when the toxic produce hits the market. It is the onus of the state government crackdown on bad irrigation practices, ensuring clean water supply as the origin is traced to farmer's end.

We cannot indict farmers for growing the vegetables, we can rap sellers.

Are only the farmers at fault?

The problem cannot be isolated as the responsibility of only the growers or sellers. Agriculturists are using polluted water because the government has not done anything to clean the source or provide an alternate source. From farm to plate, it then becomes a chain of earning a living.

You mean to say the issue runs deep?

Of course. We need to have a holistic approach to address it. Farmers are not aware of polluted water. The seller is the ready victim to be upheld. There is no plan of rehabilitating poor farmers if the fields are razed. All these matters need intervention as well.