

BusinessLine

High sugar, salt content: FSSAI sticks to its stance on labelling norms

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Seeks industry's views on proposal mandating red-colour coding for high fat/salt products

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has decided to stick to its proposal for making it mandatory for food products that are high on fat, sugar and salt content levels to display red-colour coding on their labels.

In its draft labelling regulations, released after two years of consultations with the packaged food industry, the FSSAI maintained its stance. However, it proposes to implement this norm in a phased manner over a period of three years.

Views sought

After pre-draft level consultations, which saw industry players raising several concerns, the FSSAI had set up an expert group to look into the proposed regulations last year. On Thursday, it said it has now released draft regulations to seek additional views from the industry on the same.

Other key proposals in the draft labelling regulations include declaration of calories, saturated fat, trans-fat, sugar and sodium per serve on the front of the pack, new logo for vegetarian food and mandatory allergen declarations. The draft regulations also propose labelling requirements for food products sold on e-commerce platforms and restaurants, and stricter norms for products that claim to be gluten-free.

As far as red-colour coding norm is concerned, the FSSAI has defined different threshold levels for sodium and saturated fat content for various categories of food products. In case of sugar, the draft regulations propose display of red-colour coding, for those that have added sugar content value is more than 10 per cent of the total energy (kcal) provided by the 100 g/100 ml of the product.

At the same time, it has also proposed to exempt some product categories such as milk and certain milk products, staples such as sugar, salt and flour, and fresh vegetables, as per the draft regulations.

As far as front-of-the-pack labelling is concerned, many large packaged food companies already follow this norm voluntarily.

'Requirements vary'

A spokesperson for Nestle India said that the labelling regulation is still at a draft stage, and that the industry has collectively shared comments on the notice issued last year regarding the same.

"We voluntarily provide monochrome GDA on our food labels which provide guidance of daily energy intake and key defined nutrients on the front of the pack to enable consumers to evaluate a product's composition in their daily diet," the spokesperson added.

Meanwhile, Subodh Jindal, President, All-India Food Processors' Association, said that industry experts are examining the draft and will be submitting their views to the regulatory authority.

"However, we believe that the salt, sugar and fat requirements of a consumer depend on various factors such as age, life style, physical disposition, medical prognosis, activity level, climate and region. It will not be proper to prefix applicability of a food through colour coding," he said.

He added that the concept of red-colour coding will reduce choices for consumers and adversely impact the food processing sector and the farm economy.