

Government waives fee for food adulteration test



The new GST regime, which was rolled out from 1 July, provides for levy of 12% on food bill in non-AC restaurants. Photo: iStockphoto

14 Dec 2019 Neetu Chandra Sharma

- Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has authorised credible voluntary consumer organisations (VCOs) to assist consumers in getting such tests done
- To overcome the problems, the FSSAI has said, testing fees will now be reimbursed, even if the consumer sample does not fail

Topics

FSSAI

New Delhi: Doubtful about quality of a food product? You can now get the sample checked in government designated food laboratories free of cost.

The apex food regulator, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has authorised credible voluntary consumer organisations (VCOs) to assist consumers in getting such tests done.

Currently, in India food safety law provides for reimbursement of testing fees only if a consumer sample fails. According to the government, this provision has however never been used due to some practical difficulties.

To overcome the problems, the FSSAI has said, testing fees will now be reimbursed, even if the consumer sample does not fail.

The food regulator has authorised 80 VCOs to facilitate the testing process.

The VCOs will create a nationwide network of consumer organisations for food safety and nutrition (NetCOFaN) with the support of FSSAI.

"The tests will be done only through pre-selected consumer organisations and limited numbers. We will try it with a few credible consumer organisations first and then scale it up," Pawan Agarwal, CEO, FSSAI told Mint.

"Consumer organisations will be linked to identified labs and tests will only be done at those labs," he said.

NetCOFaN will initially work in three specific areas, i.e. awareness and training, mobilization of small and petty food businesses for various schemes, and food testing and surveillance.

The network will also use content on food safety and nutrition by FSSAI with their ground level contacts for awareness and training programmes by localizing it.

On-ground presence of VCOs will help reach the messages to local areas across the country. Support of VCOs will also be taken to mobilize small and petty food businesses to participate in hygiene rating, cluster certification and food safety training and certification (FoSTaC) programmes.

VCOs will be provided with 'Food Safety Magic Box' that has over 100 simple do-it-yourself tests for common adulterants and a kit for testing in mid-day meal scheme.

"Creation of network would help to build synergies amongst them and is very innovative way of FSSAI in reaching out to the consumers across the country," said Pushpa Girimaji, an expert on consumer issues.

Starting the process, FSSAI has partnered with Delhi-based Consumer Voice to check safety and quality of milk products in Delhi NCR, for which it has collected samples of paneer, khoya and desi ghee and other milk products.

These samples were coded by Consumer Voice and tested in FSSAI's National Food Laboratory at Ghaziabad. The results of this surveillance would be compiled soon and shared with concerned stakeholders. Preventive and corrective action, if needed, would then be initiated jointly by Consumer Voice and the State food authorities.

Evidence based point system has been put in place to monitor work of VCOs and they would be provided token funding based on of activities to ensure sustainability and continuity.

FSSAI had earlier asked top-200 food companies to appoint nodal persons for consumer grievances. These persons have been trained for effective consumer grievance redressal. FSSAI is now looking at ways of using services of VCOs in effective redressal of consumer grievances.