

Press Release

FSSAI responds to the CAG Report: Assures citizens that they can trust food they get

New Delhi, 20.12.2017: Responding to the performance audit report by the CAG tabled in the Parliament on 19th December, 2017, FSSAI assures citizens that they can trust food they get. FSSAI is confident that the country's food safety ecosystem is well on the way to become more robust and globally benchmarked in the years to come.

Food Testing

In its report, CAG has raised concerns regarding lack of equipment, shortage of manpower and absence of accreditation of the state food laboratories in the country. Accepting the reality, FSSAI pointed out that it has been working over the past couple of years to ensure that the state food laboratories and referral laboratories are fully equipped and functional. Central government is making an investment of Rs.480 crore for strengthening of the state food laboratories and referral laboratories.

For training and capacity building of lab staff, over 24 training programs have been conducted in this year alone, some of which were with international experts to bring in best global practices. 64 Master Trainers have been created in a cascade approach, who in turn would train hundreds of more lab personnel, and 300 persons have been trained in Good Food Lab Practices in just one year.

Further, handholding support is being given to states to support them in getting NABL accreditation. 23 labs across 22 states /UTs are being funded for upgradation which will lead to NABL accreditation eventually, and over 140 lab staff have been trained in NABL accreditation processes. Overall 45 labs across States/ UTs would be supported. The number notified private labs has increased from 82 to 152 as of now. It is proposed to provide for 62 mobile food testing laboratories across all States/ UTs. As of now 19 mobile food testing labs have already been made available to States/ UTs.

To increase the pool of food analysts in the country, in an intensive drive, 3 sets of exams have been conducted in the past year and 204 Food Analysts have been notified out of a pool of thousands of applicants; the 4th exam is being conducted in January 2018 to further enhance this pool. A policy for selecting and training Junior Analysts through a Fellowship program is also on the anvil in partnership with NIFTEM

INFoLNET is a holistic lab network and management system where information is available from all labs in a central database; samples can be tracked and information on testing and technical strengths of labs is available. As of now 170 out of 242 laboratories have been registered on INFoLNeT.

It also needs to be clarified that as per section 98 of the Food Safety and Standards Act 2006, tests done by state laboratories that were inherited by FSSAI from Prevention of Food Adulteration (PFA) era are all valid under the transition provisions.

Formulation of Standards and Notification of Regulations

Recent years have also witnessed rapid progress in developing new regulations and food standards. FSSAI has notified nearly 9000 provisions for use of around 400 food additives in various food categories, several of which address the majority of issues related to product approval after the discontinuation of the product approval system. These include inter alia Regulations on Health Supplements and Nutraceuticals, Approval for Non-Specified Food and Food Ingredients Regulations and Import Regulations.

Majority of Directions issued under section 16(5) of the Act have been brought into the fold of regulations. Such directions are normally issued to expedite the notification of regulations on areas that have been specified in the Act, but are yet uncovered. FSSAI has notified 4 principal regulations; 7 new regulations which are at various stages of finalization; and 59 amendments to various regulations since 2015.

FSSAI has put in place a robust system comprising of 17 Scientific Panels and a Scientific Committee for review and establishment of science-based standards. In order to address concerns of food businesses and get structured inputs on formulation of standards, Standards Review Groups have been set up with members from Industry Associations. This is only an input, which is then considered by Scientific Panels and Scientific Committee and the Authority. Structured inputs are also taken through consumer groups and organizations in setting standards.

Product Approvals

The system of Product Approvals was suspended on the directions of the Supreme Court on the ground that it was carried out on the strength of advisories by FSSAI and not under regulations. It needs to be clarified that fresh Product Approvals were suspended immediately on the receipt of orders of Hon'ble Supreme Court. In case of product approvals already granted, a risk assessment had been duly carried out as per usual practice, and since the orders of Hon'ble Court were based on procedural rather than safety issues, no action was required to be taken on these cases. Further, it must be noted that provisional PNOCs on product approval given for one year have all lapsed. Therefore, there is no need to withdraw such product approvals. Now, necessary regulations have been framed for Product Approvals not specifically covered under existing regulations.

Food Safety Compliance and Enforcement

Several state food authorities have conducted surveys of food business activities under their jurisdiction and some states have not been able to do so due to acute shortage of manpower. In such cases, limited staff is optimally utilized in effective enforcement and putting pressure on businesses to adhere to food safety and to obtain licences and registrations. FSSAI conducts annual, periodical and geographical area based surveillance activities for effective implementation of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 and Rules and Regulations made thereunder. During the current year Milk Survey is being undertaken.

In the area of Licensing, FSSAI is simplifying processes for licensing and registrations by rationalising and reducing the documents that are required to be submitted. The focus is to ensure more effective enforcement and administration of the FSS Act.

FSSAI has developed mechanisms for risk based inspections and shared the same with States. However, several states do not have adequate manpower to conduct as many inspections as they should, for want of manpower.

Web Based Inspection System (FoSCoRIS)

Further, FSSAI has developed a web-based Inspection System FoSCoRIS (Food Safety and Compliance through Regular Inspections and Sampling) based on Standardised Checklist for inspections of Food Businesses by Food Safety Officers in the field. The web based FoSCoRIS system will help verify compliance of food safety and hygiene standards by food businesses. FoSCoRIS guarantees uniformity, transparency and enables the Food Safety Authorities to monitor it digitally.

Coordination Mechanism on Food Regulatory Ecosystem to facilitate Investment and Trade

FSSAI has established a robust procedure for information sharing and coordination with customs and other agencies for food regulatory matters which would ultimately facilitate investment and

trade. There will be an institutional mechanism comprising of all the relevant ministries/ departments and other agencies which would deliberate on issues such as: coordination in standards setting and quality benchmarking; coordination in regulatory compliance and inspections to reduce regulatory burden on food businesses; coordination in food testing to ensure credibility including issues relating to recognition of labs outside India; and resolve differences among agencies; take up joint initiatives in the above areas for further facilitation of investment and trade.

One Nation One Food Law

FSSAI has launched the Food Regulatory Portal which will act as a single interface for food businesses to cater to both domestic operations and food imports. Further, strengthening government's vision for ease of doing business in India, the FSSAI has launched "One Nation One Food Law" initiatives for all state level food authorities. The "One Nation One Food Law" would ensure consistency and predictability of business environment and enable state food authority to standardized their method of testing, surveillance and implementation of food safety regulation across the country through the help of the Food Regulatory Portal.

Recruitment Regulations

FSSAI has finalized the Recruitment Regulations and asked for creations of about 600 new posts to strengthen FSSAI set up across the country. About 200 these posts are for essential functions of food safety, inspection and enforcement, that were not considered at the initial creation of posts. These functions were also identified essential during performance audit by C&AG. 48 posts proposed are for IT Division, a function earlier outsourced and now being carried out internally. About 40 posts are for social and behavioral change, training and capacity building that require special skill in media, communication, curriculum development, pedagogy and consumer outreach.

General

FSSAI appreciates the inputs from CAG to improve performance of food safety. CAG report should however be seen in the context of the huge and complex task at hand and the fact that FSSAI is new an evolving organization and it faces severe constraints of manpower and resources. It would have been useful if the report had noted a lot of very useful work done by the FSSAI over years that has helped to raise the profile of food safety in the country significantly in recent years. Nevertheless, FSSAI continues to be committed to raise the bar for food safety and hygiene in the country so that citizens can trust food they get in the marketplace.

For media queries, contact:

Ruchika Sharma

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India

E: sharmaruchika.21@gmail.com