

Standing Committee Report Summary

Functioning of Food Safety And Standards Authority of India

- The Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare (Chair: Prof. Ram Gopal Yadav) submitted its report on 'Functioning of Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)' on August 7, 2018. FSSAI is responsible for formulating science based food standards and regulating the manufacture, storage, distribution, and sale of food to ensure consumer safety. Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:
 - **Regulatory framework:** The Committee noted that even after more than a decade of the enactment of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, FSSAI is yet to frame regulations governing various procedures relating to accreditation of food testing laboratories, food labelling standards, and genetically engineered food, among others. Further, the FSSAI has been unable to identify areas for which standards are yet to be formulated or amended. It was observed that most states do not have a separate food safety department to efficiently implement food safety and standards. This has resulted in: (i) lack of quality checks, (ii) food adulteration, (iii) misleading labelling, and (iv) sale of defective food products.
 - The Committee recommended that the FSSAI must frame and notify regulations on all areas that have been specified in the Act within a period of one year. Further, it recommends the establishment of a separate food safety department in all states for enforcing a robust food safety mechanism.
 - **Licensing and registration:** Under the Act, no person can commence or carry on any food business without obtaining a license. The Committee noted that several food businesses were operating either without a license or with expired licenses. Further, licenses were being issued on the basis of incomplete documents by central and state licensing authorities. It also noted that the rejection rate of licenses for renewal is very low. The Committee recommended that FSSAI ensure all licenses issued under the earlier system of product approvals are reviewed, and licenses are cancelled and reissued as required under the present procedure of product approvals.
 - **Food safety surveys:** The Committee observed that FSSAI has left the task of undertaking surveys to states, but states are not equipped to undertake surveys. However, no survey has been conducted for the enforcement of the Act. FSSAI also does not have any database on food businesses. Therefore, it recommended that FSSAI and state food authorities must conduct surveys of food businesses in their jurisdiction.
 - **Food recall plans:** The Committee recommended that FSSAI ensure that every food business has a food recall plan, in case of ban on any food items. Further, it recommended that FSSAI provide recall reports on a fortnightly basis to make consumers aware of adulterated and misbranded products.
 - **Food testing laboratories:** The Committee noted that there is a shortage of laboratories, manpower and functional food testing equipment in most food laboratories (used for testing food samples by FSSAI and state food safety authorities), resulting in deficient testing of food samples. It noted that there are 266 laboratories in the country, many of which lack facilities to test essential parameters like heavy metal, pesticide and bacterial contamination. The Committee recommended a uniform procedure of testing across the country to obtain accurate results. In addition, it recommended each state to frame its recruitment regulations and conduct regular exams to fill up vacancies in laboratories.
 - The Committee also observed that only 13 out of the 62 functional state food laboratories possess National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories accreditation. In this context, the Committee recommended making accreditation of all laboratories mandatory for efficient food quality management.
 - **Amendments to the Act:** The Committee recommended several amendments to the existing Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 to establish a uniform food safety regulatory regime in the country. These recommendations relate to: (i) regulating use of food dye, (ii) regulating primary production i.e., the use of pesticides by farmers and fishermen, and (iii) modifying the process of selection of the Chairman and CEO of FSSAI to include experts and scientists in the food sector.
 - **Shortage of manpower:** The Committee observed that there is acute shortage of staff at FSSAI and state safety authorities which affects food safety measures across the states. It recommended that the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare draw an action plan in coordination with states for overcoming the shortage of manpower.

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