

Ensuring Food Safety

Availability of safe and quality food for the population is of vital importance for any country



Unsafe food is equivalent to an enemy which weakens the economy as it leads to using up of scarce resources for fighting diseases caused due to consumption of unsafe food. In recent years, there has been a spate of food borne diseases all around the world, which necessitated the need for establishing a food safety management system by all types of players within the food chain.

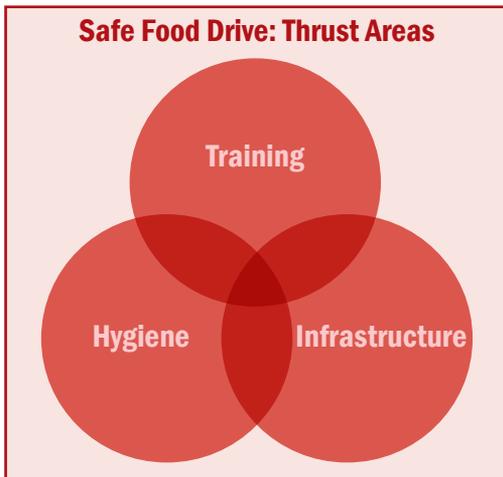
A move towards ensuring safe food...

Food hawkers in India are generally unaware of food regulations and have no training in food handling. They also lack support services such as good-quality water supply and waste disposal systems, which hamper their ability to provide safe food. Therefore, there is a need for a move to ensure safe, healthy and sustainable food supply, and bring awareness among consumers to demand safe and

quality food. Almost simultaneously, the practice of good hygiene among consumers, producers and food processors has to be promoted.

India is about to witness dramatic changes in food norms, impacting the sector significantly, if initiatives being taken by Food Safety & Standards Authority (FSSAI), which was established in 2006, are a yardstick. The food safety movement would focus on three

Safe Food Drive: Thrust Areas



aspects - training of manpower, infrastructure development and hygienic food options.

Some of the key reforms taking place are:

1. A new Integrated food safety law
2. Licensing and monitoring of every food manufacturer
3. Formulation of food recall procedures in case of unsafe or hazardous products
4. Mandatory compliance with GAP (good agricultural practices) for big retailers, labeling changes for packaged food items
5. Organic food certification
6. Setting water quality standards and verification of claims by food supplement companies

The Food Safety & Standards Rules, 2011 have replaced from the first week of August 2011. This new act includes graded penalties for offence against indulgence in any malpractices. Manufacturing, storing, selling misbranded or substandard food is punished with a fine and more serious offences with imprisonment. For instance, the penalty for manufacturing or selling substandard food can be up to Rs 90,000 (US\$ 2000), while that for misbranded food is up to Rs 1,35,000 (US\$ 3000).

The act also provides for compensation in the event of consumer injury or death. Under the new law, India is expected to have 8,000 to 9,000 food safety officers, rather than inspectors, or at least 10 officers per district, as compared to 2,100 food inspectors or three

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inspectors to a district. Apart from upgradation of existing laboratories, the authority wants to increase the number of state labs to 250-300 from 72 at present. The new standards for licensing and monitoring of food production in India from local dairies to roadside food stalls, aim to improve safety standards and enforcement across the country.

More ministries and sections of the sector shall be joining forces to carry out a year long campaign to reach out to all the stakeholders and consumers on food safety and quality initiatives. Rather than having six to seven separate food laws for meat, milk, edible oil, fruits and vegetables, the integrated food law will lay down uniform standards and a central mechanism on safety.

The Centre, states, municipalities and panchayats will implement the same. Furthermore, it is an attempt to ensure that the responsibility of food safety lies with the manufacturer, whereas the focus of safety must be on the entire supply chain - production, processing, distribution, and marketing. Lack of manpower and dearth of quality infrastructure are major hurdles for the law to be enforced in a meaningful manner.

The food safety drive led initiatives...

1. 11 cities have been selected as a Safe Food Town
2. 10,000 street vendors across the nation would be identified, profiled and steps taken to upgrade the safety and quality of their food, and be granted quality certification on the basis of standards which have already been identified.
3. Identification of food streets in 75 cities across India. Six food streets with ethnic cuisine would be identified, under which the majority of stakeholders would be

upgraded in terms of quality and hygiene, and support will be given for creation of infrastructure such as drainage, water supply, lighting, etc

4. 50 food safety laboratories would be identified which would be benchmarked against industry best practices, and a plan of action drawn up for their upgrade
5. The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) Centre for Corporate Education, Training & Consultancy (CCETC) and School of Agriculture (SoA) collectively with FSSAI to lead the training modules on food safety and hygiene for educating housewives and young girls. Introduction to food safety, quality of water, requirements for a kitchen, principles of safe food preparation, cross-contamination and purchase of raw materials and processed foods will be some of the topics to be covered in the appreciation programme.

Implication of new food safety law

The Indian government is aiming to ensure that only quality food is consumed in the country. The processes and practices that are being initiated will continue to usher in new initiatives of food safety and quality in the future with increased awareness and resultant economic and social benefits. Street food would be the first variety to have an impact if there are more stringent checks of quality and hygiene to make sure it's safe to eat. The food safety move would enforce the licensing or registration of all food manufacturing, selling units and street food vendors. Hence, this would result in entailing street vendors to maintain accepted levels of hygiene and better quality food. Also it would be easier to trace and take suitable actions against food vendors and manufacturers who are not offering a quality which is acceptable. The change is positive and would also offer great employment opportunities for trained manpower and food experts. ■

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Some Food Safety Initiatives		
Initiatives	Cities Identified	Type of Assistance
Safe Food Town (2008-09)	Ranchi, Nagpur, Kochi, Ludhiana, Jaipur, Agra, Guwahati, Agartala	Financial assistance
Safe Food Street (2008-09)	Tirupati, Hyderabad, Amritsar, Varanasi, Udaipur, Guwahati	Training to vendors

SOURCE: MoFPI, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA