

# Food Safety Act takes effect from today

August 5, 2011

Initiating a new era in food safety, the Food Safety and Standards Act of 2006 will come into force across the country from Friday making it at par with the international standards. It will ensure improved quality of food for the consumers and censure misleading claims and advertisement by those in food business.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), established under the overarching legislation, will lay down science based standards for food items and regulate their manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import to ensure availability of safe and wholesome food for human consumption. As many as 22 States and Union Territories now have Food Commissioners in place as required under the Act, while seven are expected to do so by the time it is enforced.

The Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 which comes into effect five years after it was passed in Parliament, subsumes various central Acts like Prevention of Food Adulteration Act of 1954 , Fruit Products Order of 1955, Meat Food Products Order of 1973, Vegetable Oil Products (Control) Order of 1947, Edible Oils Packaging (Regulation) Order of 1988, Solvent Extracted Oil, De- Oiled Meal and Edible Flour (Control) Order of 1967, Milk and Milk Products Order of 1992 and also any order issued under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 relating to food. It will ensure prevention of fraudulent, deceptive or unfair trade practices which may mislead or harm the consumer, and unsafe, contaminated or sub-standard food.

Talking to reporters here, V.N. Gaur, Chief Executive Officer of FSSAI, said the Food Safety and Standards Authority will broadly frame regulations to lay down the standards and guidelines for food items and specify an appropriate system of enforcing various standards. It will specify mechanisms for accreditation of certified bodies engaged in certification of food safety management system for food businesses, and procedures for accreditation of laboratories.

## **Biological risk**

The FSSAI, set up in 2008, will collect and collate data regarding food consumption, incidence and prevalence of biological risk, residues of various contaminants in foods products, identification of emerging risks and introduction of rapid alert system. The data will help in the implementation of the proposed Food Security Bill and also contribute to the development of international technical standards for food, sanitary and phyto-sanitary standards.

While the FSSAI will be based in New Delhi, the states will have a Food Safety Commissioner, and the SDM who will be the designated office at the district level to issue licenses along with the Food Safety Officers (Food Inspectors) who have been trained for their new roles.

According to Mr. Gaur, while defining the roles of food business operators and regulator (FSSAI), the Act has provision for compounding offences (except for which punishment is prescribed), adjudication and trials in Appellate Tribunals and special courts, including summary trials. The time limit for prosecutions has also been fixed. The trial has to start within a year from the date of commission of offence. As of now, more than one lakh cases related to food standard offences are pending in various courts across the country.

The four major food-testing laboratories have been taken over by the Authority and it is in the process of acquiring two more. But the bigger challenge before the government is to upgrade the 72-odd food testing laboratories at the State level which are woefully inadequate for the modern requirements particularly in the wake of India being a signatory in the WTO. The Authority proposes to grant Rs. 5 crore each for the strengthening of these laboratories under the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan.