FSSAI IN NEWS

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FSSAI says CAG ignored their points while collating performance report

FSSAI to set up more Referral Labs for dispute redressal

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Terming most of the negative observations that the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has made in its Performance Report of Food Safety & Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) tabled in the Parliament yesterday as “lack of proper understanding” and without considering explanations offered by FSSAI, Pawan Agarwal, CEO of the apex Authority said that the food safety ecosystem in the country is safe and robust and on the right path to be globally benchmarked. Agarwal was speaking after announcing the partnership that FSSAI has entered with the National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI) for its National Street Food Festival in New Delhi between January 12 - 14.

Answering each point raised by CAG in its report, Agarwal said that the Food Testing infrastructure in the country has improved a lot in the last couple of years. “Overall lab capacity is not a major issue,” he said. From just about 82 accredited labs two years, the number of accredited labs in the country has gone up by 152, he said. While conceding that the foods labs in the States are devoid of proper facilities, he said that the process of upgrading around 45 identified labs are underway with an estimated investment of INR 450 cr. “NABL accreditation takes at least two years’ time to complete,” he said.

He said that FSSAI is upgrading its own Food Lab in Ghaziabad on Private partnership model, and if it is proved to be successful, the same model will be replicated for the proposed labs in JNPT Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata.

He said that the Authority will be empanelling at least 6 to 8 labs as Referral Labs so that right testing methodology can be developed as well as proficiency of testing and training of staff for food labs can be done.

On the issue of formulation of standards and notification of regulations, which was a major point in the CAG Report, Agarwal said that a robust system is in place as far as formulations of standards and regulations are concerned. He said that many new standards have come up in the last one year by which product approvals are not even required for many items. The entire observation on product approval by the CAG is wrong and lack of proper understanding, Agarwal said.
He said that FSSAI works under lot of constraints as far as human resource is concerned compared to regulatory systems in matured markets like the US or Canada are concerned. He said that lot of efforts have gone into capacity building over the last couple of years.

In order to improve the standards of lab tests and bring consistency, Agarwal said that an online India Food Lab network has been developed so that uniform procedures and testing parameters are followed to avoid inconsistency in results.