FSSAI using technology to enforce food safety norms: CEO

Food regulator FSSAI is using technology in a big way to enforce its norms and has set up an IT platform for safety compliances to bring consistency and transparency in inspection, its CEO Pawan Agarwal said today.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) will soon make it mandatory for all food businesses to employ food safety supervisor, he said, adding that the move would be a game changer and reduce compliance burden.

“We have started using technology in registration and licensing of the food business operators (FBOs). All our systems are IT-based,” he said, addressing a CII’s food safety, quality and regulatory summit. Agarwal said the authority has strengthened its internal IT team to ensure effective compliance of food safety law.

He said the regulator has developed standardised testing methods and protocols for food products and launched IT enabled Indian Food Laboratory Network (INFoLNet). All food labs, which are FSSAI notified, are submitting food testing reports online on this network, he added.

“To reach scale, we need technology,” he said.

That apart, Agarwal said the FSSAI has created a smart and digital compliance system.
A large-scale IT platform for Food Safety Compliance through Regular Inspections and Sampling (FoSCoRIS) is being put in place for adoption across all States. Agarwal said this smart-phone based system is being tested in Madhya Pradesh and Goa by the food safety officers and will soon be rolled out across the country.

“This will bring consistency and transparency in food safety inspection and sampling,” he said.

To achieve its mandate to provide safe and wholesome food to all, Agarwal said the regulator is partnering with other stakeholders including corporates and consumer organisations.

He, however, said ensuring compliances of food safety regulations in unorganised sector is a challenge. “We organised training programme for street vendors but we need to continuously engage with them,” he added.

Agarwal said the authority has taken many initiatives in last few years and has also sensitised state government as they are responsible for the enforcement of food safety law.

However, he said: “We have to go a long way to bring States on the same page. But now there is greater engagement with the food safety commissioners”.

Speaking at the summit, Nestle India CMD Suresh Narayanan said the Indian food industry is valued at close to USD 40 billion and is expected to grow at a CAGR of close to 11 per cent.

Stating that the food processing has multiplier effects on our economy being one of the country’s largest employment creators, he said the industry attracts domestic and foreign investments, and contributes to exports, amongst others.

He said the rising FDI into the Indian food sector from food giants across the world is a testimony to the growing interests in the Indian market.

According to the data provided by the DIPP, the food processing industry in India has received around USD 7.5 billion foreign direct investment during the period April 2000 to December 2016, he added.

Narayanan, who is also the Chairman of the CII National Committee on Food Processing, said the evolving regulatory regime that is focused on developing a strong and credible food safety and regulatory system has enabled the Indian food processing industry in taking a high level national and international consumer projects.

India is being established as a preferred investment destination on the back of initiatives taken by the FSSAI in strengthening the food standards and by institutionalising the mechanism for consistent scientific review of standards, he added.