FSSAI focuses on ease of doing business

The Food Regulatory Portal, which was launched on Thursday, will act as a single interface for food businesses to cater to both domestic operations and food imports.

Further strengthening Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s vision for ease of doing business in India, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), the country’s apex food regulator, has launched the “One Nation One Food Law” initiative for all state level food authorities.

The “One Nation One Food Law” would ensure consistency and predictability of business environment, and enable state food authorities to standardise their method of testing, surveillance and implementation of food safety regulation across the country through the help of the Food Regulatory Portal launched on Thursday.

The Food Regulatory Portal for food businesses focuses on six key areas, which are food standards, consistent enforcement, hassle free food imports, credible food testing, codified food safety practices, and training and capacity building. This portal will act as a single interface for food businesses to cater to both domestic operations and food imports. This portal has a centralised code and ethics for food safety and standards that can be easily accessible to all food manufacturers and food safety officers on a digital platform for quick and easy access.

In an exclusive conversation with The Sunday Guardian, Pawan Agarwal, CEO of FSSAI, said, “Even when the Food Safety and Standards Act was enacted in 2006, its implementation across the states has not always been uniform due to legacy issues, leading to business uncertainties. Even at the national level, a few specific issues continued to be looked after by different ministries or agencies. The launch of the Food Regulatory Portal today is a major development, as it creates a robust environment for uniform implementation of the law across the states and coordinated approach across all central agencies, leading to a transparent and enabling business environment.”
Asked about the challenges faced by the food regulator at state levels, he said, “The challenge we faced was the limited understanding of the law by food officers in the field which led to different interpretation and lack of implementation. To address this challenge, we have come up with digitisation of food standards and regulations. I think the manuals that we have prepared and the technology we are using will also address the issue of manpower shortage in the field and also give them guidance as to what they can be doing in a given situation.”

For a large country like India, there are less than 130 food-testing laboratories across the country. Among these 130, some do not even function according to the “standards” and “capacities” such laboratories are supposed to adhere to.

However, Pawan Agarwal said, “The government is investing a huge amount of money to develop the food testing infrastructure and as the food business starts to grow in India, more laboratories will be added. And from now on, all the food tests across all laboratories will be following the same set of parameters codified under the law and follow similar standards across the country.”

About the arbitrary behaviour of food inspectors in some states with regard to food sampling and testing, Agarwal said, “We are addressing this issue through the introduction of Food Safety Compliance through Regular Inspections and Sampling (FoSCoRIS,) which will bring an end to the arbitrariness and adhocism in inspections and sampling. FoSCoRIS will replace manual inspections with digital inspections. For consistency, we have developed standard matrices for inspection of various kinds of food businesses and we are hopeful that these measures will create a positive environment in the food business sector.”