Coca-Cola ties up with FSSAI to train street food vendors

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Coca-Cola India has tied up with FSSAI to train 50,000 street food vendors over the next three years in food safety, hygiene and waste management.

New Delhi: A sector regulator and the companies under its watch aren’t usually partners. The regulator frames the rules and ensures that companies abide by them. But Pawan Kumar Agarwal, chief executive officer of Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), believes companies can join hands with the food regulator in its primary task—ensuring safe food for every Indian.

Towards that end, the local unit of American beverages company Coca-Cola Co. formally signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with FSSAI on Monday. Under the agreement, Coca-Cola India will train 50,000 street food vendors, irrespective of items they sell, over the next three years. The vendors will get training on how to prepare safe food, ensure hygiene, and in waste management.

Coca-Cola and FSSAI are now finalizing the curriculum for the training. The field training will start next month in Ludhiana, Punjab. Training retailers is not new for Coca-Cola. It has, in the past 10 years, offered training to about 350,000 retailers in India, but has never trained street food vendors, said Venkatesh Kini, president (India and South West Asia), Coca-Cola.

Coca-Cola is not alone. Nestle India Ltd, the local arm of the Swiss packaged food company whose single-largest revenue earner Maggi instant noodles was banned by FSSAI in 2015 for about six months on safety concerns, has recently worked with the regulator to train 700 street food vendors in Goa.
“Besides Nestle and Coca-Cola, we are also working with companies like ITC Ltd, Mondelez India, TetraPak, Jubilant FoodWorks, Yum Brands, among others, for different projects related to nutrition and food safety,” Agarwal said.

While cigarette-to-biscuit maker ITC is working with FSSAI to ensure nutritious food at about 10,000 schools, Mondelez is working on ensuring safe food and nutrition at 40 underprivileged schools in north Delhi besides the points of sale in the retail market, according to the regulator. Like Coca-Cola, for most of the companies, these activities will be part of their corporate social responsibility initiatives.

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For the past few months, Agarwal has been vocal about FSSAI’s aim to ensure safe and nutritious food for every Indian. In September last year, it initiated a special programme to promote safe food at all places including homes, schools, offices, eateries and even religious places while commemorating the 10th anniversary of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.

The regulator had, in January, said it aims to make use of fortified wheat flour, fortified edible oil and double fortified iodized salt mandatory for mid-day meals by December 2019 and in the public distribution system (PDS) by January 2020. Last week, FSSAI said in a statement that all major edible oil makers in India have agreed to add vitamins A and D to make their products fortified within the next three months.

According to the regulator’s estimates, fortification of edible oil with added vitamins A and D will increase manufacturing cost by 10 paise per litre.

The regulator had finalized standards for fortified rice, wheat flour, milk, edible oil and salt in January.