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FSSAI panel to address concerns on health supplements, nutraceuticals

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Challenge with food supplements is that there is no framework for testing food supplements products

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) on Thursday said it is in the process of addressing concerns raised by the industry on new standards for eight categories of products, including health supplements and nutraceuticals, which were notified in 2016.

"These standards will come into force for compliance from January 1, 2018, so we have a little time at hand before these come into compliance and hopefully we will be able to iron out those differences and concerns which will be addressed within the next 5-6 months that we have," Pawan Agarwal, Chief Executive Officer of FSSAI, said while addressing an 'Assocham National Symposium on Nutraceuticals'.

The FSSAI chief said the standards of nutraceuticals were released by the food regulator a few months ago after very prolonged deliberations by the scientific panel, scientific committee and then the authority.
"There are associated standards and regulations, and the key amongst them being labelling regulations, claim regulations for which again the draft will soon be available on our website and we will be very happy to get feedback from the industry on those drafts," he said.

Agarwal added that these are also quite contentious issues considering that consumers' interest for any regulator is primary. "I think that is non-negotiable. So any food supplement manufacturer giving any kinds of claims has to be extra cautious and as a regulator we have to ensure that those claims are substantiated with evidence."

On the labelling, he said there may not be too many issues, however, adding that FSSAI has been getting reports from the field that increasingly large number of spurious products are available in the market today.

"The challenge with the food supplements is that there is no robust framework for testing of food supplements products. There are also issues about good manufacturing practices around food supplements and nutraceuticals sectors," said the FSSAI chief.

He said that FSSAI had set up a technical panel with representatives from food supplement companies to put together the framework for goods manufacturing practices (GMPs) for nutraceuticals and food supplements.

Agarwal said though there are many companies that import food supplements, the FSSAI intends to provide them a level-playing field. But considering the 'Make in India' campaign of the government, their focus is on promoting much of processing and manufacturing within India.
The FSSAI chief added that it is imperative for both the industry and government to work together to provide a more robust framework for growth of food supplement and nutraceuticals sector in India.

J.P. Meena, Secretary, Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI), stressed upon the need to make the food supplements and nutraceuticals affordable as about 43 per cent children across India remain malnourished while the sector mainly caters to the middle and upper-middle class consumers.

Meena said the MoFPI has particularly been focusing on making farmers/growers partners in the growth story of food processing sector.

"Unless the benefits to some extent are passed on to the farmers, I see that the future of industry will not be very stable and we may not be able to face challenges which will emerge in the future on account of health concerns," he said.

He also said that with regard to capacity expansion and creating new capacities, MoFPI has come out with a new scheme, 'Kisan Sampada', whereby the government will be investing Rs 6,000 crore over the next three years, which should bring an investment of about Rs 35,000 crore in the food processing sector as a whole.