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India’s food regulator plans leftover banks to feed the hungry

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FSSAI is looking at creating a mechanism through which food can be collected from restaurants, weddings, large-scale parties.

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The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is in the process of creating a network of food banking partners to collect and distribute leftover food from large parties and weddings to the hungry.

A notification to create a separate category of food business operators (FBOs), who will be licensed to deal only with leftover food, has been drafted to ensure the quality of food. “We are looking at partnering with NGOs or organisations that collect, store and distribute surplus food to ensure..."
they maintain certain hygiene and health standards when handling food,” said Pawan Agarwal, CEO of FSSAI.

“All food, whether it is paid for or distributed free, must meet the country’s food safety and hygiene standards,” he said.

The organisations in the business of collecting leftover food will now have to work in collaboration with FSSAI so their efforts can be scaled up.

“*Tonnes of food is wasted annually and can be used to feed several thousands. We are looking at creating a mechanism through which food can be collected from restaurants, weddings, large-scale parties etc,” said Agarwal.*

The initiative will set up a helpline network where organisations can call in for collection but reaching individuals who want to directly donate food will take time.

“We will have a central helpline number. Reaching people at the household level may not be feasible initially but it is an integral part of the long-term plan,” he said.

“We have begun collecting names of people working in the sector. There are still a few months to go before the scheme materialises,” said Agarwal.

“Collecting food going waste to feed the hungry is a noble thought but to transport, store and maintain the cold chain of cooked food is a huge challenge. The logistics are a nightmare, which is why we don’t handle leftovers and only distribute uncooked food that can be cooked locally,” said Kuldip Nar, founder of Delhi NCR Food Bank, which has been feeding the poor in 10 cities since 2011.