FSSAI considering third-party auditing of railway catering pan-India

FSSAI IN NEWS

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The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is actively considering third-party auditing of the railway catering services in the wake of the recent uproar regarding the kind of food served aboard trains across the country, for which the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) also pulled up the Railways.

This is a part of the larger plan made by the country’s apex food regulator, which also includes the provisional identification of auditing firms and regulations for food safety auditing by third parties.

Pawan Kumar Agarwal, chief executive officer, FSSAI, said, “The authority has already issued draft regulations for food safety auditing by third parties, but until they are finalised, it will identify the auditing firms or agencies, and one of these will conduct the audit of the Indian Railways catering services.”

He said, “While the regulations are finalised, we are conducting the provisional registrations of such auditing firms to get a sense of how many such agencies exist and we might conduct third-party auditing of railways catering services.”

FSSAI has issued expressions of interest (EoIs) for the provisional recognition of food safety auditing agencies, and the provisionally-recognised auditing agencies will only be engaged by the regulator to audit some food businesses as decided by it.

Meanwhile, FSSAI has notified draft Food Safety and Standards (Food Safety Auditing) Regulations, 2017 for stakeholder consultation. In order to cultivate and foster the growth of compliance culture, the apex food regulator is enabling compliance through auditing agencies.

“While emphasising on self-compliance by the food businesses to address
the need to monitor such compliance, FSSAI is envisaging introducing third-party audit of the food companies by FSSAI-recognised auditing agencies,” the regulator stated.

“This draft Food Safety and Standards (Food Safety Auditing) Regulations, 2017 includes the procedure for the recognition of auditing agencies, the procedure for renewal/cancellation/suspension of recognition, the terms and conditions of recognition, the auditing procedure, the duties of auditors and the audit reporting and audit monitoring system,” it added.

As reported earlier by FnBnews, the selected food categories, on the basis of their risk classification, will be subject to third-party auditing. Food businesses falling under such categories would be required to get their businesses timely audited by recognised auditing agencies on their own. Food businesses which are not subject to mandatory third-party auditing can also voluntarily opt for the same.

Food businesses having satisfactory audits may be subjected to less frequent inspection by Central or state licensing authorities. Hence, third-party audits will reduce the burden on the regulatory inspections conducted by Central or state licensing authorities and also encourage the efficient self-compliance by the food businesses.

FSSAI has invited comments from stakeholders within 30 days from the date of becoming available to the public.

The regulator stated, “Once the Draft Food Safety and Standards (Food Safety Auditing) Regulations, 2017 is vetted and finally notified, the food authority shall, from time to time, specify the category of food businesses which shall be liable for mandatory audits, and the food business operators (FBOs) which are not mandatorily subject to food safety auditing, but are desirous of getting audited by the recognised auditing agency, can opt for the same as laid down in Section 8(2) of the Regulations.”

“Also, the audits conducted by the provisionally-recognised auditing agencies would be deemed to be conducted under the Food Safety and Standards (Food Safety Auditing) Regulations, 2017,” it added.