Pulses and beans imported into India are safe. There is no concern regarding the presence of glyphosate in these commodities. This is based on the results of the tests conducted on these products over the past one month.

FSSAI, the country’s apex food regulator, had instructed its import offices at ports to start monitoring for the presence of glyphosate for pulses and beans last month. Pulses and beans are imported into India mainly through Mumbai, Chennai and Tuticorin.

Speaking on the issue, Pawan Kumar Agarwal, chief executive officer, FSSAI, reassured that such monitoring of pulses for glyphosate will continue for some more time, till it is established for sure that there are no residues of glyphosate in imported pulses.

Glyphosate is a non-selective herbicide which is used to kill weeds, especially annual broadleaf weeds and grasses that compete with crops. Glyphosate is absorbed through foliage and minimally through roots, meaning that it is only effective on actively-growing plants and cannot prevent seeds from germinating.

In India, as per the Central Insecticide Board and Registration Committee (CIBRC), glyphosate is registered under Section 9(3) of the Insecticide Act, 1968, and the Food Safety and Standards (Contaminants, Toxins and Residues) Regulations, 2011, prescribe the maximum residue level (MRL) of 1mg/kg for the presence of glyphosate in tea.

There are no prescribed MRLs for glyphosate for pulses in the Food Safety and Standards (Contaminants, Toxins and Residues) Regulations, 2011. So, considering the representations received by FSSAI concerning the high levels of the herbicide in imported pulses, an order
dated October 12, 2018, was issued by the apex regulator, wherein MRL for glyphosate in pulses, as specified by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), would be considered for testing of pulses until FSSAI specify its own limits. Authorised officers (AOs) at ports have been directed to monitor and share data with the FSSAI headquarters every 15 days for the presence of glyphosate in imported pulses.

Whenever imported food articles are referred to FSSAI for clearance by the Customs Authorities are subjected to scrutiny, visual analysis, sampling and testing in order to determine whether or not they conform to the safety and quality standards established and laid down under the Food Safety and Standards Regulations, 2011, and various orders issued from time to time. If sample is found conforming, a no-objection certificate (NOC) is generated, and if not, a non-conforming report (NCR) is generated.

After the order dated October 12, 2018, monthly data pertaining to the glyphosate level in pulses received from ports directly handled by FSSAI was analysed, and it has been observed that of the 319 consignments tested, glyphosate residues were found in only seven consignments and they were found to be within the prescribed MRLs. So, it may be observed from above that there is no concern of any kind, as FSSAI AOs at ports are regularly monitoring the presence of glyphosate in pulses at the time of import before their clearances.

Agarwal expressed concern that the order dated October 12, 2018 was misreported by certain sections of the media, which created a scare among the public at large about the safety of pulses.

He hoped that the media is more circumspect while reporting on the issue of food safety, so that public trust in food available in the market is maintained. He also pointed out that FSSAI will soon organise a workshop for media professionals on risk communication around food safety to build media capacity on responsible reporting of issues on food safety.