FSSAI seeks participation of 95 cities in Food Smart City initiative

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Prashant Nikale, Mumbai

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has written to the administrations of 95 cities to participate in its ambitious Food Smart City project, which is aimed at providing a system for food safety and hygiene.

According to the country’s apex food regulator, the project is based on the concept of looking food on an end-to-end basis, from production to consumption and focusing on local actions that can trigger change across the country. Inviting the city commissioners to participate in the project, Pawan Kumar Agrawal, chief executive officer, FSSAI, said, “Food is the heart of human health and wellness, and a holistic plan must provide for system for food safety and hygiene.” “FSSAI, in consultation with officials from the Central government and international experts, have identified a broad four-pillared approach to create a food smart city,” he added.

The six norms for Smart City are as follows:

- To encourage 100 per cent licensing and registration on the online portal
- To upgrade the food testing labs and food safety officers (FSOs)
- To facilitate the supply of fortified food staples
- To create food street or night market for traditional food
- To set up an institutional mechanism to raise awareness about different Safe and Nutritional Food (SNF) campaigns
- To establish a partnership with at least one organisation in domain of excess food management
The concept
Agrawal explained, “To address the urbanisation challenges, the ministry of urban development unveiled the Smart City mission in 2015 to develop physical, institutional, social and economic infrastructure in cities.”

“To address the food challenges in urban India, FSSAI wants to extend this mission to build smart cities which will look at the food system on an end-to-end basis, from production to consumption,” he added.

“It will integrate the sustainable food safety and nutrition system within the design of Smart City and will focus on local actions to trigger change across the country and create a change model,” Agarwal said.

Meanwhile, Madhavika Bhajoria, project manager, food fortification resource centre, FSSAI, and key person, Food Smart City project, said, “We are planning to work with the city administrations to identify gap areas in their food system, as per the food smart city framework.”

“Once the gap areas are identified, we will work with the city to design a project to address the gap areas by linking them with one of our national and international partners, who specialise in addressing food system challenges in an urban context,” she added.

“Nationally, we are collaborating with the ministry of urban development and internationally, we are collaborating with Food Foundation UK, EAT Foundation and the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP) and academics from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine,” she added.

MUFPP is a pact which fosters the role of cities in changing food production and consumption paradigm. It has been signed by 140 cities across the world and C-40 is their network of world megacities to address climate change and food systems sustainability.

Bhajoria added, “We started off by only focusing on Smart Cities, but have now opened it up to all cities. As part of our outreach efforts in this project, we have written to about 95 cities in India.”
Plan of action

FSSAI have proposed a four-pillared approach with actionables to accompany each pillar. These processes, practices and campaigns can be adopted by cities as per their needs to become Food Smart Cities.

Pillar 1: Ensuring food safety and hygiene

(a) Institutional infrastructure
It will include licensing and registration systems online, including payments, integrating common service centres (CSCs) - ease of doing business, risk-based surveillance and inspection systems and grievance redressal and citizen connect.

(b) Physical infrastructure
Physical infrastructure will assure adequate and trained regulatory staff and testing laboratories. Planning for healthy and safe food environments like model outlets for street food model, vegetable and fruit mandies or hawking zones, preventing food deserts.

Short healthy and resilient supply chains like procurement portals, space for urban growing of perishables (especially fruit and vegetables), promoting school college farms and instituting food safety management systems (FSMS) at slaughterhouses as per the standards laid down by FSSAI.

(c) Social infrastructure people capital
- Training food business operators (FBOs) - Food Safety Training and Certification (FoSTaC)
- Encouraging community participation through municipalities

Pillar 2: Improve diets to deliver health improvements

Dietary diversification
- Guidelines for reduction in high-fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) foods
  - Promoting local and traditional healthy foods with Food Street Hub

(b) Tackling dietary in equality
- Fortification of staple foods with micronutrients that Indians are deficient in
• Food fortification resource centres at FSSAI are supporting consumer demand for healthy food through inclusion in government programmes and the open market
  • Creating smart apps and healthy food zones in the city

Pillar 3: Social and behavioural change
  • Large-scale advocacy and training to bring about behavioural change for a sustainable food system - Safe and Nutritious Food (SNF) campaign

Pillar 4: Surplus food collection and food loss management
  • Pillar four will insure infrastructure facilitation, efficient transport, proper storage and refrigeration facilities
  • It suggests a smart solution - to develop a common platform and database for food businesses and organisation in the domain of surplus food collection and food loss management

**Challenges of rapid urbanisation**
Agrawal stated, “The cities are the engines of growth in India. Over 60 cities have populations of over a million. It is because of this unplanned growth that India is facing several challenges, like cities falling short of basic civic infrastructure and facilities and citizens inhabiting unhealthy environments. The urban poor have become the most disadvantaged in society.

**Food challenges in rapidly urbanising India**
FSSAI has marked three major challenges - food sufficiency concerns (that is, the shrinking availability of agricultural land); food quality concerns (which highlight the questionable food safety and hygiene across the food system and point out that India has triple burden of undernutrition, micronutrient deficiency and overweight and obesity) and environmental concerns (which talks about sustainability of food production and consumption).