Imported food items will need to have three months to go for expiry

NEW DELHI: All food items imported from other countries will need to have at least three months to go for expiry or a minimum 60 per cent of shelf life, the food safety regulator has proposed. To enforce this, the regulator has proposed that no customs officer will approve import of any food item that does not meet this norm. In a draft notification issued on Friday, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) said, "Customs shall not clear any article of food unless it has a valid shelf life of not less than sixty per cent or three months before expiry whichever is less at the time of import." Shelf life refers to the period between the date of manufacture and the 'best before use' or 'date of expiry', whichever is earlier as printed on the label.

The move gains significance since there have been instances of foodstuff landing in India with very little time before their expiry. The draft notification also specifies that the food importer shall register with the Directorate General of Foreign Trade and needs to have a valid import-export code. Moreover, FSSAI shall profile the importer, custom house agent, manufacturer of the imported product, imported product, country of origin, source country of the consignment, port of entry and history of compliance.

The importer shall submit certificate of sanitary export from authorised agencies in exporting countries for the categories of food as may be specified by the food safety regulation, according to the draft notification.

Last week, the FSSAI also issued guidelines for the process to recall food products from markets if these were found unsafe. The guidelines put the onus of implementing any recall on manufacturers and distributors. The regulator has also said that it could review the licence of food companies if the recall was related to serious health issues.