To ensure that all the food business operators (FBOs) operate with the prescribed licenses or registration in Uttar Pradesh, the state food and drug administration (UPFDA) plans to launch a statewide drive soon.

According to senior functionaries of the state FDA, FBOs can continue to run their businesses only if they possess the license or registration as mandated by the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.

Ramaraj Maurya, additional commissioner, UPFDA, stated that the state authority had planned a drive and will check if there is any FBO operating without a valid license or registration.

“It has been mandated under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 that any FBO found operating without a valid license or registration will be penalised,” he added.

“We will ensure that every FBO operates with a prescribed license or registration as required. For this, we plan to start a drive,” Maurya reiterated. However, he did not stipulate a timeline for the drive.

However, it is also pertinent to mention here that the actual number of FBOs across the state and country is unknown.

Last year, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), the country’s apex food regulator, refused to extend the deadline for obtaining licenses and registering beyond August 4, 2016. Its focus was more on educating the FBOs about the responsibilities under the Act than mere registration.
Commenting on the issue, Pawan Kumar Agarwal, chief executive officer, FSSAI, said, “It is a continuous process, and FSSAI regularly issues directives to the state authorities to make sure that the FBOs operate with valid licenses and registrations.”

“However, no directive has been issued to a particular state. Each state has been given the autonomy to act independent of others. They can take action, including penalising or compounding errant FBOs. The powers have been mentioned in the Act,” he added.

Agarwal said, “To further strengthen the process of licensing and registration, FSSAI plans to use technology-based solutions. For instance, it plans to use mobiles to check whether the licensing and registration regulations are being complied with.”

Meanwhile, a number of other states have also increased their efforts in this direction.

A Maharashtra FDA official said, “Licensing is a basic requirement to start and run a business. However, getting all the FBOs to obtain licenses or register their businesses can, at times, be a difficult task. The state has about seven lakh registered FBOs and perhaps as many unregistered ones. New businesses are set up on a daily basis. The number of food safety officers (FSOs) in the state is estimated to be between 150 and 170. They are entrusted with the task of keeping a check on over seven lakh FBOs. It becomes difficult to keep strict surveillance on all of them.”

He added, “We conduct drives across Maharashtra regularly, primarily to educate small FBOs, some of whom are clueless about the licensing and registration process. However, sometimes we come across FBOs who, despite being aware of the system, run their businesses without proper licenses. In such cases, they are warned first. If they fail to register themselves despite the warning, we take strict against against them.”

Even in neighbouring Gujarat, special drives are routine. Stated H G Koshia, commissioner, Food and Drug Control Administration (FDCA) Gujarat, “On a number of occasions in the past, we have conducted special licensing and registration drives across the state.”
“Recently, at a special meeting we had in Ahmedabad with all the state FSOs, it was discussed that there are remote areas in Gujarat where some FBOs do not possess valid licenses,” he added.

“The list of such villages has been submitted to the FSOs, who will immediately commence checking these areas and conduct licensing and registration drives. If we come across FBOs flouting the rules stipulated under the Act, immediate action will be taken against them,” Koshia said.

In Telangana, a senior functionary with the state food safety department, said, “To ensure the smooth enforcement of the licensing and registration regulations in the state, we carry out drives regularly. We also have an awareness programme in place, where street vendors are educated about the importance of maintaining quality and hygiene.”

However, Kerala has not planned any crack down on unlicensed and unregistered FBOs.

D Ashrafudeen, joint commissioner, food safety (enforcement), Commissionerate of Food Safety, government of Kerala, said, “We mostly undertake raids when complaints are lodged. At a recent meeting, it was decided that if two or more such cases are registered in any district, they will be prosecuted.”