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India needs single nodal agency for organic standards: Report

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 6: India needs a single nodal agency for fixing standards for organic products and a comprehensive regulation encompassing export, import and domestic markets to promote the sector and increase exports, a study carried out by a top research institute has suggested.

The paper, brought out by Delhi-based think tank ICRIER is based on a survey of companies dealing in organic products. It also stressed the importance of product traceability to ensure that items being bought by consumers are genuinely organic.

Piecemeal regulations

“Our survey, covering 75 companies, reveal that businesses feel that one of the main factors hindering growth of organic products is that there is no nodal government agency responsible for it. Multiple government bodies are doing piecemeal regulations which often confuses exporters,” said Arpita Mukherjee from ICRIER who co-authored the report.
There is also lack of clarity on the role of various organisations involved in exports, the report stated. In India, organic products for exports are certified by various agencies accredited by the National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP), India, under Agriculture and Processed Food Products Export Development Agency (APEDA).

“Customs officers are also sometimes confused about the documents and clearances. The lack of well-defined procedures creates delays at the border and reduces India’s rank in ease of doing business and logistics indicators,” the report said.

**Draft regulations**

*Although the FSSAI, after consultations with the Commerce Ministry, has come up with a draft Food Safety and Standards (Organic Foods) Regulations, 2017, which has been put up on its website for comments, it does not mention doing away with multiple agencies.*

ICRIER will circulate the report to the ministries and departments concerned and hopes to hold discussions when it is officially launched later this month. On the need to check malpractices, all 75 companies interviewed pointed out that it is the role of the government to protect the consumer from malpractices, ensure that consumers are not cheated and that they have safe food.
The companies specified that the FSSAI can take the lead on inspecting and monitoring products based on proper standards and guidelines.

In case of fraudulent practices, the FSSAI should have the powers to penalise wrongdoers, it said. The survey participants also pointed out that there should be one common standard for organic products for the domestic, import and export markets.

This standard should be in line with globally approved standards.

In case of India, the National Standards for Organic Production (NSOP) under the NPOP has been approved by key trading partners such as the US and the EU.