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Building Partnerships Globally And Internally With Stakeholders Integral For Food Safety: Ashish Bahugana, Chairperson, FSSAI

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At the plenary session on ‘One Nation, One Food Law- Enabling Regulatory Environment for Investment in the Food Sector’ at World Food India 2017, there was a panel discussion on the need for improving the regulatory framework and environment for the food sector to make it conducive to investments, moderated by Ashish Bahugana, Chairperson of Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, which included panellists like Sadhvi Niranjan Jyoti, Minister of State for Food Processing Industries and Devendra Chaudhry, Secretary, Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, Government of India.

Preeti Sudan, Secretary at the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said, “In 2006, the Food and Safety Standards Act was enacted, and in 2011 it came into force. An entirely new process of food safety and certification is being developed in the country. There are various stakeholders who are involved in the regulation of food law and food safety. While discussing the enabling regulatory framework, we need to highlight the domestic and international perspective.” She also added, “The global trade of food products is regulated under WTO. The global approaches to food safety, the significance of alignment to global standards, the scientific approach to regulation of food safety and the importance of global partnership needs to be highlighted. In order to benefit from other countries, the questions to note are- is India going the right way, the mutual equivalence of regulatory measures and best practices from global standards.”

Bahugana brought up various questions to the esteemed panellists like “whether the regulatory environment is sufficient and does it meet the aspirations of the people?”, and “while we may be proud of our standards, is it enough? Does it match up to global standards?” He brought up the challenge of bringing these regulations to the informal and unorganized sector, and declared that “Building partnerships globally and internally between stakeholders in the country becomes very integral.”

“I congratulate the food processing industry for organizing one of the biggest mega-international events in our history of our country. With wheat and food grains there is a big rollercoaster in terms of CAGR while fish, egg and milk has a steadier trajectory, hence it is important to see how it gives a steady flow of income to farmers. If income is to increase, livestock is the best option. You get a 4.7 times return for every dollar invested in livestock”, said Devendra Chaudhry, Secretary, Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and
Fisheries, Government of India. He added that “There is a concern on the use of antibiotics and growth facilitating chemicals. There is a sharp decline in the prevalence of foot and mouth diseases in the past few years. We have also launched a platform for single online SIP Clearance. The investment opportunities in the dairy sector include in milk procurement, processing, packaging, effluent treatment and dairy farm machinery."

Ashim Sanyal, Chief Operating Officer, Consumer Voice, said, “This is a time for assessment. An assessment of the current scenario of the food regulation of India as mandated by FSSAI and other agencies is integral. One must say that the level of confidence between consumers and business houses has grown up tremendously, and the suspicious eye is at the lowest level. All credit to FSSAI for enabling this environment.” He also added, “The consumer would ask, in a country so big and diverse, is it possible to have a universality of law? Can India match up to the global standards? We have built the right environment, we have invested time and effort to enable an efficient regulatory environment. I see a positive environment where there is going to be a lot of hand holding between MNCs and small players. Food quality and environment go hand in hand under one nation, one food law. All credits to the government of India which has made India gain confidence and has made the whole world look at us in a positive light.”

One of the signatories of the MOU between FSSAI, EIC (Export Inspection Council) and GFSP (Global Food Safety Partnership) for the setting up of training centres for capacity building (International Training Centre for Food Safety), Lystra Antoine, CEO, Global Food Safety Partnership, Global Food Safety, World Bank, said, “One thing which has come out very clearly that food safety is critical for food security, which India is very much aligned to. Food security and food safety are integral to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. True partnerships are essential for capacity building internally and globally. There is an importance of science-based regulations, building the capacities of laboratories by training the scientists which we have done in coordination with FSSAI.” Antoine also added, “Global Food Safety Partnership is joining hands with FSSAI and Export-Import Council to set up training agencies for food safety capacity as demonstrated by the MoU signing. We in GFSP want to join hands with India, to ensure India’s food safety capacities are enhanced and that India becomes a beacon of food safety in the world.”