Stating that the onus was on the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Maharashtra to train temple personnel and the staff at restaurants and hotels across the state, Pallavi Darade, commissioner, FDA Maharashtra, informed that it will conduct a training programme for the former in September 2017, and the latter in October and November. It will cover a host of topics, including food safety, ingredients, hygiene, packaging and labelling and preparation of safe food.

Both the objectives of this exercise are of utmost importance. From the point of view of the temples, hotels and restaurants, it will give hygiene the much-needed fillip, and from the consumers’ perspective, it will provide them safe food. At an event in Mumbai, Darade explained the reason for the move, saying, “Some food business operators (FBOs) are not aware of the rules and regulations that have been laid down for them. That is one of the biggest hurdles, coupled with the fact that many of them are illiterate.”
As for the consumers, the state FDA chief added that it was not only the responsibility of every person to become aware of what he/she was consuming (irrespective of whether he/she was doing so at a restaurant, a hotel, a stall manned by a vendor on the street or a temple), but also that it was his/her right to consume safe food. “In fact, he/she ought to know that regardless of the place where the food is prepared or consumed, it should be safe for human consumption,” she added.

“Regarding the method of conducting the training programme, we have instructed all joint and assistant commissioners across Maharashtra. In fact, we have asked them to follow the example of the Blissful Hygienic Offering to God (BHOG) initiative, which was launched at Mumbai’s Siddhivinayak temple by the state FDA with the help of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), the country’s apex food regulator, recently, while imparting it,” Darade said.

She informed that a similar training programme was conducted in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, under which about 100 temples were covered, and added, “We aim to cross this figure, covering each and every temple across the state of Maharashtra.” C D Salunke, joint commissioner [headquarters (Mumbai)], FDA Maharashtra, stated that a directive had been issued to all the joint commissioners across the state, instructing them to submit a report by August 31, 2017.
“It should contain the details of all the temples in their regions, with the names of the trustees and staff working at the temples, and the halls booked by them to conduct the training programme,” he said. As regards the training programme for hotels and restaurants, Salunke stated, “We expect a good response from the FBOs, and after the training programme, we expect them to become self-compliant and submit a quarterly report of their working to FDA Maharashtra.”

Siddhivinayak temple is now in a position to export the prasad prepared in its premises, because it has now been harmonised by the norms laid down by the United States Food and Drug Administration (US FDA), who gave FDA Maharashtra its nod. Darade informed that Pawan Kumar Agarwal, chief executive officer, FSSAI, was present at the launch of the initiative.

She stated that training was imparted to the people working in the temple complex, as well as the food vendors in its vicinity, in the preparation of the prasad, which could not be exported earlier. The state FDA chief added, “The training did not merely include the process of preparing the prasad, but also the ingredients to be used in its preparation and its packing and labelling.”