Technology will be used to enforce food safety norms: FSSAI CEO

Food regulator shall use technology in a big way to enforce its norms and has set up an IT platform for safety compliances to bring consistency and transparency in inspection, its CEO Pawan Agarwal said. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) will soon make it mandatory for all food businesses to employ food safety supervisor, adding that the move would be a game changer and reduce compliance burden. “We have started using technology in registration and licensing of the food business operators (FBOs). All our systems are IT-based. He was addressing a CII’s food safety, quality and regulatory summit.

Agarwal said the authority has strengthened its internal IT team to ensure effective compliance with food safety law. The regulator has developed standardized testing methods and protocols for food products and launched IT-enabled Indian Food Laboratory Network (INFoLNet). All food labs are FSSAI notified, are submitting food testing reports online on this network. “To reach scale, we need technology.”

Besides, Agarwal said the FSSAI has created a smart and digital compliance system. A large-scale IT platform for Food Safety Compliance through Regular Inspections and Sampling (FoSCoRIS) is being put in place for adoption across all States.

FSSAI CEO said this smart-phone based system is being tested in Madhya Pradesh and Goa by the food safety officers and will soon be rolled out across the country. “This will bring consistency and transparency in food safety inspection and sampling.” To achieve its mandate to provide safe and wholesome food to all, food regulator partners with other stakeholders including corporate and consumer organisations.

Ensuring compliances of food safety regulations in unorganised sector is a challenge.

“We organised a training programme for street vendors but we need to continuously engage with them,” he added. Agarwal said the authority has taken many initiatives in last few years and has also sensitised state government as they are responsible for the enforcement of food safety law. “We have to go a long way to bring States on the same page. But now there is greater engagement with the food safety commissioners.”

Present at the summit, Nestle India CMD Suresh Narayanan said the Indian food industry is valued at close to USD 40 billion and is expected to grow at a CAGR of close to 11 per cent.
Stating that the food processing has multiplier effects on our economy is one of the country’s largest employment creators, Narayanan said the industry attracts domestic and foreign investments, and contributes to exports, amongst others.

He said the rising FDI into the Indian food sector from food giants across the world is a testimony to the growing interests in the Indian market. As per data provided by DIPP, food processing industry in India received around USD 7.5 billion foreign direct investment during the period April 2000 to December 2016.

Also the Chairman of CII National Committee on Food Processing, Narayanan said the evolving regulatory regime that is focused on developing a strong and credible food safety and regulatory system has enabled the Indian food processing industry in taking a high level national and international consumer projects. India is being established as a preferred investment destination on the back of initiatives taken by FSSAI in strengthening food standards and establish mechanism for consistent scientific review of standards.