Food regulator receives over 1,722 complaints in eight months

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The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has received over 1,722 complaints in last eight months through its consumer grievance platforms, majority of which remain unresolved.

In a period of June 2016 to February 2017, the maximum number complaints, ie 1,307, that consumers filed to the country's apex food regulator were about food packaging. Another 415 grievances were about parcelled packages or takeaways, 98 were about food adulteration, and 74 were on sale of expired food packages. A concerned FSSAI convened a meeting on Friday with respective food business operators and the state enforcement agencies to address the problem.

A team handled these complaints and sifted through and categorised them depending on the nature of the complaint. Then the team referred the complaints to the food business operator or the state enforcement agency for appropriate action within the defined timelines. However, a strict scrutiny of the complaint redress showed that a large number of complaints were pending with the food business operators and the state governments.

"The food safety authority would soon come up with quantifiable metrics to accurately gauge the performance and efficiency of each food business operator
vis-a-vis their resolution of consumer complaints. We want to make sure that no complaint goes unresolved," said Pawan Agarwal, CEO, FSSAI. "The food business operators should be sensitised to the rights of consumers, particularly their right to quick and satisfactory resolution of their complaints," he said.

In order to tighten the complaint resolution system, the FSSAI is planning a series of workshops with food business operators as well as state food safety officers. "We regret that companies, particularly the larger ones, were prone to complacency when it came to consumer complaints. This has to change. They should understand that criticism is good, and start to take it as a learning experience," said Ashish Bahuguna, Chairman, FSSAI.

During the meeting, the FSSAI insisted that food business operators should nominate a nodal officer for redress of consumer complaints. FSSAI has also taken an initiative to develop a Food Safety Phone Network (FSPN) wherein all food regulatory authorities shall be operating in a Closed User Group (CUG) across the country. This network will bring more coherence in the efforts of maintaining food safety standards in the country, but shall also reduce the response time to the exigencies emerging out of food safety issues, the FSSAI officials said.

With its increasing focus on consumer rights, particularly their right to safe food and the right to redress of their grievances, the food regulator has provided as many as eight platforms through which consumers can register their complaints, concerns, views and opinions. Besides the toll-free number 1800112100, consumers can WhatsApp or SMS their complaints on 9868686868 or send in their concerns to the web portal — Food Safety Connect. They can also contact the food regulator through official Facebook and twitter pages, can e-mail a complaint on compliance@fssai.gov.in, or send it by snail mail to the Regulatory Compliance Division, fourth floor, FSSAI, FDA Bhawan, Kotla road, New Delhi-110002.