FSSAI moves closer to 'engage' with food firms

Food regulator is in the process of withdrawing all old cases against food companies

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), the apex food regulator, is in the process of withdrawing all old cases against food business operators (FBO) which are now redundant under revised regulation. FSSAI has issued a circular to all local administrations in this regard bringing relief to many major multinational food producers and thousands of FBOs in the country.

The circular issued on Friday seeks to reduce confusion among stakeholders, including food manufacturers, state food and drug administration (FDA) officials and the FSSAI itself. “Commissioners of food safety are advised to withdraw, or, at least not pursue, cases for violation of old norms and standards unless these are...
still not in conformity with the new or revised standards so that avoidable harassment of FBOs could be prevented”, it said.

The new advisory is aimed at avoiding any Maggi-like incidence. In the latest round of controversy, district FDA officials had claimed presence of excess ash in Maggi noodle’s samples, collected a year ago. However, after review it was found that ash content in the samples confirmed to revised standards, while it surpassed the level allowed earlier.

The move has brought relief to many FBO in the country, who had been finding it difficult to deal with frequent change in norms and had cases filed against them. In the past few years, thousands of cases has been lodged against FBOs.

ON THE PLATTER

Fortune oil from Adani Wilmar, Frooti mango drink from Parle Agro, Safola Gold cooking oil from Marico and Mirinda from PepsiCo were found ‘substandard’ by various local authorities. Apart from Maggi instant noodles, Nestle’s Cerelac Wheat also came under regulator’s scanner.

We are pleased that the FSSAI has issued an order bringing clarity on pending cases filed on the basis of old norms and standards, and where the products are in conformity with standards which have since been introduced or revised”, a Nestle India spokesperson said.
Welcoming the step, a PepsiCo India spokesperson said, “This is a progressive step that augurs well for the industry”. However, “PepsiCo complies with labelling and other regulations issued by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India. All products, including Mirinda, comply with the food regulations and are completely safe”, he added.

Data shows, during 2014-15 some 13,700 food samples were found adulterated by various regulators and 10,269 cases were launched. Next year, 9,745 cases were filed after over 14,000 samples were found to be adulterated or misbranded.

Post the Maggi controversy that rocked the sector in 2015, engagement between the food regulator and food companies has increased significantly. According to industry insiders, major food companies are now in constant dialogue with FSSAI over required changes in norms.

According to Rodrigo Lima, managing director, Danone India, exchange of ideas and concerns between the companies and FSSAI is now more open. According to Mike Robach, vice-president (corporate food safety and quality), Cargill, the regulator now seeks more insights from the industry.