Soon, food biz will require staff certified in safety, hygiene practices

Panaji: Training those involved in the food business in way of good sanitary and hygiene practices is a prerequisite to food safety and this is exactly what Food Safety and Standards Authority of India's (FSSAI) recently launched the Food Safety Training and Certification (FoSTaC) programme is looking to achieve.

In Goa, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is getting ready to commence implementation of the programme starting in the month of October.

"The programme entails training persons in food safety and nutrition through private participation. Empanelled auditors will conduct training programmes of varied durations," said FDA director Salim Veljee, adding that as directed by the FSSAI, for the first two years, the FoSTaC certification will be voluntary.

"(Eventually) it will be mandatory for food establishments to recruit a person holding FoSTaC certification under the FoSTaC regime, and the person will have to ensure food safety and hygiene at his/her place of employment," said Veljee, adding, some 3000-odd food premises in Goa will be brought under the ambit of the programme.
Veljee said that with the implementation of this programme FDA would not need to carry out training and awareness campaigns in food safety from time to time, adding that the involvement of private auditors will ease their job, leaving FDA staff to carry out their other functions that they would have had to otherwise defer due to time constraints.

"We cannot keep a 24X7 vigil. It is simply not possible," said Veljee, adding that their limited staff strength did not permit them to check each and every eatery on a regular basis. The FDA is already in talks with various stakeholders in the state to enable the programme to commence in October.

Training partners will broadly include trade, professional and scientific associations, licensed food businesses, recognized academic and vocational institutions, those approved by various sectors of skill councils and other government schemes, and other training agencies, who have had at least three years of experience at the national or international level in training in food safety and nutrition.

For FDA, the FoSTac is a big step that would change the working of food establishments. There will be different levels of programmes covering various segments and duration of training programmes would vary depending on the targeted segment.

Veljee said a person running a 'gaada' selling vada pao will not be able to devote eight hours of day to attend a training programme. For him and other such people, a training programme of shorter duration has been drawn.