FSSAI targets supplements, looks to curb doping in sports

Food regulator FSSAI will bring in rules on the presence of doping substances in food and nutritional supplements that are usually sold off the shelf.

'We have formed a working committee consisting of experts from relevant industries for technical assistance,' FSSAI CEO Pawan Kumar Agarwal has said. Photo: Pradeep Gaur/Mint

New Delhi: The country’s food regulator now wants to curb the use of prohibited performance-enhancing substances by sports professionals through nutritional supplements.

Over the next few months, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) will bring in regulations on the presence of doping substances in food and nutritional supplements that are usually sold off the shelf. Companies will
have to follow specific labelling norms for selling food and nutritional supplements. Both domestically produced products and imported supplements will come under the FSSAI regime.

FSSAI, which signed a five-year agreement with National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) on Thursday, will develop capacities at its laboratories to test for the presence of restricted or prohibited substances in food and nutritional supplements.

At present, FSSAI laboratories do not have either the expertise or the capacity for this. NADA, however, does.

“We have formed a working committee consisting of experts from relevant industries for technical assistance. A draft regulation will be discussed in the next meeting on 21 September,” said Pawan Kumar Agarwal, chief executive officer, FSSAI.

Besides FSSAI’s own team, the committee will have representatives from NADA, Sports Authority of India (SAI) and Narcotics Control Bureau, among others. FSSAI is also in the process of constituting a team for surveillance and enforcement of regulations. “As part of awareness development among consumers, we’ll also bring a special usage guide. Most of the doping is done without knowledge and they have ill-effects in the long term,” Agarwal added.

FSSAI and NADA held a series of meetings on the subject of doping in the last few months after the latter requested the food regulator to frame standards and regulations. “Doping is a menace we need to stop. With FSSAI, we’ll try to ensure availability of safe supplements for competing athletes, among others. There are about 300 substances that are prohibited globally. Of these, about 10 such as steroids, are commonly used,” said Navin Aggarwal, CEO and director general, NADA.

Last year, FSSAI notified standards for health supplements, nutraceuticals, foods for special dietary use, foods for special medical purposes, functional foods and novel foods. According to the notification, these foods should “consist of a composition delivering the desired level of energy, proteins, vitamins and minerals, and other essential nutrients required for the respective age group, gender and physiological stage in accordance with the guidelines made by the Indian Council of Medical Research”.
The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), in its doping violation report for 2015, ranked India third after the Russian Federation and Italy. In 2015, 117 athletes failed to clear dope tests.

The Indian government had, in 2013, drafted the National Sports Development Bill that highlighted elimination of doping practices. As per a 27 April report in the *Indian Express*, the government has been working on a new legislation to make doping by athletes a criminal offence and the proposed law could include coaches, manufacturers and suppliers of these products.