FSSAI plans food safety index to measure performance of States

Regulator proposes to deploy 62 mobile food lab units across the country

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 22:

In a bid to encourage States to have a robust food safety ecosystem, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) will soon launch a food safety index to measure their performance on various parameters.

In addition, the food regulator has asked the Indian Railways, which had been earlier slammed by the Comptroller and Auditor General for serving poor quality food, to conduct an internal audit. This will be followed by a third party audit.

Pawan Agarwal, CEO, FSSAI, said here on Tuesday: “We are developing an index that will measure the performance of States on various parameters of food safety to promote
positive competition among them. All the States are in agreement on this and we hope to launch this soon.” The various parameters will include status of food safety infrastructure, manpower, enforcement, training capacity and steps to address consumer grievances, among others.

Replying to a query on food safety issues concerning the Railways, he said: “We have asked them to conduct an internal audit first and then we will conduct a third party audit of food safety system in the Railways.”

Agarwal was speaking at an FSSAI event to launch key initiatives, including “Food Safety on Wheels”, to strengthen the country’s food testing infrastructure.

**Mobile food labs**
Under the Food Safety on Wheels initiative, 62 mobile food lab units will be deployed across the country for food testing, public education and awareness and for conducting training and certification programmes. The mobile labs will help officials of various States and Union Territories to enhance their surveillance activities and outreach even in far-flung areas.

The multi-purpose vehicles will have a fully functional laboratory equipped with basic infrastructure for quick testing for detection of common adulterants in various food commodities, FSSAI said in a statement. Nine mobile units were flagged off on Tuesday. The regulator has also launched a digital solution to connect all the government and private food labs to a centralised lab management system called InFolNet (Indian Food Laboratory Network).

**High-end testing**
The regulator is also working on further strengthening 45 State food labs by providing them high-end testing equipment. Other initiatives include conducting Junior Analyst Examination to attract young talent and plans to set up an international training centre in Mumbai in collaboration with the Export Inspection Council.

“We are making a holistic effort by using digital solutions, strengthening food safety infrastructure, enhancing testing and training capacities as well as growing the pool of trained food analysts to give a big push to country’s food testing system,” Agarwal added.