



FSSAI finalizes draft norms for third-party audits at food firms

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Auditing will have to procure necessary accreditation from specified accreditation bodies for each of the food categories, as defined by the regulator, to conduct these audits. Photo: Priyanka Parashar/Mint

New Delhi: Companies making food products—packaged or otherwise—will soon have to get their facilities and processes inspected by third party auditors regularly as a mandatory exercise. The country's food regulator Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has finalised the draft regulation for a "systematic and functionally independent examination" aiming to ensure food safety at the point of origin.

FSSAI has already notified the draft regulations on its website and a final notification will come after the regulator reviews suggestions, views and

comments from members of the Technical Barriers to Trade committee of the World Trade Organisation (WTO-TBT) over the next two months.

“We’ll have third party auditors to audit the premises and certify that appropriate food safety management practices are being followed. We’ll make it mandatory for large scale food businesses initially,” FSSAI chief executive officer Pawan Kumar Agarwal said.

Some food companies in India voluntarily hire laboratories to inspect safety of their products but it is not mandatory yet. Such audits are common in most developed countries where self-regulation is the norm.

According to the proposed regulations, there would be a recognised auditor and agency that would analyse the risk and undertake an audit to examine if there’s compliance with the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006. FSSAI, along with the Quality Council of India (QCI), the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) and Export Inspection Council of India, will form a committee to evaluate the auditing agency and auditors.

The regulations will have detailed rules on what the auditors should examine and how. “The Authority, from time to time, would declare the categories or types of food businesses which will be subject to mandatory third-party auditing, primarily based on their risk classification,” the draft noted.

Auditing will have to procure necessary accreditation from specified accreditation bodies for each of the food categories, as defined by the regulator, to conduct these audits.

Audit monitoring mechanism will include review of audit reports and performance, on-site assessment of the food safety auditors to ensure competency of auditing food safety management systems and regulatory requirements.

Auditors and food business operators will have to maintain records of audit reports, actions and rectification measures for a period of five years, according to the draft regulation.