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E-paper

State labs in poor condition, working to strengthen them:

FSSAI_{PTI} |

New Delhi, Feb 28 () Food safety regulator FSSAI CEO Pawan Kumar Agarwal today said food testing labs at state level are in poor condition and serious efforts are being made to strengthen them by providing financial help and capacity building training.

At present, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has total 62 labs spread across the country. Out of which, only 10 are accredited by the National Accreditation Board for Testing & Calibration Laboratories (NABL). The private sector has 150 labs which are all NABL accredited.

"Of course, we continue to face problems with the poor quality of state labs for good reasons perhaps. We are trying to improve these labs," Agarwal said after exchanging the memorandum of agreement (MoU) with AOAC International here.

As per the MoU, the AOAC International -- a globally recognised standards developing organisation -- will offer free access to the official method of analysis to the FSSAI. It will also support FSSAI in its capacity building programmes.

Sharing about the state labs, Agarwal said, "The condition of many of the government labs are not up to the mark as they are still working under transition position."

However, the regulator is closely working with state governments to ensure the labs are strengthened and they come up to the standards that the country deserves, he added.

The FSSAI has decided to strengthen 45 state government labs with financial and capacity building training.

"A significant headway has been made in that, though more rapid progress is required. We have already supported 22 labs and getting more states and more labs on board is now a challenge," he noted.

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Since some of the states do not have private lab capacity, the FSSAI CEO said, "The lab capacity even in the private sector in most of North east, Jharkhand, Bihar and Uttarkhand is very poor. That's why we are pursuing state governments to upgrade their labs."

The FSSAI is also pushing the balance 52 government labs to get the NABL accreditation in a year or so.

Besides strengthening primary testing labs, the FSSAI is making efforts to put in place a network of appellate labs or referral labs in the entire food testing ecosystem.

The referral labs are used for testing the samples in times of dispute. The regulator has supported providing equipment to six such labs and plans to support additional five labs, he said.

Also, the regulator has plans to put in place a dozen of them as national reference labs for doing proficiency testing and method development and validations. Basically, the reference labs would act as support structure.

"We have floated an expression of interest (EoI) calling both private and public labs. Over 30 labs have shown interest, we are in the process of selecting them. May be 10-12 labs can be called as national reference labs."

The FSSAI is also encouraging mobile testing labs. Already 30 such labs are in the field. They do rapid testing and are creating awareness about food safety, he added.

Agarwal said that a reasonable amount of work has been done in the area of food testing and analytics in the last one year despite limited human resources. LUX SBT –