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New rules to curb misleading advertisements on packaged food

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NEW DELHI: In a move to curb misleading advertisements on packaged food, the food regulator plans to notify Food Safety and Standards (claims & advertisement) Regulations later this week. The regulations will prohibit companies from using words or phrases such as 'natural', 'fresh', 'original', 'traditional', 'premium', 'authentic', 'genuine' and 'real' etc on the food labels except under specific conditions.

"These restrictions are primarily aimed at restricting an open-ended use of these words or phrases by food businesses on frivolous grounds," an official said.

Companies can use these claims only if their product is not processed in any manner except washed, peeled, chilled and trimmed or put through other processing which could alter its basic characteristics, as per new regulations framed by the Food Safety Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) .

The regulations will also prohibit food businesses from advertising or make claim undermining the products of other manufacturer so as to promote their own products or influence consumer behaviour.

These regulations have been in the pipeline for some time since FSSAI first issued the draft regulations in March this year.

The regulations will contain several sections detailing definitions; general principles for claims and advertisements; criteria for nutrition claims (including nutrient content or nutrient comparative claims), health claims, claims related to dietary guidelines or healthy diets, and conditional claims; claims that are specifically prohibited; and procedures for approval of claims and redressal of non-compliances under these regulations.

Once notified, the regulator will also not permit advertisements of a food product that undermines the importance of healthy lifestyles or portrays the food product as a complete replacement of normal meal.

It will also have penalty provision with a fine of up to Rs 10 lakh for those violating the norms.

However, the claims may refer to a nutrient such as energy, fat, cholesterol, saturated fat, trans-fat, sugar, or sodium salt being 'low' or 'absent', and unsaturated fat being 'high' in a food; a food being 'source of' or 'high' in respect of nutrients like dietary fibre, protein, vitamins or minerals.