

An Exclusive Interview with FSSAI Chairperson Rita Teatia



Krishi Jagran team interacted with Mrs. Rita Teatia, the Chairperson of Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). Mrs. Teatia assumed the office of Chairperson FSSAI, on November 28, 2018. Between 2003 and 2007, she worked as Joint Secretary in the ministry of health and family welfare, Government of India, focusing on food safety, drug control administration and national disease control programmes. She also worked as Commerce Secretary in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry between July 2015 and July 2018, before joining the apex food regulator.

In her 35 years career, she has worked extensively in both policymaking and practice in varied sectors, including energy, health, rural development, IT (information technology) and telecommunications.

Q.1 What is the role of FSSAI for agriculture and farming (including organic) in the context of FSS (Organic Foods) Regulations, 2017?

Ans. Section 22 of the Food Safety Standards Act, 2006 (FSS Act, 2006) has the provision that no person shall manufacture, distribute, sell or import organic foods which the Central Government may notify in this behalf. Accordingly, FSSAI has notified Food Safety and Standards (Organic Food) Regulations, 2017 in the Gazette of India. In the spirit of 'One Nation, One Food law', FSSAI released these Regulations along with a unified logo for Organic Foods 'Jaivik Bharat' as a symbol of authenticity and trust.

Q.2 How FBOs are required to comply with these regulations?

Ans. Food Business Operators shall comply with all the provisions of these Regulations. The organic foods to comply with all the applicable provisions of any one of the certification systems i.e. National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) or Participatory Guarantee System for India (PGS-India). A direction dated 29th June 2018, was issued wherein it was directed that all FBOs manufacturing/processing or handling Organic Food shall have to obtain a license under FSS Act 2006 or get the organic food endorsed in their existing license through Food Licensing and Registration System (FLRS) within three months from commencement of these Regulations. However, through another direction dated 24th January 2019 the use of FSSAI's organic logo (Jaivik Bharat) was made implementable w.e.f 01st April 2019.

Q.3 Any relaxations for small organic producers?

Ans. The Organic food which is marketed through direct sales by the small original producer or producer organization, as determined by the Food Authority from time to time, to the end consumer shall be exempted from the provisions of NPOP or PGS-India. However, the provision of direct sales of organic food to the end consumer by the small original producer/producer organization having an annual turnover of organic produce of not more than Rs 12 lakh is permitted. They may be allowed to sell organic food without any certification i.e. NPOP/PGS-India.

It is not always viable for small producers who have low quantities of organic food to go to the market. In such cases the, aggregator/intermediary may collect organic food from small producers and sell it to the end consumer directly. Such aggregator/intermediary shall have a turnover of organic produce not exceeding Rs 50 lakhs/annum. They may be allowed to sell products without any certification i.e. NPOP/PGS-India. Such foods shall not bear Jaivik Bharat Logo.

However, organic food retail firms have to comply with the certification norm. To build confidence in small producers, these regulations may be considered as 'enabling regulations' and not be considered for prosecution particularly for small original producers and producer organizations during the initial phase of its implementation till April 2020".

Q.4 How can a consumer identify that the product is organic or not? Will these regulations help?

Ans. Yes, the FSSAI's Organic Logo on foods will signify that such foods are organic because the FSSAI's Organic Logo on the foods can be used only after the standards of certification and other FSS Regulations are being met. As the domestic Regulations are being implemented, therefore the companies will have to comply with the regulations before labeling their products as organic.

Q.5 What are the key challenges in the implementation of Organic Food Regulations?

Ans. One of the key challenges is that there are a large number of producers and producer organizations in the country who are not yet certified under any of the two systems of certifications - National Program for Organic Production (NPOP) and Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) India. It is important to align them under the regulations and efforts are underway for simplification of PGS-India to make it small producer –friendly.