

FSSAI nod to audit of food business operators by third-party pvt firms

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Food businesses in the country are all set to get more responsible as auditing of FBOs by third-party private audit agencies gets the official FSSAI seal. The stringent norms are likely to encourage self-compliance.

Recently, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) gazetted the Food Safety and Standards (Food Safety Auditing) Regulation 2018. With this, the apex food regulator will undertake auditing of Food Business Operators (FBOs) through third-party private audit agencies

Now, self-compliance According to the gazette notification, as part of the food safety surveillance by encouraging self-compliance, the regulations include the procedure for recognition of auditing agencies, procedure for renewal/ cancellation/suspension of recognition, terms and conditions of recognition, auditing procedure, duties of auditors, audit reporting and audit monitoring system.

Twenty-two audit agencies

Currently, FSSAI has empanelled 22 audit agencies for the same in accordance with the draft Food Safety and Standard (Food Safety Auditing) Regulations, 2017. These include national and international food safety audit agencies like DNV, Bureau Veritas, Intertek, MS Certification, IRCLASS, SGS, BIS, TUV and Indocert.

The food authority stated, "Selected Food Categories on the basis of their risk classification will be subject to mandatory food safety Auditing. Food Businesses falling under such category would be required to get their businesses timely audited by recognised Auditing Agencies on their own. Food businesses which are not subject to mandatory auditing can also voluntarily opt for Auditing of their businesses."

Less frequent inspection

Food businesses having satisfactory audits may be subjected to less frequent inspection by Central or state licensing authorities. Hence, third-party audits will reduce the burden on

the regulatory inspection conducted by Central or State Licensing Authorities and also encourage the efficient self-compliance by the food businesses.

The regulation draws its powers from Section 44 of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, which empowers the Food Authority to recognise an organisation or an agency for carrying out food safety audit and checking compliance with the Food Safety Management Systems required under the Act or the rules and regulations thereunder.

Competent agencies satisfying the eligibility criteria as laid in the Food Safety and Standard (Food Safety Auditing) Regulation, 2018 can apply to FSSAI for recognition under these regulations.

These third party agencies will be working in close coordination with the government food safety department. The agencies will be conducting audits to ascertain the compliance with standards of food safety and hygiene prescribed under Schedule 4 of the Food Safety and Standards (Licensing and Registration of Food Business) Regulation, 2011.

The Audit Process involved for assessing the food safety management system of a Food Business Operator shall be based on IS/ISO 19011:2011 (Guidelines for auditing management systems). FBOs will have to get their businesses audited on the basis of the frequency prescribed for their kind of businesses by FSSAI. Based on their audit reports submitted by the agency, the frequency of their inspections by regulatory officials will be decreased or increased as the case may be. Satisfactory Audits will lead to less frequent regulatory inspections, except the regulatory sampling by Central or State Licensing Authority. Apart from these mandatory audits, these agencies can also be used by FSSAI for conducting audits on central institutions like government agencies like railways, defense, etc.

These agencies will also be used to rate catering establishments under FSSAI's Hygiene Rating Scheme and Responsible Place to Eat schemes under Project 'Serve Safe'. An Expression of Interest has also simultaneously been floated to invite additional agencies for these schemes which have been initiated with the intent of ensuring that consumers can make informed choices and food businesses are encouraged to showcase and improve their food hygiene standards.