

Empowering India towards a healthy future

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the world to a halt, urging Governments to strengthen public health systems. However, the far deadlier silent epidemic of malnutrition remains overlooked. While on the one hand, 196 million Indians are undernourished, 135 million are overweight/obese putting them at risk for non-communicable diseases such as high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes. Further, the number of cases of food borne illnesses is expected to rise from 100 million to 150 – 177 million in 2030 compared to 2011. This will directly impact the ability to absorb nutrients, fight infection, rendering millions vulnerable to a host of diseases.

The role of Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is critical in the light of this nutrition reality in India. Established under the Food Safety and Standards Act (FSS), 2006, FSSAI is the apex food regulatory body in the country with the mandate to ensure safe and wholesome food for all citizens. As a part of its core regulatory functions FSSAI sets science-based, globally benchmarked standards for food safety, ensures credible food testing for quality and compliance to these standards and processes through effective surveillance mechanisms.

Apart from this, FSSAI has also embarked on a series of initiatives to ensure safe, healthy and environmentally sustainable food for everyone through the 'Eat Right India' movement. This movement is the

collective effort of all key players in the food ecosystem and is aligned with the government's focus on public health through programmes like 'Ayushman Bharat Yojana', 'POSHAN Abhiyaan', 'Anemia Mukh Bharat' and 'Swachh Bharat' Mission. In the wake of the current pandemic, the provision of safe and healthy food has gained greater prominence.

Under 'Eat Right India', FSSAI has launched initiatives targeting both food businesses and consumers to create an environment of right food practices and habits. As per FSS Act, 2006, food businesses are mandated to be licenced/registered with FSSAI. For this, the revised FSS (Licensing & Registration) Regulations simplify the process of application and renewal with reduced time and effort. FSSAI is also releasing new regulations to facilitate and speed up import clearances.

To strengthen food testing, FSSAI has approved 30 rapid food testing kits/devices to ensure faster, better and cheaper real-time testing of food even at the field level, thus assuring quality of food. These recent developments support ease of doing business, while raising the bar for food safety in the country. FSSAI is also focusing on periodic risk-based inspections, third-party audits and focused checks to ensure safety and quality of food products available in the market to earn the trust of consumers.

To build capacity of food businesses on food

- **35527** Schools have been registered on the Eat Right School portal and are in the process of certification.
- **30** Campuses awarded Eat Right Campus certificates across the country including IIT Gandhinagar, IIT Roorkee, LBSNAA, Mussoorie, and other large private corporates.
- **20** Clean Street Food Hubs in different parts of the country.
- **3** Railways Stations have been awarded as Eat Right Station including Mumbai Central and Chhatrapati Shivaji Station at Mumbai and Anand Vihar Railway Station at New Delhi.



“ To strengthen food testing, FSSAI has approved 30 rapid food testing kits/devices to ensure faster, better and cheaper real-time testing of food even at the field level, thus assuring quality of food. FSSAI is also focusing on periodic risk-based inspections, third-party audits and focused checks to ensure safety and quality of food products available in the market to earn the trust of consumers.



To empower consumers to address adulteration, FSSAI has introduced The DART Book to check common food adulterants at home with simple tests. A mobile food testing van called Food Safety on Wheels (FSW) has been launched to reach remote areas and conduct training and awareness activities as well. Over 90 FSWs are in circulation across the country.

To build capacity of food businesses on food safety, FSSAI has launched 'Food Safety Training and Certification' (FoSTaC) – a unique programme to ensure a trained and certified Food Safety Supervisor (FSS) on each food business premises. Almost 3.5 lakh FSS have been trained so far. FSSAI has recently introduced an online training programme on hygiene practice required during COVID-19, which has already trained over 60,000 FSS."

- Arun Singhal, CEO, FSSAI, New Delhi

safety, FSSAI has launched 'Food Safety Training and Certification' (FoSTaC) – a unique programme to ensure a trained and certified Food Safety Supervisor (FSS) on each food business premises. Almost 3.5 lakh FSS have been trained so far. FSSAI has recently introduced an online training programme on hygiene practice required during COVID-19, which has already trained over 60,000 FSS.

Given the large unorganized food sector in India comprising a range of food businesses from street food vendors, dhabas, eateries etc. several benchmarking and certification schemes to improve food safety and hygiene standards are in place. These involve training of food handlers and third-party audits of food businesses. Schemes such as 'Clean Street Food Hub', 'Clean and Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Markets', 'Eat Right Station' and 'BHOG (Blissful Hygienic Offering to God) for Places of Worship' are targeted to clusters of vendors. So far, 30 such clusters have been certified, thereby raising the confidence of consumers in consuming food from such places. For individual outlets such as restaurants, catering establishments, sweet and meat shops the 'Hygiene Rating Scheme' has been introduced. Over a thousand food outlets have been rated so far to empower consumers to make informed food choices.

To empower consumers to address adulteration, FSSAI has introduced The DART Book to check common food adulterants at home with simple tests. A mobile food testing van called Food Safety on Wheels (FSW) has been launched to reach remote areas and conduct training and awareness activities as well. Over 90 FSWs are in circulation across the country.

More recently, the Food Authority has introduced two new parameters in the honey standards to

determine the adulteration of honey with any other sugar syrups, especially rice syrup, which is a common concern for many.

FSSAI has launched mass awareness campaigns to reduce salt, fat and sugar in the diet, 'Aaj Se Thoda Kam' and 'Trans-Fat Free India' by 2022 to reduce the risk of non-communicable diseases. Going forward, consumers will be empowered to make healthy choices under the new voluntary regulations on menu labelling that require bigger food service establishments to declare nutrition information of food per serving.

Large-scale food fortification is also being promoted to address deficiencies of vitamins and minerals like iron, vitamin B 12, folic

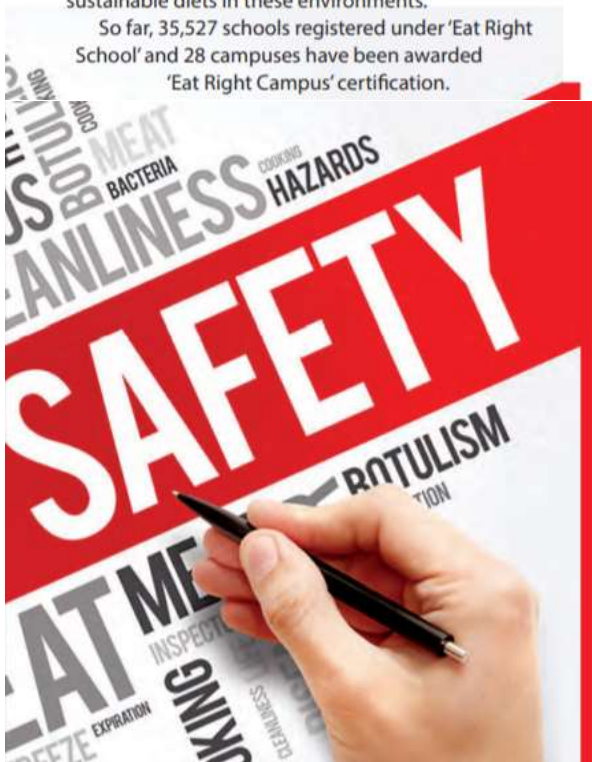


acid, that lead to conditions like iron-deficiency anemia. So far, fortified foods such as edible oil, milk, wheat flour, rice and salt, with the +F logo to identify them, are being supplied in the open market and in some government Safety Net Programmes like Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Mid-Day Meal (MDM) and Public Distribution system (PDS) in 19 States and 5 Union Territories (UTs). So far, 157 fortified products are available in the open market and 47 per cent of the top ten players in edible oil and 36.6 per cent of the organized milk industry are fortifying as per FSSAI standards.

Another important regulation to boost fortification of food will now cover standards for fortification of species identified milk like cow, buffalo, camel, goat, sheep etc.; for all kinds of multigrain atta and categories of processed foods covering cereal products, bakery wares and juices – with various specified micronutrients, except in products that are high in fat, salt and sugar.

To target consumers in different environments- schools, workplaces, education institutes, hospitals etc. Eat Right School and Eat Right Campus have been launched. Under these initiatives, certification is awarded based on compliance to predefined benchmarks on provision of safe, healthy and sustainable diets in these environments.

So far, 35,527 schools registered under 'Eat Right School' and 28 campuses have been awarded 'Eat Right Campus' certification.



Moreover, the Food Authority has recently finalised FSS (Safe Food and Healthy Diets for School Children) Regulations, 2019 that will ensure wholesome food to school children by not allowing food items high in fat, salt and sugar to be sold and advertised within school premises and within 50 metres radius of the school gates.

Additionally, keeping the health of infants in mind, the FSS (Food for Infant Nutrition) Regulations 2019 have been finalised that cover standards for infant milk food and formula as well as foods for special medical purpose, specifically food for infants with inborn errors in metabolism (IEM).

To reach citizens at the grass roots level through frontline health workers to promote right eating habits, the 'Eat Right Toolkit' has been developed. This is being mainstreamed through Health and Wellness Centres under 'Ayushman Bharat Yojana'.

FSSAI also releases 'Myth Busters' and 'Guidance Notes' for consumers from time to time to address any growing concerns related to food and clarify misconceptions at large. Recently, an e-guidebook on 'Eating Right During COVID-19' was released to inform consumers on additional health and safety precautions to follow for food. With time, this 360 approach is expected to usher in a culture of eating right across the country.

To encourage and support sustainable food practices to protect the environment, FSSAI is spearheading initiatives such as 'Jaivik Bharat' for easy

identification of authentic organic food; 'Save Food, Share Food' to reduce food waste and promote food donation; 'Safe and Sustainable Packaging in Food and Beverage Sector' to reduce the use of plastics and Repurpose Used Cooking Oil (RUCO) for safe and healthy use of cooking oil and repurposing used cooking oil to make biodiesel/soap etc.

At present, 82 food distribution agencies have donated over 50 million meals to those in need in over 100 districts. Around 55 lakh litres of UCO have been repurposed into 39 lakh litres biodiesel.

Apart from promoting safe, healthy and sustainable food, these 'Eat Right India' initiatives are generating economic opportunities in the food ecosystem through increased demand for trained food testing and regulatory personnel, training, auditing, implementation and development partners, petty food vendors and small businesses and creating a thriving circular economy in line with the vision of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'. 'Eat Right India' is ultimately a people's movement. Therefore, it puts an onus on everyone to transform the way India eats and usher in a culture of right eating. **NS**

FSSAI Team

16 | I&A | NUFFOODS SPECTRUM | SEPTEMBER 2021 | www.nuffoodspectrum.in

"The MoU with CSIR is just the first step towards encouraging digital nutrition"



Arun Singhal,
Chief Executive Officer, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), New Delhi

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) aiming towards collaborative research and information dissemination in the area of food and nutrition. NuFFooDS Spectrum reached out to Arun Singhal, Chief Executive Officer, FSSAI, New Delhi to find out more this collaboration. Edited excerpts;

What are the key objectives of the recent MoU signed with CSIR?
The key objectives are to identify technologies and programmes that focus on food safety and nutrition, and to share the expertise of various institutions associated with CSIR in developing internationally acceptable regulatory framework for the food safety ecosystem in our country. We also intend to utilize the pool of available technologies with CSIR for select innovations of national importance; to strengthen the laboratory network across the country for a robust and more reliable food testing and reporting system; to conduct joint research and surveillance activities; and to build capacities of people involved in food businesses and formulation of regulations.

How can you ensure this will help in more scientific studies on food in India?
CSIR is one of the oldest, credible and reputed scientific organizations, not only in India but at the global level as well. With FSSAI's mandate to develop science based standards and ensure safe and wholesome food for the consumers, collaborating with CSIR would result in smooth adaptation of innovative technologies and methods developed by the premier institutions under them. Besides, the technological capability (both in

terms of manpower as well as instrumentation) of CSIR institutions can be synergistically used for setting science based standards as well as evaluating the impact of any regulatory policies made. Overall, the collaboration tends to utilize the abundant scientific resources of CSIR for better implementation of regulatory framework by FSSAI.

Do you feel food & nutrition challenges in India can be solved with more research? How?
Many of the food and nutrition related challenges in India can be resolved with more holistic and collaborative research by premier institutions using local resources. The results of such R&D would not only address the challenge being faced, but also strengthen the food safety landscape in the country. Further, sufficient research in various fields related to food & nutrition would also help industries in identifying and harnessing innovative methods and techniques of production which will lead to creation of healthier food products and reduce the carbon footprint in manufacturing process. For example, a detailed research on the nutritional profiling in various products can help companies reformulate their products with less amount of fats, salt and sugar.

How do you foresee the concept of digital nutrition in the coming years?
Although the concept of digital nutrition is yet to take off in a big way, it appears to be the way in the years to come. This is mainly because with unprecedented situations like COVID-19 pandemic, the focus would be more on providing safe, authentic and nutritionally balanced diet to consumers with far less contact and reduced human intervention. Nutrition being very specific to individual physiology, potential of the digital nutrition to make an indelible mark can be high, provided digital health initiatives get integrated with the nutritional requirements of people. One of the main focus of the MoU with CSIR is to ensure building a digital database of nutritional requirements and the resources that can fulfill those nutritional needs. However, a lot needs to be done collaboratively by various scientific institutions, food industries, policy makers and regulators. The MoU with CSIR is just the first step in creating such a mechanism or platform for encouraging digital nutrition. ■

Dr Manbeena Chawla
manbeena.chawla@mmactv.com

In a recent interview with NuFFooDS Spectrum, Shri Arun Singhal, CEO FSSAI highlighted that the key objectives behind the MoU between CSIR & FSSAI are to identify technologies and programmes that focus on food safety and nutrition, and to share the expertise of various institutions associated with CSIR in Internationally acceptable regulatory framework for the food ecosystem in our country.