

No change in provisions for licensing & regn; online since 2011: FSSAI

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FSSAI has issued a clarification on some news reports about harassment of food businesses due to rules and regulations for licensing and registration and said that there has been no change in the provisions in this regard and the process has been an online service since 2011.

“Whether the application has to be addressed by the state authorities or FSSAI, the experience for the food business is the same. An improved IT platform with more facilities and ease of operation is being implemented now,” reads the statement.

The FSSAI clarified that not all FBOs need to approach the apex food regulator for licensing and only very limited licences are to be obtained from FSSAI while the rest are delegated to state government officials.

“Only businesses with turnover of more than Rs 20 crore per annum have to take a licence from FSSAI. Another condition is that manufacturers of proprietary foods have to take licence from FSSAI. As on date, less than 1% of the total food businesses in the country are licensed by FSSAI,” reads the statement.

Further, traditional Indian sweets and namkeen were always treated as proprietary items because no standards exist for them. The respective associations of manufacturers have been approached to help FSSAI in framing standards, but they are still working on these proposals.

The food regulator said that it is clarified that these items have been proprietary foods ever since the inception of FSSAI and there has been no recent change. Also, it can be reasonably expected that within the next six months FSSAI would be able to have vertical standards for mithai and namkeen, and there would be no requirement of obtaining a licence from the Central authority for them.

Further, the condition of employing a technical in-charge has been in force ever since 2011 for manufacturers of food commodities and is also not a fresh condition. This condition applies only to licensed food businesses and not those who are registered and it is clarified that food service establishments such as a halwai making kachoris would not be treated as a manufacturer and this clause would not be applied in his case.

“It will only apply to factory type establishments where kachoris are being

manufactured and packaged and sold as a packaged product,” says FSSAI.

Another reform that has been proposed by FSSAI is to have perpetual licences instead of the present practice of limited time period licences. Food business operators would only have to submit their annual returns online and pay nominal annual charges in order to retain active status of the licence.

The fee of Rs 100 applies for registration of businesses with turnover upto Rs 12 lakh. In case of a licence, the fee is higher and varies from Rs 2,000 to Rs 7,500. It may be clarified here that Rs 7,500 is the highest licence fee which is charged from businesses with very high turnover.

Also, on the apprehension that packaging material will be rendered useless because of change in licence number is not factually correct, says FSSAI, as per rules, FSSAI provides a time period of at least six months to utilise the existing packaging material and this time period can be extended on a case to case basis.

FSSAI said that good manufacturing practices have been a part of regulations ever since 2004. Every small or big manufacturer of food items has to annually get the water quality certified and this is a necessary condition in order to ensure food safety for customers.

“Any dilution of this may lead to food borne illnesses which would be detrimental to the health of the general public. Similarly, the requirement of glazed tiles; caps, aprons and gloves for workers and other hygienic requirements apply to the kitchen area of any food business. These conditions are also essential to maintain proper hygiene and to ensure good quality of food preparations. Any dilution of these also would not be desirable in the public interest,” says FSSAI in a detailed statement issued here.

Further on the question that manufacturers producing less than 2,000 kg per year could earlier obtain a licence from the district authorities and they will now have to approach FSSAI, the FSSAI stated that this is not correct factually. There has been no change in the turnover or quantity of production requirements for FSSAI licensing.

“As clarified earlier, only registration with district authorities is required up to a turnover of Rs 12 lakh per annum. From Rs 12 lakh to Rs 20 crore per annum, state government authorities issue licences and FSSAI comes into the picture only for a turnover of more than Rs 20 crore or more than 2 MT per day,” says FSSAI.

The apex food regulator has stressed that looking at the difficulties being faced by mithai and namkeen manufacturers in migrating to the new IT platform, a one year relaxation has been provided to them. According to this relaxation, renewal by state authorities has been permitted upto June 2021 and they would not need to approach FSSAI for licence. It is expected that vertical standards for these products would come in force before this relaxation period ends, and then they would be able to obtain licences based on turnover, so that there would be no disruption.