

# FSSAI mulling using next-gen technology tools to ensure food safety, quality

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New Delhi, Jul 27 (PTI) Food safety regulator FSSAI on Tuesday said it is exploring the possibility of using next generation technological tools like blockchain and machine learning to ensure food safety and quality.

Such tools assume importance as the current pandemic situation has negatively affected many aspects of routine regulatory inspections, monitoring and surveillance at both the domestic level and border points, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) CEO Arun Singhal said.

These regulatory inspections are essential for ensuring food safety and quality for people, he added.

Addressing a virtual event organised by industry chamber CII, Singhal urged the industry and researchers to come up with simple tools or interventions which regulators can use.

For instance, a technique to detect the ratio of materials in a blend, a tool to prevent food fraud, real-time safety monitoring through affordable and rapid testing, among others, he said.

"FSSAI is exploring the possibilities of using technological tools like blockchain, machine learning, etc in obtaining traceability information," Singhal said.

Next generation tools like genome sequencing and innovations in chemical and molecular analysis can be very useful in the area of food authenticity and integrity, he pointed out.

Also, Internet of Things (IoT) has taken a big leap forward and can be used for mounting production and processing operations, he added.

With regard to recycled-PET and recycled plastics for food products, Singhal said FSSAI has promulgated regulations to allow alternate packaging materials.

"However, the authority is also aware of the limitations. These materials are not available in volumes that are desired by the industry," he said, and urged the industry, academia and research bodies to explore ways of making these materials available in sufficient volumes at reasonable prices.

For FSSAI, Singhal said the major thrust areas are simplification of the regulatory regime, IT platforms, and registering as many food businesses as possible.

Currently in India, close to 5 million food businesses are registered and this outreach must continue, he said.

"Many are small businesses, where some intervention is required in terms of capacity building. So that is a major thrust area. And in this direction we're already ensured the food safety training and certification program," he said.

FSSAI has already trained about 500,000 food safety supervisors in various food businesses. In addition, during the pandemic, about 2.6 lakh persons were trained on safe food and hygiene practices required for COVID-19, he added.

That apart, the FSSAI is gradually moving towards periodic risk-based inspections, third-party audits, focus checks and interventions to ensure safety and quality of products.

The second major thrust area of FSSAI, Singhal said, is to strengthen the food safety ecosystem at the state level.

FSSAI has started providing technical and financial assistance to states and union territories by creation of infrastructure and testing equipment for mobilising resources to carry out manual special camps inspections, awareness drives etc, he said.

FSSAI has signed memorandums of understanding with states. Last year, MoUs were signed with 23 states, and a substantial amount of funds were released to states. That process is continuing this year as well, he added.

The third major trust area is to strengthen the food testing capabilities in the country.

As of now, there are about 252 food testing laboratories notified by FSSAI and all of them are accredited by the National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL), he said.

In the past three years, FSSAI has released about Rs 300 crore to various state food testing laboratories for strengthening, purchasing equipment, and setting up microbiological testing facilities.

"Microbiological infections are very important. So we are planning to strengthen the microbiological testing facilities in labs," he added.