

FSSAI's NFL opens in Ghaziabad; Foundation stone for FSSAI Tower laid

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FSSAI's National Food Laboratory (NFL), was inaugurated at Ghaziabad in Delhi NCR on Friday by Dr. Harsh Vardhan, minister of health and family welfare. He also laid the foundation stone of the FSSAI Tower, which would house FSSAI's extension office.

NFL, Delhi NCR is one of the two premier referral laboratories under the direct administrative control of FSSAI. The other laboratory in Kolkata is also being upgraded.

This national lab is a result of a public-private-partnership (PPP), the first-of-its-kind in the food laboratory sector. It houses state-of-the-art collaborative training centres, namely, the Food Safety Solution Centre (FSSC) and the Centre for Microbiological Analysis Training (C-MAT).

NFL-Delhi, NCR symbolises the synchronisation of policy-driven partnerships and collaboration with a holistic approach and a futuristic vision.

FSSAI, in a statement, stated that the lab has a comprehensive array of equipment with the latest technologies and facilities to conduct analysis as per global accreditation standards for testing and calibration.

The apex food regulator will also be establishing NFLs at Mumbai and Chennai in the near future along the same lines, as reported by FnBNews,

In his inaugural address, the minister said, "For an effective regulatory food environment, a robust food testing ecosystem is important. This is essential to evaluate the quality and safety of food, their compliance to standards and also to identify any emerging risks from farm to fork."

He added, "FSSAI's initiatives towards this goal are truly commendable. I congratulate FSSAI for completion of 13 years of its existence. The contribution of FSSAI is visible everywhere and this scientific ecosystem backed by advanced food-testing infrastructure is a testimony of today's towering success." The FSSAI Tower, co-located at this place, has been planned to accommodate FSSAI's

growing staff numbers. The Central Government has recently created 493 new posts for FSSAI, bringing the overall strength of FSSAI to 824 now.

The new facility would also host visiting faculty and trainee officers during trainings and conferences.

Other facilities include a cafeteria, day-care centre, fitness centre, conference hall and training centre. This 8-floor tower with adequate parking facilities shall further augment the capabilities of FSSAI and its National Food Laboratory. Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare Ashwini Kumar Choubey, congratulating FSSAI in his keynote address, noted, "This public-private partnership in the food testing ecosystem will synergise the efficiency of the private sector and the regulatory control of the Government in an efficient manner."

"I have full confidence in the success of this partnership and hope to see more such collaborations for other laboratories in the country. This advanced food testing infrastructure will also help us fight any instances of food adulteration and will become more robust in the years to come."

Pawan Kumar Agarwal, chief executive officer, FSSAI, informed that in the past few years, FSSAI has taken various steps to create and invest in an effective food-testing ecosystem in the country.

With a robust system to recognise and notify laboratories in place, currently there is network of 261 food-testing laboratories, which has almost doubled from 138 in 2014.

The Indian Food Laboratory Network (InFoLNet) has been created as a one-stop virtual-hub for transparent flow of laboratory information.

FSSAI has also launched Food Safety on Wheels (FSW), a mobile food testing lab for testing, awareness and training. This first-of-its-kind, innovative van will take food testing infrastructure to remote villages and far-flung areas, thus, instilling confidence among citizens. There are 44 FSWs currently, which are expected to cross 500 in the coming years. "FSSAI has been investing in strengthening state and referral labs with advanced equipment, microbiological testing facilities, apart from capacity building activities for all the laboratory personnel. Several of these referral laboratories have been recognised as national reference laboratories. Fourteen of these were awarded certificates of recognition at the event," Agarwal said.

He added that through general and specialised training by FSSAI on good laboratory practices, over 1,500 laboratory personnel have been trained in the last three years.

The Authority has also streamlined the conduct of examinations to qualify food analysts increasing their number from 48 in 2014 to 360 currently.

In order to encourage young professionals to choose food analysis as a career option, FSSAI has established a system of conducting the Junior Analyst Examination since 2017, with 250

qualified junior analysts available across the country today.

Agarwal stated that as yet another example of synergistic partnership, the International Training Centre-Food Safety Analysis and Applied Nutrition (ITC-FSAN) has been created at Mumbai in collaboration with Global Food Safety Partnership (GFSP) and Export Inspection Council (EIC) as a regional laboratory capacity building and training hub.

He added that FSSAI had made strategic and smart investments in outreach activities to engage and empower citizens.

The DART Book and the Food Safety Magic Box have been developed to enable citizens to test common food adulterants at home and in school laboratories, respectively. These are being converted into short videos for mass dissemination.

Agarwal highlighted, “This is a landmark occasion for FSSAI as today we have commemorated the 13th anniversary of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006. Over the past 7-8 years, the Authority has transformed the food safety ecosystem in the country with the support of our stakeholders.”

“NFL-Delhi, NCR is one of the most advanced laboratories in the country and is at par with any other laboratory in advanced countries like USA. Today India can proudly boast of one of the finest networks of laboratory systems and emerging as a hub of food testing ecosystem in Asia,” he added.

He said, “Initiatives like the Food Safety Magic Box enhance engagement and build scientific temper to unleash creative potential among students through simple and fun experiments around food. We plan to make these Magic Boxes available across Health and Wellness Centres and are hopeful for the support of the Health Ministry.”

Present on the occasion amongst other was Rita Teotia, chairperson, FSSAI.