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Food companies can't lie now! FSSAI to prohibit terms like pure, natural, authentic on packaged foods

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Photo credit: Reuters

Tired of misleading food labels, like seeing the word 'fresh' on packaged foods? The Food Safety Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has got you covered. The food regulator is reportedly ready to introduce new regulations banning food companies from using words like 'natural', 'fresh', 'original', 'traditional', 'pure', 'authentic', 'genuine' and 'real' on the labels unless the product is not processed in any manner.

The only exception to the rule is that the products so labelled can be washed, peeled, chilled, trimmed or put through other processing stages that could alter its basic

characteristics, The Economic Times reported. The new regulations will be notified in the coming days.

Significantly, companies using synonyms of the above mentioned words in their brand names - or even words that could mean fresh, natural, pure, etc - will have to give a clear disclaimer stating "this is only a brand name or trade mark and does not represent its true nature".

The new regulation also specifies norms for several kind of claims that food companies can make in their advertising and promotions. The list includes nutrition claims, non-addition claims, including non-addition of sugars and sodium salts, health claims, claims related to dietary guidelines or healthy diets as well as conditional claims. For instance, packaged food companies can no longer advertise their products as a complete meal replacement, or undermine the importance of healthy lifestyle in any way. In case advertisers want to make claims that the new regulations do not cover, they will have to seek approval from the authority.

Last but not the least, the coming guidelines will reportedly prohibit food businesses from comparative advertising and making claims undermining the products of competitors as to promote their own products or influence consumer behaviour. There are strict penalty provisions for those misleading consumers.

"We are fully supportive of FSSAI's efforts to improve nutritional standards in India. Along with the rest of the F&B industry, we are engaging with them to have robust regulations in place," a spokesperson for HUL told the daily.

With this move the regulator is clearly gunning for more accountability among packaged food companies while protecting consumer interest. Given that Credit Suisse expects this market to grow to \$200 billion in the next 10 years, the FSSAI's move is a much-needed one.