

FSSAI notifies regulations to improve quality of food testing in India

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Shraddha Joshi, Mumbai

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), in a recent development, has gazette notified the regulation on laboratories, giving a structure to the food lab ecosystem in the country by detailing out recognition and notification of laboratories. Eventually, the new norms will help improve quality of food testing.

The comprehensive regulations will replace the existing laws governing the food labs in India. The new regulation has in detail, listed out the procedures for creating the three tier system of labs in India - food lab, referral lab and reference lab.

The new regulations will be called as the Food Safety and Standards (Recognition and Notification of Laboratories) Regulations, 2018.

Explaining the new law, a senior official from FSSAI, stated, "The apex regulator would soon start process for recognising any notified food laboratory or referral food laboratory as reference laboratory which will help develop method, procedure and testing of food across the country."

He added, "It will bring and build confidence amongst the consumers for food testing laboratories system by FSSAI and bring more transparency in the process of testing done by these laboratories."

The regulations say that the reference laboratory will be responsible for evaluating the performance of other notified laboratories. It will develop standards for routine testing procedures and reliable testing methods. It will also act as resource centre for provision of information for certified reference materials, provide technical support in the area of competence and also coordinate exchange of information amongst notified food laboratories.

The regulations would prescribe all the procedural requirements of the recognition and notification system for laboratories, such as renewal, suspension, derecognition and audits.

Apart from prescribing the procedures, it will develop proper system for reviewing and monitoring the activities of other laboratories thereby improving the quality of food testing in the country and also providing a legal base to the system already existing under FSS

Regulations, 2011.

The regulation highlights that the food authority may conduct surprise audit to monitor or review the functioning of a food laboratory, which will be scheduled once a year along with an annual surveillance audit.

On receiving a complaint on the functioning of a food laboratory, the authority may carry out investigation based on the complaint.

The notified labs are obliged to perform all tests in the approved premises as per the valid scope of recognition, provided that such laboratory may get tests carried out through sub-contracting with any other food laboratory with prior permission of the Food Authority.

Confidentiality with regards to test reports and information of sample results shall not be divulged to either FBOs or other person says the regulation.

The lab should submit monthly or quarterly or annual statement pertaining to number of samples received for testing and number of samples tested or number of samples failed, specifying the parameter or test and other details. It shall adhere to the testing charges as fixed by the Food Authority.

On being declared insolvent, accreditation granted to a food laboratory has been suspended or cancelled by the concerned accreditation body, failing to follow the terms and conditions of the agreement, non renewal of accreditation, technical competency, integrity or confidentiality is not satisfactory and committed a fraudulent act then the food laboratory may get denotified or derecognised by the food authority.