

Pune: Days before FSSAI guidelines come into effect, dairies wary about stricter rules

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On July 20 this year, the FSSAI had issued a notification on antibiotic residues and other pharmacological substance in milk. The notification had listed out 93 commonly used drugs and prescribed limits for them in parts per million (ppm). A set of new guidelines by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), which will come into effect on January 1 next year, has become a major source of worry for the dairy industry. The lack of preparedness and know-how at the ground level may, fear dairy owners, result in the rejection of several samples and hinder the supply of milk. On July 20 this year, the FSSAI had issued a notification on antibiotic residues and other pharmacological substance in milk. The notification had listed out 93 commonly used drugs and prescribed limits for them in parts per million (ppm). Traces of antibiotics in milk are found when such drugs are given to the animals. Usually, dairies carry out random checks on the samples collected for farmers, but those checks only screen for two or three commonly-used drugs.

The FSSAI's new regulation has, however, listed 93 drugs and prescribed limits for them. Dairy owners admit that screening for all of them this will be a tough task. The Authority had warned that if the dairies failed to adhere to these guidelines, legal action, including a possible jail term, would be initiated. From next year, the onus will be on the dairies to ensure that the milk they collect from farmers match the limits prescribed by the FSSAI. But industry insiders claim that the Authority has decided to implement its order 'in isolation', though the step would end up affecting the various stakeholders whose involvement is required to ensure adherence to the new guidelines. Now, dairies will not only have to set up testing facilities at their collection points, but they may also have to start refusing samples that don't adhere to the limits. This is bound to hit dairy farmers who lack the awareness and technical know-how to ensure the milk samples are not contaminated by antibiotics.



The issue of antibiotics or drugs in milk is caused by the easy availability of over-the-counter veterinary drugs as well as the absence of qualified veterinarians. Citing the example of sulfa drugs, a senior official from a private dairy in Maharashtra said the usage of such drugs was rampant and farmers ended up using them even for common problems as they were easily available. It was the job of the Food and Drugs Administration that

comes under the FSSAI, to crack down on the sale of such drugs, said industry sources. The lack of qualified veterinarians, meanwhile, triggers another set of problems as dairies often have to rely on para-vets, who are only trained to conduct artificial insemination, for the treatment of sick animals. "They are not qualified to prescribe antibiotics but do so in the absence of qualified vets," said a dairy owner.

The limits prescribed by FSSAI have also raised questions as, point out dairy farmers, in many cases the international standards are much more lenient. The Authority has said the maximum residue limit for three commonly-used drugs — sulfadiazine, sulfanilamide and sulfagunidine — are prescribed as 10, 10 and 25 parts per billion (ppb). The international food standards — commonly called as Codex Alimentarius — allows 100 ppb for sulfanilamide. With barely a couple of days before the guidelines come into effect, both farmers and veterinarians, however, remain clueless about the withdrawal period needed for such drugs. Even after the administering of drugs stops, there is a withdrawal period to ensure even traces of antibiotics are eliminated from the milk, said dairy owners. Rajiv Mitra, managing director of Phaltan-based Govind Milk and Milk Products, said: "We support any initiative which is in the interest of our consumers."