

## FSSAI on World Food Safety Day

*World Food Safety Day 2019*



"The first-ever World Food Safety Day on June 7 is an opportunity to take stock of where India is regarding food safety, and commit to promoting safe food and healthy diets," says FSSAI CEO Pawan Agarwal.

"Food touches the lives of everyone, everywhere. From farmers to food businesses, governments, and consumers — all are key players, which makes 'food safety everyone's business' as this year's theme states.

"The enactment of the Food Safety and Standards Act in 2006 ushered a paradigm shift in the approach to food safety, which moved from a focus on prevention of adulteration to ensuring food safety across the supply chain, including post-harvest primary production to transportation, storage, processing, storage, distribution and retail. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) was established under the Act to give life to this vision. It is mandated to ensure safe and wholesome food to more than 130 crore people with diverse eating habits through a highly fragmented food system and a largely unorganised sector.

"FSSAI has adopted a unique approach to creating a robust food-safety system that rests on the four pillars of science-based standards, consumer empowerment, building capacity of food businesses, and effective compliance and enforcement.

"Globally-benchmarked science-based standards for safe food are mostly in place now. As the food system evolves, these would be reviewed and expanded continually.

"The second and perhaps the most important pillar is empowering consumers to demand safe and wholesome food. The FSSAI has rolled-out several structured social and behaviour-change interventions designed to engage, excite and enable consumers to become drivers in this change, including Safe and Nutritious Food (SNF) initiatives at home, school, workplace and eating out. A 'food safety magic box' has been developed as a do-it-yourself food-safety testing kit for schoolchildren. FSSAI is working to reduce food waste through its 'Save food, share food, share joy' initiative that includes repurposing used cooking oil as biodiesel under the RUCO (repurpose used cooking oil) initiative.

"To incentivise safe-food practices, hygiene rating of restaurants and certification of clean street food hubs has been initiated and the certification of 'eat right campus' has been introduced to encourage the adoption of safe and healthy food practices at the community level.

"The FSSAI has launched the State Food Safety Index to rank states and create a sense of competition among them to promote food safety.

"These initiatives are now required to be scaled-up through multiple partnerships with government departments, consumer and civil society organisations and development partners, corporate houses, academic institutions and citizens. FSSAI has created a unique 'Network of professionals of food and nutrition' (NetProFaN) to disseminate messages widely through their local networks and chapters.

"Convergence with government programmes is being done by mainstreaming the 'Eat Right Toolkit' at the 150,000 Health and Wellness Centres of being established under Ayushman Bharat. The toolkit is a comprehensive package with simple messages and interactive tools to train frontline health workers.

"The third pillar is to build the capacity of food businesses to provide safe and healthy food options and FSSAI has trained at least 146,000 food-safety supervisors using minimal government funding under its food safety training and certification programme.

"Effective compliance and enforcement are imperative to ensure safety. With the number of licenced and registered food businesses increasing rapidly, a risk-based inspection system has been developed and implemented in most states. Third-party food-safety audits are being done and a network of 270 well-equipped and adequately staffed labs have been established for credible food testing. These are supported by reference labs that develop new test methods and provide proficiency testing and training. The government has 41 mobile food testing labs and more are in the pipeline, which has helped build public confidence.

"The work, however, has just begun as the size and complexity of challenges in ensuring safe food and healthy diets are enormous. Scaling-up consumer-outreach initiatives, greater efforts to build capacity of food businesses, particularly the small and marginal players, better surveillance, more effective enforcement, and addressing challenges from primary production such as removing pesticide and antibiotic residues in food are vital to build greater public confidence with regard to food safety. Let's use World Food Safety Day to commit ourselves to this goal."