



# Enabling Sustainable Food Systems

## ARUN SINGHAL

Chief Executive Officer,  
Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)

With market and trade globalization, people in both developing and developed nations have been experiencing many changes in their way of living as well as eating habits. Within the supply chain which is increasingly becoming more and more complex in the globalized market, contamination of food remains a serious issue, which requires more attention.

Continuous increase in the number of domestic food business operators (FBOs) and emergence of more street food hubs in the country is adding to the rise of new and emerging bacteria, toxins, and antibiotic residues. Alongside, changing consumer preferences and habits are also leading to increase in imported foods from outside. Imported food items also have chances of deterioration/food contamination/adulteration. Further, ease of accessibility to processed foods which often include high level of sugar, salt/sodium and fats is increasingly becoming a serious cause for rising burden of non-communicable diseases like obesity, heart disease, hypertension and diabetes.

At this juncture, what should be the effective strategies to address the emerging challenges to provide safe, healthy, nutritious and sustainable produced food to the world's population? The answer lies in the food systems approach. The world needs to rethink the ways in which food is produced, processed and consumed.

Today, India needs a new paradigm where the food systems approach becomes more holistic with policy coherence across all sectors like agriculture, food, health, trade and environment to name a few. To narrow down the gap, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), the apex food regulator in the country, has embarked upon a large-scale effort to transform the country's food systems through the 'Eat Right India' movement. The tagline - 'Sahi Bhojan. Behtar Jeevan', defines the foundation of this movement.

Eat Right India has devised FIVE KEY ACTIONS to achieve its vision. The first action is to formulate new regulations to promote healthy eating. FSSAI has come up with regulations on labelling, elimination of trans-fats, fortification of milk, oil and rice, and strengthening food testing. The government's effort is to make India Trans Fat free by 2022, a year ahead of WHO's target, in synergy with

the Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a New India on 75 years of the country's independence.

The second is to train and build capacity of various stakeholders in the food ecosystem such as food handlers, administrators, frontline health workers, etc. to help food businesses succeed, ensure compliance of food safety measures and serve safe food to the public at large.

The third is to certify various food businesses from clusters of street food vendors to restaurants, schools and campuses based on benchmarks for food safety and hygiene. So far, 28 Safe Street Food Hubs have been certified, thereby raising the confidence of consumers in consuming food from local street food hubs; and over 170 campuses have been certified as Eat Right Campus. This is an on-going effort which is gradually gaining momentum.

The fourth is to nudge food businesses by encouraging them to reformulate packaged foods into healthier options and to use safe and sustainable packaging materials; reduce usage of fat, sugar and salt in food; donate food under one of our initiatives – Save Food Share Food.

The final action point is to ignite large-scale social and behavioural change among the people of India towards safe, healthy and sustainable eating habits through initiatives such as Eat Right Fairs, mobile food testing vans called "Food Safety on Wheels", and awareness campaigns on electronic and social media platforms.

Eat Right India is also aligned with various Government flagship programmes like POSHAN Abhiyaan, AnemiaMukt Bharat, Ayushman Bharat and Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan. It brings together diverse stakeholders from various institutions like government departments, consumer organisations, development partners, industry associations, academia, professional associations etc., working closely on the food systems identified from pre-existing multi-stakeholder platforms or coalitions working on various food-related issues.

The food system being complex in nature, necessitates a more holistic and coordinated approach. The "whole of government" and "whole of society" approaches adopted by FSSAI underpin its role as "enabler and reformer" to build a positive, collaborative and inclusive environment to foster a sustainable food system in India. **NS**