

Policy for Recognition/Accreditation of Food Testing Laboratories located abroad

The issue of Recognition/Accreditation of Food Testing Labs has been raised from time to time by our trading partner countries. An Expert Committee was constituted under the Chairmanship of Dr. S.K. Saxena, Director, EIC to examine the matter. Based on the recommendations of the Expert Committee, the following policy is proposed:

The proposed policy envisages two major objectives (i) Mutual recognition of Food testing Laboratories and (ii) Identification of Government agencies in the respective countries for entering into MOA for certifying the quality of Food Products exported by them.

(i) Mutual Recognition of Food testing Laboratories.

It is imperative for food and agricultural products imported into India to meet our national standards. Similarly, food products exported from India also need to conform to the standards of the importing countries. Imported food products are, therefore, tested for such conformity before being allowed to enter the country. This results in delays and also adds to the transaction costs. In order to facilitate trade without compromise on food safety, a system could be developed for mutual recognition of the food safety labs in the trading countries. The test reports/Health Certificates issued by such labs may be accepted for import clearance.

Protocol:

- Identified government labs in South East Asian/India's neighbouring countries shall be accredited as per ISO/IEC 17025.
- The application shall be scrutinised against the FSSAI food safety requirements and if found in order, may be considered for recognition, which shall be commodity specific.
- If required, a team of experts may visit the laboratory to verify the compliance prior to consideration of recognition, as the regulatory requirements may differ from scope of accreditation.
- If a laboratory is found compliant as per FSSAI requirements, the laboratory may be allowed for pre-export sampling and analysis/issuance of health Certificate which shall be commodity specific.
- Based on the strength of the above test reports/Health certificate, FSSAI may carry out risk based sampling and analysis at its ports.
- Competent authority in the exporting countries shall take responsibility for the test reports issued by the recognised labs and take corrective action in case of non-compliance during the risk based sampling and analysis.

(ii) Identification of Government agencies in the respective countries for entering into Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) for certifying the quality of Food Products exported by them:

In order to ensure that the food and agricultural products exported/imported meet the respective national standards, it is essential that there is an MoA on reciprocal basis between the competent Authority in the Exporting Country and EIC & FSSAI which will facilitate the smooth export and import of food products between India and the neighbouring countries.

Protocol

- FSSAI and EIC shall interact with competent Authority of the respective countries for signing of MoA.
- Recognition of the competent authority/labs in neighbouring countries should be on a reciprocal basis. Therefore, MoA can be a Tripartite between the competent authority in the exporting country and FSSAI and EIC.
- Customs would be kept on board of the MoA, since FSSAI presence is only at the 6 ports of entry and the rest of the ports are under the control of customs.
- Once the MoA is finalised , the importing country shall circulate the seal and signature of the officials of the competent authority of the exporting country to border posts.
- Mutual recognition of food testing labs shall focus on the commodities of trade (import – export) interest.