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Q The current health crisis is a wakeup call for us to ensure we create a safer food system. As a result, nutrition is a major priority. What are some of the initiatives that FSSAI has taken recently to ensure safer and more nutritious food?

FSSAI has instituted several initiatives under the realm of the 'Eat Right India' movement to promote awareness and educate citizens on issues related to safe and healthy food. Recently, on 8th August, 2020, FSSAI has been selected as one of the top 10 finalists for the Food Vision Prize by Rockefeller Foundation, in association with Second Muse and OpenIDEO for its vision for the 'Eat Right India' Movement. Over the past 3-4 years, FSSAI has brought about a paradigm shift in its approach, way of working and regulatory delivery; thereby addressing both performance as well as perceptions amongst key stakeholders. FSSAI has taken up a holistic approach that caters to each and every sector, be it organized or unorganized. Keeping in mind even the smallest of business, through its cluster approach, FSSAI caters to the informal food sector also. Building their capacity and increasing the level of confidence through initiatives like the Clean Street Food Hubs, Eat Right Campus, Clean Meat/Mithai/Vegetable and fruit markets ensures that no citizen is left behind. The

Authority has tried to make a shift in its role from an 'enforcer' to an 'enabler'. This has helped build a positive, collaborative and inclusive environment, conducive to unlock the true potential of the food sector and facilitate ease of doing business and ease of living.

In recent years, the country's food regulatory environment has significantly improved and this would be further strengthened through private sector participation and partnerships in the coming years. As we move forward, FSSAI will continue to facilitate provision of safe and healthy food to the citizens. The Eat Right India movement has been launched with this objective and is comprised of various flagship initiatives such as Eat Right Campus for people at workplaces, hospitals and higher education institutions; Eat Right School for school children and awareness about safe, healthy and sustainable diet. Several benchmarking and certification schemes and cluster initiatives to improve the infrastructure and hygiene compliance levels in food establishments have been created that include Clean Street Food Hubs, Hygiene Rating for restaurants etc. Food businesses are being encouraged to reformulate their products and gradually reduce their fat, sugar and salt content; several corporates have voluntarily signed a pledge on such reformulation.

Fortification is being promoted by notification of standards for 5 staples along with +F logo for easy identification by consumers. The focus is to scale-up these initiatives and increase the scope of activities under each of these.

Q How harmful are traditional Indian cooking mediums like Vanaspati? Do we know which parts of the population consume more Vanaspati - rural? Is it still distributed through the PDS?

Vanaspati is one of the major sources of trans fat in Indian households especially in the rural areas. It was introduced as a cheaper substitute for Ghee. Vanaspati, a product made from vegetable oils has been in use in India for several decades with diverse applications such as a cooking medium at household level, frying medium of some common traditional fast foods and as ingredient in several bakery-ware on account of its functional properties and being a cheaper substitution for ghee. As such vanaspati is a standardized product listed in our regulations and involves use of safe permitted ingredients (vegetable oils). However, the process used for its manufacture leads to development of trans fatty acids which may have some implications for the health of consumers.

It is not being distributed through PDS.

Q With India fast emerging as the obesity capital of the world, what are some of the steps that you are taking to ensure that limits are prescribed for fats, trans fats, salt and sugar in all foods?

FSSAI has used a multi-pronged approach towards constituting a 'Healthy India'. On one side, we are bringing regulations to limit the fat, sugar and salt content in foods, and eliminate TFA, while on the other side, through the Eat Right initiative and awareness programmes, we are trying to generate awareness among consumers to limit the consumption of foods containing high levels of fat, sugar and salt.

Indian food standards are largely harmonized with those of the Codex Alimentarius and WHO recommendations are duly taken into consideration to limit use of fat (including saturated fats and TFAs), salt and sugar. Apart from regulations, FSSAI has also instituted

several initiatives under the realm of The Eat Right India Movement to educate citizens on fats, trans fat, salt and sugar.

Q It is said that eliminating TFA has been specifically recommended by WHO has a "best buy" i.e., something that could catalyze quick gains in health with less pain. It is well known that industrially produced TFA is considered a dietary risk for all major NCDs and one that is linked to half a million deaths worldwide. What steps FSSAI has taken to reduce the presence of industrially-produced trans fat in our food items?

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is committed to eliminate industrially produced trans-fat by the year 2022, a year ahead of the World Health Organization's global target to eliminate industrially produced trans fats from the food supply. FSSAI aims to achieve freedom from trans fats when India celebrates its 75th Independence Day - 'Trans Fat: India@75.' This transition is being facilitated and supported with the regulatory provisions (including revisions of trans-fat limits in vegetable oils and fats and other food products as well; labelling requirements and criteria for relevant claims in this context as explained earlier).

Additionally, some other actions/campaigns undertaken by FSSAI include:

- An advisory to ICDS & MDM not to procure and use trans-fat containing fats/oil (Vanaspati) in the preparation of foods and also desist from procuring food products prepared using margarine and bakery shortening;
- Initiating a campaign "Trans Fat Free India (Heart Attack Rewind – a 30 second audio – visual Public Service Announcement)" which focuses on elimination of trans fat through consumer awareness.
- Obtaining a voluntary commitment from the edible oil industry, Bakery Association, Halwai and Mithai Association to bring down the trans-fat from the existing 5% to 2% by 2022.

Q FSSAI has been extremely proactive about food safety of late. An example is the proposed 2% limit cap on TFA in foods and fats, oils and foods a year before the WHO deadline of 2023. When can we expect the regulations to be acted upon?

The regulation on TFA < 2% limit in fats and oils is in its final stage and will be released soon, may be as early as next month. The regulation on TFA in foods is also in the process. As indicated earlier the limit of 2% in all oils and fats is proposed to be implemented for mandatory compliance in a phased manner.

Q You have committed to Freedom from TFA – India@75. Will India meet that timeline?

As an apex food authority in India, FSSAI has taken up trans fat issue as a priority with efforts directed towards best practice policies which include limiting trans fats to "no more than 2 g per 100 g" (or no more than 2% of total fat) in all fats and oils; and less than 2% of the fat content in foods. With the notification of these two regulations on trans fat, FSSAI is very close to becoming one of the nations with best practice policies related to trans fat. Additionally, FSSAI has committed to achieve the goal of Freedom from Trans fat by 2022, a year before WHO's target. We propose to engage intensively with food businesses to achieve these goals in a time bound manner.

Q How much TFA is present in Indian foods? Do we have any baseline data of TFA content in Indian foods like samosa, jalebi etc.?

Foods prepared using partially hydrogenated vegetable oils (Vanaspati, margarine and bakery shortening) contain trans fats. In India a variety of foods are prepared using these materials

IN DECEMBER 2018, FSSAI ISSUED A DRAFT REGULATION LIMITING TRANS FATS IN ALL OILS AND FATS TO 3% AND 2% BY JAN 2021 AND JAN 2022, RESPECTIVELY

e.g., sweets (Jalebi, laddoo etc.), bakery products (fan, patty, puff, cake, pastry etc.) and these may contain Trans fats.

A couple of recent independent studies on various types of foods available in the domestic markets reveal that majority of the samples tested (more than 97%) had trans fatty acids content within the permissible limits of 5% of the total fat which also include around 63 % of the samples having trans fatty acids below 2% of the total fat.

Q Why is margarine so harmful? What are the challenges in exercising regulatory control on any of these recommended limits in foods or the edible oils sale of margarine?

Margarine is an emulsion of vegetable oils and fats with water. When partially hydrogenated vegetable oil is used in the preparation of this product, it leads to the presence of trans-fats in margarine. The existing regulation limits trans fat in margarine to not more than 5% of the total fat. The upcoming regulation of limiting trans fat in all fats and oils to not more than 3% by 2021 and 2% by 2022, applies to margarine as well. Once the upcoming regulation is notified, there will be stricter monitoring of fats and oils.

Q Have any limits been regulated in the past? If so, how successful have you been in enforcing compliance?

Yes, in the past FSSAI limited the industrially produced trans fats content to a maximum of 10% of total fats in various PHVOs, including interesterified vegetable fats, vanaspati, bakery shortening and bakery and industrial margarine. This limit was brought down to a maximum of 5% in 2017. The enforcement of the 10% limit and further bringing it down to 5% had been successful in the past with the majority of edible oil industries complying with the same.

In December 2018, FSSAI issued a draft regulation limiting trans fats in all oils and fats to 3% and 2% by Jan 2021 and Jan 2022, respectively. Further, in 2019, FSSAI issued another draft regulation limiting trans fats to 2%/100 g of fats in all processed foods by Jan 2022. Once these regulations are notified and enforced, FSSAI would be doing rigorous monitoring to ensure full compliance at field level.