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Q As the CEO of FSSAI, what you feel should be the top priorities of the Government in the interest of the consumers and Food Safety and Standards of our country?

The top priority of the Government should be educating consumers and making them aware about the facts regarding safety of food. In this age of the Internet and social media, a lot of negative and incorrect information is available, which misleads consumers or confuses them. FSSAI's responsibility lies in dispelling myths, clarifying misconceptions and ensuring that consumers are able to make informed choices by providing scientifically credible information on a range of topics. FSSAI's consumer awareness efforts include topics ranging from checking for adulteration to analyzing labelling information and making informed, healthy food choices. FSSAI also has a Myth Busters section on its website www.fssai.gov.in that address current myths circulating in the media. There is a video library and FSSAI's own You Tube Channel with all the latest information on food related topics. FSSAI has also developed a series of books such as Eat Right During Covid-19, Do You Eat Right? that directly target consumers. This information is being disseminated through various channels ranging from the Eat Right India website to TV, radio, print and social media in order to reach people from all walks of life.

Q The New Consumer Protection Act 2019, which has come into force since July this year was a promise made by our Hon'ble Prime Minister in 2014, which has been fulfilled, what are the key features you feel FSSAI can deliver to the common consumer in terms of improving Accessibility of Wholesome Food?

Consumers have been greatly empowered by the new Consumer Protection Act. E-filing of complaints, less

action suits, product liability, faster settlement of consumer disputes are noteworthy features of this law. Packaged food items fall within the ambit of consumer protection law and thus FSSAI's efforts to act in the interests of consumers will be strengthened.

Q Sustainable consumption and production are about doing more and better with less. What steps is the government taking to promote eco-friendly food products and what is the importance of pictorials or symbols on food labels in India like Veg & Non-Veg labels?

Use of ecofriendly packaging can significantly reduce the environmental impact of food products. FSSAI has constituted a Scientific Panel on Packaging to deal with the challenges in this area. A major step that FSSAI has taken is the review of its packaging regulations to accommodate more environment friendly materials and also promote reduction in use of plastic packaging. FSSAI has proposed the use of food grade packaging materials other than PET and glass for packaging of drinking water and has issued guidelines for use of bamboo as food contact material.

FSSAI has also allowed serving drinking water in paper sealed reusable glass bottles for captive use within hotel premises subject to certain conditions.

A campaign has been launched for safer and sustainable packaging and the State Food Safety Commissioners have been asked to start awareness campaigns on the use of alternatives to plastics. In addition, under the NetSCoFAN network, Indian Institute of Packaging (IIP) Mumbai as the lead institution along with other partner institutions will work in collaboration with FSSAI to address the issues related to eco-friendly packaging.

Food Safety and Standards (Labeling and Display) Regulations, 2018. prescribe the labeling requirements of



**Shri Arun Singhal IAS, CEO,
Food Safety and Standards Authority of India,
Government of India on the occasion of National Consumer Day 2020**

pre-packaged foods and display of essential information on premises where food is manufactured, processed, served and stored. Pictorials or symbols are easy to understand and are language neutral, so they facilitate easy choice of foods by consumers. Accordingly, the regulation provides for various pictorials and symbols for vegetation, non-vegetarian and organic foods, Front of pack labelling for indicating salt, sugar and fat content in pictorial form are also under discussion.

Q When do you feel we can empower consumers in India to make informed choice similar to Traffic Light and Zero Trans Fat symbols abroad?

FSSAI regularly brings out guidelines / regulations for all stakeholders and the industry to follow. It is our constant endeavor to nudge consumers to eat healthy foods through various eat right India initiatives.

In 2015, FSSAI revised the limits of trans-fatty acids to be not more than five percent in the vegetable fat/oil, margarine and fat spreads and hydrogenated vegetable oils. In May, 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) called for elimination of trans fat by 2023 and has launched the (REPLACE) action package, a step-by-step guide for the elimination of industrially-produced trans-fatty acids from the global food supply by 2023 as the first global initiative to eliminate a risk factor for CVD. FSSAI has also committed to reduce industrially produced trans-fat to less than 2% by year 2022, a year ahead of global target by WHO.

Regulation to mandate this are in final stages. FSSAI also provides trans fats free certification and logo to food businesses. Introduction of traffic light labelling for salt, sugar and fats is a work in progress, as it requires intensive consultations with all stakeholders in order to arrive at a consensus.

Q What are some of the key awareness initiatives to educate consumers on their rights and responsibilities on safety, health and sustainability and make them conscious consumers on safe and healthy food habits?

The Eat Right India movement has been launched by FSSAI to protect the health of the people and the planet by transforming the food ecosystem of the country. It is based on three key themes- Eat Safe, Eat Healthy, and Eat Sustainable and encompasses a bouquet of initiatives that targets food businesses and consumers to make the right food choices.

Through Eat Right India, FSSAI is promoting safe and wholesome food. Under this umbrella, Eat Right India promotes a variety of whole grains ranging from wheat and rice, to millets and other indigenous grains for better nutrition, keeping the diversity of the population in mind. Various initiatives such as Eat Right Campus for people at workplaces, hospitals and higher education institutions; Eat Right School for school children and the Eat Right Toolkit to reach people at the grassroots level have been launched.



Various IEC and awareness activities such as “Aaj Se Thoda Kam” have been launched to reduce salt, fat & sugar in diet as well as promotion of safe food habits. To empower consumers to check food adulteration, the DART Book, The Food Safety Magic Box and a mobile food testing van called Food Safety on Wheels have been provided.

Eat Right India is also focused on promotion of large-scale fortification of wheat flour and rice with iron, folic acid and Vitamin B 12 to address widespread iron-deficiency anemia in the country. These staple foods such as rice and wheat flour appear to be good vehicles to deliver nutrients to large sections of the population. FSSAI has been working with the Ministry of Women and Child Development to promote fortified staples in the ICDS programme and the Ministry of Human Resource Development to promote fortified foods in the mid-day meal scheme. Even under PDS, fortified rice is being provided in 15 districts, which would be later expanded.

To encourage and support sustainable food production and consumption, FSSAI is spearheading initiatives such as Jaivik Bharat to identify authentic organic food; Save



Through its Eat Right India movement, FSSAI has taken a food systems approach wherein it is working with a range of stakeholders in the food ecosystem to ensure safe, healthy and sustainable food for everyone.

Food, Share Food to reduce food waste and promote food donation; Safe and Sustainable Packaging in F&B Sector to reduce the use of plastics and Repurpose Used Cooking Oil (RUCO) for safe & healthy use of cooking oil and repurposing used oil to make biodiesel.

FSSAI has recently announced the Eat Right Challenge for cities and districts and has also announced the launch of Eat Right Challenge for the Smart Cities. Further, FSSAI is using various communication tools to disseminate right information on safe and healthy eating practices in the interest of public. Everyday posts, in Hindi and English from the official handle of FSSAI incorporating key messages of food safety, personal hygiene practices, healthy eating habits and other valuable tips for citizens are taken out on various social media platforms. FSSAI has recently released an eBook on Eat Right during COVID for consumers and a guidebook "Do You Eat Right" so that consumer can make right eating choices.

Q What is your message to the consumer organizations and citizens on the occasion of National Consumer Day?



Firstly, I congratulate and thank various consumer organizations for their constant support and dedication in spearheading the agenda of Eating Right in every possible manner.

I sincerely request consumer organizations to work in tandem with the Food Authority and spread awareness amongst consumers and empower them about their rights as well as responsibilities. Food Safety is a shared responsibility and it is the duty of every stakeholder including consumers to demand safe, healthy and sustainable food. Demand always helps in generating Supply. Only when a consumer demands safe and healthy food, food businesses will be pushed to provide us with healthier options.

Consumer organizations can play a big role in making consumers aware about the recent changes in regulations and other important issues pertaining to food. FSSAI has been working towards improving the food testing ecosystem across the country. We have provided mobile food testing laboratories called Food Safety on Wheels (FSWs) to the States/ UTs and any consumer can visit these FSWs and test the quality of food products. FSSAI has recently overhauled the consumer grievance platform with better functionality and accessibility to State Food Safety Commissioners. I hope and desire this new platform will bring a more cursory shift towards the better complaint management system.

A lot can be achieved at the ground level with their support and every small effort would certainly help in mobilizing the masses. Food is a common requirement of all consumers and hence, consumer organisations should make safe and healthy food for consumers their topmost priority. FSSAI will stand solidly with them in this venture. ▶