

FOOD SAFETY FOCUS ON INDIA: A GROWING MARKET

Open to foreign direct investment and with growing food and agriculture sectors, India offers a wealth of opportunity to the food industry. However, as a developing nation, its food safety regulation is only now coming into focus and undergoing extensive improvement.

Consumers, regulatory bodies and the government are all driving food safety improvement. Historically, food safety in India has been regulated by a wide variety of legislative orders and acts, but this ad hoc approach is becoming more streamlined and effective. Nevertheless, logistical challenges remain.

ACTIVE FOOD SAFETY STANDARD ENFORCEMENT

The Food Safety & Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is responsible for active enforcement of the national laws and regulations that govern the retail supply chain and its food processors. It has replaced a fragmented structure that relied on multi-level, multi-departmental control, and now delivers a single line of command, as well as a more visible and recognisable oversight organisation.

In an effort to improve food safety standards and open the country for international business India's Food Safety & Standards Act 2006 (FSSA) consolidates the country's existing laws into one cohesive Act and is the building block upon which the FSSAI is based.

To ensure the availability of safe, wholesome food for human consumption, the FSSA sets down scientific standards for food articles, to regulate their manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import. It integrates the licensing provisions in the following food product related Orders:

- Fruit Products Order, 1955.
- Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954.
- Milk and Milk Product Order, 1992.
- Vegetable Oil Products (Control) Order, 1947.
- Edible Oils Packaging (Regulation) Order, 1998.



- The Solvent Extracted Oil, De Oiled Meal and Edible Flour (Control) Order, 1967.
- Meat Food Products Order, 1973.
- Any Order under the Essential Commodities Act, 1995, relating to food.

IMPROVED OPPORTUNITY

The FSSAI's role as the single point of reference for all matters relating to food safety and standards, regulations and enforcement means not only better service to all stages of the food value chain, but also an improved response to strategic issues such as health foods, nutraceuticals, GM foods and facilitating international trade.

Enforcement of the FSSA is the responsibility of state governments and union territories (UT). However, the FSSAI is also working to shift the emphasis from enforcement to self-compliance, through adoption of food safety management systems. Introducing consistency between domestic and international food policy measures will help to raise standards without reducing the safeguards to public health and consumer protection.

Consumers will benefit too, as better regulation increases confidence in the quality and safety of food.

As India seeks to increase its export market and deals increasingly with traders already conversant with the stringent regulatory conditions of the USA, Europe and Japan, so the implementation of international standards will become commonplace. Food processors and exporters will have to embrace regulation to ensure continuity of trade.

RETAIL RESPONSIBILITY

Retailers can ensure compliance with food safety standards by ensuring that their suppliers, manufacturers, packers and growers maintain proper systems that meet the requirements of the FSSA. This can be achieved either by in-house verifiers, or as may be more practical for India's independent business model, by an experienced third party testing and inspection company like SGS.

Chapter IV, paragraph 23 of the FSSA states that no person shall manufacture, distribute, sell, or expose for sale, nor dispatch or deliver to any agent or broker for the purpose of sale, any packaged

food product that is not marked and labelled in the manner specified by regulation. It is therefore the retailer's responsibility to ensure compliance of all products. Imported goods intended for retail sale are subject to all provisions of the Standards of Weights and Measures (Packaged Commodities) Rules, 1977, at the point of import.

Introducing a consistent, effective management system coupled with a supplier inspection and verification programme will demonstrate compliance and improve standards.

NEW MARKET, NEW CHALLENGES

Agriculture is India's third largest industry employing almost half the country's working population and accounting for 18.1% of GDP. On the whole, it is not widely organised and relies heavily on small growers, transporters and traders to supply both domestic and export markets. As one of the world's biggest producers of tea, fresh produce, grains and oilseeds, its producers and transporters are rising to the challenge set by export standards.

With a traditionally local focus, the supply chain is both long and low-tech, raising issues that have already been overcome in other markets, such as risk of contamination and damage during delivery.

CONTAMINATION RISKS

To meet growing demand for food production, farmers in India use a range of fertilisers and pesticides. As a result, the agro-chemicals used to grow produce, as well as the veterinary drugs/antibiotics commonly used in animal farming are often found in trace quantities in the final product, and thus enter the food chain.

International traders need to be aware of these risks and work with growers and processors to introduce, implement and verify production processes and policies. A testing programme from SGS can verify the presence of these substances and help to ensure the quality and safety of products. Ignorance is no defence; ensure products meet the quality standards of their destination market.

Additionally, as a developing nation with vast differences in geography and geology, contaminants and impurities can also be picked up from the environment. When transporting or storing commodities, it is essential to prevent insect related risks and damage. We perform fumigation services in ports and logistics centres worldwide; our skilled and mobile teams deliver effective and reliable interventions. Accordingly, our services comply with stringent legislation, quality and safety standards.

CLEANLINESS – CAUSE FOR CONCERN

At over 3 million km² India is the seventh largest country in the world. This scale, combined with the road, rail and air infrastructure of a developing country, means that the physical supply chain that moves products to warehouses, processors and on to retail premises is longer than usual.

Travelling great distances and through numerous facilities creates an unusually high risk of contamination, adulteration or infection by pathogens. The monitoring and upkeep of hygiene and other safety measures becomes difficult.

India's agriculture sector relies heavily on small farmers, local transport companies and distribution chains. There is relatively little co-ordination across the whole country. Many operators, each needing to make a profit and serve local markets, often lack the facilities and other resources to maintain the food safety, hygiene and handling conditions that are expected of an organised, efficient transportation operation.

Without appropriate intervention, the food chain suffers from high rates of wastage and lost market value as food is mishandled, contaminated and/or damaged before it reaches its destination. Globally, it is estimated that during transportation some 10% of grain and 40% of fresh produce is lost and does not reach end consumers.

In response to the country's changing food safety landscape and the pressing need for temperature controlled supply chain facilities, SGS has opened its first integrated food safety and cold chain

facility in Mumbai. The first facility of its kind in the area, it is strategically located close to markets, port and city. Pre-cooling, sorting & grading and ripening can all be catered for. Additionally, our FSSAI approved laboratory is nearby. This means faster turn around times and reduced risk of contamination.

FSSAI APPROVED LABORATORIES

SGS in India has FSSAI approved laboratories at Ahmedabad, Cochin, Indore, Chennai, Kolkata, Bangalore, Gandhidham and Gurgaon for testing Agri & Food products.

SOLUTIONS FOR SUCCESS

The issues are not insurmountable, and the FSSAI has the power to enforce hygiene, quality and safety standards but the solutions require investment to help bring this valuable market up to internationally acceptable standards. SGS is uniquely positioned to help primary producers, processors, exporters, retailers, catering establishments, hotels and restaurants to implement food safety and quality programmes.

At SGS, our industry expertise and experience delivers efficient services to help safeguard quality and safety throughout the whole food supply chain, from raw and semi-manufactured foodstuffs, to final products in all principal food segments. We deliver comprehensive and cost-effective control solutions including audits, testing, inspection, technical solutions and training. In addition to investment in cold chain facilities and FSSAI approved laboratories we can also conduct field trials and a full range of seed services.

Find out more about [SGS Food Safety Solutions](#).

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