

## **IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE INDIAN FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRY: FSSAI, MOFPI GUIDELINES AND INDUSTRY CASE STUDIES**

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### **Abstract**

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) since its establishment in August, 2011 has as its primary mandate to provide safe and wholesome food for the country. The importance of food safety and hygiene has never been more as we are passing through these unprecedented times of crisis arising due to the worldwide pandemic situation. As we change our lifestyles in times of social distancing to prevent further transmission of COVID-19, FSSAI has formulated some important guidelines that include detailed points of clarification on the various important issues such as- Is the virus food borne, the strict set of rules to be followed by food businesses and delivery personnel, proper hand hygiene, import of food, regulations extended in the time of pandemic.

The aim of this paper is to elucidate and highlight the important points included in the guidelines issued by FSSAI. It has also been attempted to include the work and help provided by various government/state government schemes such as the poshan abhiyan, mid-day meal etc. during this crisis situation. Effort has been made to study the adoption of the FSSAI guidelines by leading food industries. This has been carried out by including several case studies of different companies like Mother Dairy, Coca-Cola, Nestle etc. responding to the pandemic. Since India already ranks at 102 among 117 economies as per Global Hunger Index 2019 the pandemic has certainly worsened the situation. Although with a transparent, modified and efficient supply chain system we can overcome this critical issue.

## Introduction

### **Guidelines Issued by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India in the Light of COVID-19**

#### **Guidelines by FSSAI for Food Business during COVID-19**

According to the FSSAI guidelines, the first major thing to be known is **that there is no evidence of spreading of coronavirus by food. It spreads directly through human transmission or indirectly through contaminated surfaces.** They also issued a guidance note for food businesses elaborating some guidelines to be followed during Covid-19.

- The symptoms should be known by all food handlers and they should be given proper testing and care to minimize the spread of coronavirus.
- They should be given training regarding the social distancing, wearing masks and handling food safely. Their screening should be done while entering in the workplace.

Some of the measure safety steps to be taken while processing, packaging, retail network like:

- Personal hygiene of food handlers should be maintained. Use of hand sanitizers or washing hands with soap and water for 40-60 seconds should be followed. Also, in the food

business, work surfaces should be disinfected regularly.

- In the working area, usage of face mask/covers/head gears/aprons must be mandatory. Masks should be sanitised regularly and while removing it, outer surface should not come in contact with the face.
- Gloves should be worn and changed frequently. Workers have to take care while handling food and do not take gloves as a sense of security and not wash their hands. It should be the utmost priority for handling food safely.
- Respiratory hygiene\_\_should be maintained by covering mouth and nose while sneezing or coughing, use tissue and dispose off in closed bins.
- Use of phones and fingerprint attendance should be discouraged for everyone's safety.
- All the masks, face covers and PPE kits must be disposed in closed bins or sealed paper bags. They should be finally disposed by following instructions given by the manufacturer of the kit.
- Minimize physical contact between workers and minimum distance of two meters should be followed, using space measures.
- No sharing of lockers should be allowed and if food delivery is to

take place, the food can be left at the doors or maintain gap.

### **Cleaning of Working Area**

- Food premises should be cleaned regularly, with soap and water, followed by disinfection.
- All the equipment and utensils should be sanitized and cleaned with hot water.
- Washrooms and toilets should be cleaned with soap and water after every shift.
- High touch points shall be cleaned twice a day for disinfecting them.

*(Cleaning with soap and water should always be followed by disinfection)*

### **For Different Food Sectors, Following Instructions should be Taken care of-**

#### For Food Delivery/Service –

- a) Cleaning of area after every meal prepared.
- b) Hand wash or sanitizer facility at entry or billing areas.
- c) No direct contact with food should be allowed.
- d) Food items should be cleaned and made in a limited amount.
- e) Customers should practice social distancing and place online orders.

#### For Delivery Workers –

a) Wear masks and gloves, carry sanitizers, follow social distancing and avoid touching high touch points.

b) Delivery bags must be disinfected & contactless delivery should be promoted.

#### For Food Transportation and Distribution People –

a) The workers should know all symptoms and precautions to be taken. They should avoid usage of public toilets. Also, delivery vehicles should be sanitized and if a worker is showing any symptoms, allowance of delivery should not be given.

b) All cleaning measures should be taken while packaging of food.

### **Some Guidelines for Customers-**

- a) Customers should be informed about all the precautionary steps of the workplace to be followed by them.
- b) Screening of customers should be done.
- c) Wearing of masks/face covers is mandatory.
- d) Social distancing should be maintained in long queues.
- e) Avoid touching any surfaces and only touch the products they intend to buy.

There's no evidence of spreading of coronavirus by foods, so if a food is handled by a corona positive case, discard the food items which have a shelf life of less than 72 hours and if

more than that, the food should be stored separately for 72 hours for proper safety.

### **Food Safety Act, 2006**

The Act aims to establish a single reference point for all matters relating to food safety and standards, by moving from multi- level, multi-departmental control to a single line of command. The Act established **FSSAI and the State Food Safety Authorities** for each State. The **Food Safety Appellate Tribunal** and the Registrar of the Appellate Tribunal, for adjudication of food safety cases.

It covers Licensing and Registration, **Packaging and Labelling** of Food Businesses, Food Product Standards and **Food Additives** Regulation. It prohibits and restricts on sales or approval for **Non-Specified Food and Food Ingredients**, such ingredients may cause harm to human health. It provides for Food Safety and Standards on Organic Food and regulates **Food Advertising**. Some programs of the Food and safety standards of India

- **Heart Attack Rewind** – It is the first mass media campaign of FSSAI. It is aimed to support FSSAI's target of eliminating trans-fat in India by the year 2022.

- **FSSAI-CHIFSS** – It is collaboration between FSSAI and CII-HUL Initiative on Food Safety Sciences to promote collaborations between Industry, Scientific Community, Academia for food safety.
- **Swasth Bharat Yatra** – It is a Pan-India cycle movement called as 'Eat Right India' aimed to create consumer awareness about eating safe and nutritious food.

### **Way Forward for the FSSAI**

FSSAI should also bring the manufacturers under the responsibility of imposing food safety. The focus should be on covering each person in supply chain for assessment of food manufacturing, storing and distribution. FSSAI has recently notified the draft Regulations on Food Recall Procedure to provide guidance to Food Business Organisations (FBO). This will enhance the present regulatory system. FSSAI and the state food authorities should conduct surveys of food business activity under their jurisdiction to ensure a comprehensive and reliable database of FBOs and ensure better enforcement and administration of the FSS Act. Increasing limits of compensation and fine in cases of injury or death and providing adequate

infrastructure such as food testing laboratories has recommended that FSSAI should frame standard operating procedures on the formulation and review of standards, and ensure that these are being followed in the near future.

### **Food Industry Case Studies**

Amid the lockdown, The Food Processing Companies have also tried their best to maintain safety and hygiene environment by following without making disruptions in their production and sales.

#### **Mother Dairy Fruit and Vegetable Pvt. Ltd.**

As the no. of case is increasing by the day, **Mother Dairy** recognises the necessary safety measures and steps to serve the nation in these tough times. It has made many arrangements and put strict protocols to fight the virus in every way possible in their units as well as around 850 milk booths in Delhi-NCR. Right from procurement to processing, logistics and retail network, they are constantly monitoring their operations to ensure supply chain in seamless and precautions are being adhered to.

In the lockdown, it ensured continuous supplyensuring no

disruption in the supply of the milk or other product as the people resort to panic buying.

It had also supplied around 300 tonnes of fruits and vegetables to its retail stores 'Safal' across Delhi-NCR to meet the local demand by enforcing safe distancing and other precautionary measures. The Company also introduced butterscotch-flavoured **haldi milk** by following the self-care guidelines and recommendations issued by Ayush ministry as preventive health measures for boosting immunity to fight the virus. Safal also partnered with restaurants aggregator and Zomato in select locations of NCR.

#### **The Coca-Cola Company**

The American beverage multinational company owns 500 brands and employs 700,000 Global employees. Since the coronavirus outbreak began, the company has implemented additional cleaning and sanitization routines, focussing on high-touch surfaces, and have taken steps to restrict the visitors to their facilities. In some of their locations, delivery drivers do not leave their truck, reducing person to person interactions.

Some manufacturing plants have implemented split shifts. They have also reinforced hygiene and exposure guidelines with their employees. If the company comes to know the employee is ill or have direct or indirect contact with someone with Covid-19 the company will immediately implement their isolation and sanitization protocols and will begin any necessary quarantines, in line with guidance of local health officials. In line with recommendations to reduce large gatherings. The Coca Cola Company has asked the majority of office based employees to work remotely. This include employees based at the company's global headquarter in Atlanta, as well as in locations around the world.

According to U.S Food and Drug Administration, there is no transmission of coronavirus from food or food packaging. Still the company is taking extra precautions to ensure products are handled hygienically at every step, from manufacturing facilities to customer outlets.

### **Dabur India Ltd.**

As a Consequence of the lockdown, there was material impact on **Dabur** productions and sales and the company faced disruptions but then it has taken

many steps to mitigate the impact of lockdown while ensuring the safety of employees and consumers.

On March 23, Dabur announced suspensions of its medicines and hand-sanitizer. It had ramped up production of essential and hygienic products and medicine to meet consumer demand adopting strict and hygiene measures at its manufacturing units. The company initiated 'Work from Home' for all office based staffs.

It has rolled up "Dabur Ashray" insurance scheme for its frontline staff who are not covered by any state or cooperate insurance scheme.

The company contributed a lot to the country to fight against corona. It established "Dabur Care Fund" to protect lives and support to the affected persons. Employees contributed their one-day-salary for the same which goes to PM Relief Fund. Now in view of the fresh guidelines, issued by Ministry of Home Affairs on May1 and after evaluating the ground situation, the company has resumed production at all manufacturing units.

### **Nestle India**



From the supply chain to the factories, **Nestle** is working around the clock to make sure they meet the nutritional needs of people all around the world. They are playing an essential role during these times with their continued and maintained supply especially for those in need- like children, the elderly and those struggling from this illness. The company is working hard to keep the supply safe and healthy .

It has taken various steps during these times to ensure the safety of both their customers and employees. The company is asking their employees around the world not to travel for business purpose. They are encouraging work from home practices to office based employees as much as possible and trying to minimize the risk of infection at work. The Company is providing sick pay and has requested its employees to self-quarantine in case they experience symptoms of COVID-19.

Nestle has led substantial local relief efforts in the communities around the globe where they operate. It has donated to food banks, food delivery organizations such as Red Cross and Red Crescent, to support people in need, apart from providing prompt and pragmatic

support to their business partners who are affected by this crisis along with supporting Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) with a donation of CHF 1 million. They are also donating CHF 10 million for immediate deployment in countries where it is most needed. The company has assured their customers that they will continue to produce and deliver products to meet global demands. Enhanced safety measures have been implemented for the safety of Nestle's frontline workers in factories, quality labs and distribution centres. Free meals and transport have also been provided to staff wherever needed to reduce the risk of falling ill. It is also providing generous sick leaves to their workers who gets infected. Nestle has even worked with physicians to develop new tailored COVID-19 medical nutrition and supplement treatment protocols.

#### **MTR Foods Private Ltd.**

**MTR Foods**, the pioneer of packaged food products in India has always taken safety and wellness of the people as its priority. In the wake of pandemic the company assures consumers of safety and hygiene standards through digital film by showing

the safety standards like sanitization, social distancing, thermal checking of workers and staffs etc. followed while manufacturing and delivering the products to give consumers a sense of reassurance. It ensures that their core categories and products that are relevant to consumers are available on e-commerce platforms and reach their consumers safely. To mitigate the problem they are working with only 50% manpower in manufacturing units. It also provided ready to eat meals to doctors and medical staff. It has taken to online retail and tie-ups with food aggregators to ensure product deliveries to customers during lockdown. MTR Foods Private Limited is doing its bit in the fight against Covid-19 and give support in every way possible.

#### **Ministry of Food Processing Industries- initiatives during covid-19**

The Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) was set up in July, 1988 to give an impetus for the development of food processing sector in the country. It is concerned with formulation and implementation of the policies for the food processing industries within the overall national priorities & objectives. The ministry

acts as a catalyst for bringing in greater development into this sector, guiding & helping the industry & creating a conducive environment for healthy growth of the food processing industry. It issued various guidelines of the scheme or the programme started by it some of which are:

Due to restriction imposed on account of COVID-19, the supply chain has been disrupted and farmers are not able to sell their product in market. After Inter- Ministerial Consultations, the scheme was approved by Hon'ble Minister for the revival of the economy as part of Atamnirbhar Bharat Package Announcement with the objective to protect the growers of Fruits & Vegetables from making distress sale due to lockdown & reduce post- harvest losses. Guidelines were provided for short term intervention for all Fruits and Vegetables under “ Operation Green” under “ Atamnirbhar Bharat Abhiyan” Now Operation Green had been extended from Tomato, Onion & Potato (TOP) to nearly all fruits & vegetable for the period of six months from the date of notification. According to the scheme Minister will provide 50% subsidy on transportation of eligible crops for surplus production cluster to consumption centre & 50% subsidy on storage facilities for eligible crops. MoFPI will engage services of existing PMAs under Operation Green Scheme to assist the Ministry in



implementation and monitoring of the scheme.

Guidelines for the Scale up/ Upgradation of Food Testing Laboratories with the motto to benefit all stake – holders & ensure safety and quality of food products was provided. With the objective to analyse the samples received from food processing industry and other stakeholders and reduce the time taken for analysis of samples it goes on to ensure compliance of domestic/international standards of food and establish a surveillance system for monitoring the quality and composition of food. The organization would implement the schedule of the proposal laboratory within a period of 18 months from the date of issue of the approval letter. The facility created out of financial assistance giving guidelines on how to proceed further from MoFPI will be availed by food processing units for getting their product tested. According to the scheme, Central/State Government and its organization / universities are eligible for grant-in-aid of entire cost of laboratory equipment 25% of the cost of technical civil work to house the equipment & furniture and also for the monthly emoluments of two technical staff. If the applicant is a govt. organization the share of expenditure is borne from their self - generated fund. The organization create awareness through wide publicity of

such facility among the food processing units in & around the area

Guidelines were given by MoFPI for the implementation of **National Mission on Food Processing (NMFP)** that has launched a new Centrally Sponsored Scheme. NMFP during the 12<sup>th</sup> Plan (2012-2013) to decentralize the implementation of Ministry Scheme which will lead to substantial participation of state govt. / UTs. It deals with numerous objectives like promoting the facilities of post-harvest operation including setting up of Food Processing Industries, to facilitate Food Processing Industries to adopt HACCP & ISO certification norms. The mission is governed by **National Food Processing Development Council (NFPDC)** headed by the Hon'ble Minister of Food Processing Industries as its chairman with Secretary, Department of Consumer Affairs, Chairman, FSSAI etc. as its members. The Council is the policy making body giving overall direction and guidance to the NMFP and will monitor and review its progress and performance. To administer the mission, an EC headed by Secretary, MFPI has been constituted with Joint Secretary, MOFPI as Member Secretary. To carry out administration of the State Food Processing Mission, a State Level Empowered Committee (SLEC) is constituted which act as a Mission Directorate for state Food Processing

Mission. It is the competent authority to decide interest allocation of the funds among the scheme like Modernization of Meat, Modernization of Food Processing Industries, scheme for HRD etc. and have the authority to recall the grant in case of mis-utilization of grant by the applicants. As per the funding Pattern is concerned, this scheme will be implemented in the ratio of 75:25 (Govt. of India & States) except for North- Eastern States where the ratio is 90:100.

### Conclusion

**COVID-19!** The pandemic that brought everything to halt. Still, for everyone's health at the utmost priority, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) issued some important guidelines. It firstly clarified that there's no conclusive evidence for any food borne transmission of Coronavirus. It spreads **directly through human to human transmission or indirectly through contaminated surfaces** that contain the virus. The disease can be **asymptomatic** as well as show **mild flu or severe respiratory symptoms**. Viruses need to enter in the living cells to replicate. Unlike bacteria, they never replicate on food. Hence, the major risk involved is transmission through infected food handler or consumer, while handling food.

They issued a guidance note titled "Food Hygiene and Safety Guidelines for Food Business during COVID-19 Pandemic". Apart from the Good Hygiene Practices, food handlers should be made aware of coronavirus symptoms to seek the earliest medical care and minimize the risk of infecting others.

FSSAI issued guidelines on '**Labelling of Food Products**' too, for the safety of consumers. The various characteristics like "Name of food, list of ingredients, nutritional information, declaration regarding vegetarian and non- vegetarian foods, food additives, net quantity, name and address of manufacture, code number/lot number/batch number, date of manufacture and expiry, instruction for use" should all be mentioned without fail. Country of origin should also be mentioned for imported foods. Consumer should always check the labelled information before buying and if a malpractice comes to notice, the manufacturer can land itself into a huge problem for cheating the consumer.

Recently, FSSAI released some guidelines on **Recalling of food products** to help FBO's outline a proper recall plan and apply them, when demanded by the situation. The recovered product, must be stored in a separate area, with accurate records and batch codes mentioned. After recovery, products should be reprocessed before

release to the market, if fit for human consumption or else should be destroyed. Competent Authority permit action on the companies which produce unsafe food i.e. recalled products, so that the need for such recalls do not rise again.

For **Import of food** also, regulations extended in the time of pandemic. The importer shall declare and submit the undertaking/declaration in the form as annexed to concerned authorised officer. Authorised officers are directed to carry out visual inspection on the same day without delay and on getting the receipt of analysis report from labs, if the product equals with FSSAI standards, they should issue final no objection certificate.

Various case studies conducted on major Indian and Multi National Companies have shown that the pandemic has been taken seriously all over the world and numerous rules and regulations have been introduced to combat this unprecedented crisis. Reduced person-to-person contact and increased sanitization and cleaning practices have been introduced to battle the spread of the illness. Split shifts for workers have also been introduced in these companies along with providing financial aid to them. Companies have assured their customers the safety and continued, safe supply of their products during this crisis.

India ranks at 102 among 117 economies as per Global Hunger Index 2019. Before the lockdown, Jaccha Bachha survey demonstrated that less than half of pregnant women in rural areas eat nutritious food and majority of them are deprived of quality healthcare. We are together fighting this pandemic, but it has worsened the situation of hunger. And to keep the situation still in hands, government is trying every way out, be it providing mid-day meals or the Poshan Abhiyan etc.

They have allowed FBO's to temporarily operate their business on the basis of a valid receipt of **FSSAI license** registration application having 17-digit application reference number generated on Food Licensing and Registration System for the period of lockdown and the month after. Only essential inspections need to be carried out at this time. Also, State food safety department while facilitating efforts in ensuring supplies to poor/stranded labour need to ensure that the food supplied is hygienic and safe.

While the department is actively engaged in COVID efforts, it must ensure that its officials including laboratories must follow all norms and quickly evolve procedures for working remotely. Abattoirs and slaughter houses need to use the current opportunity to upgrade the facilities from the perspective of both food

safety and also precaution for the ongoing situation. Also, they initiated a **training module for food handlers** on essentials of food safety and hygiene practices during COVID-19, through its flagship FOSTAC programme.

(Since the information on the COVID-19 pandemic is evolving continuously, these guidelines are according to the present information and can be revised when any new information is available.)

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