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FSSAI may join hands with ad council to check misleading claims by food firms



ASCI already works with the Department of Consumer Affairs on misleading ads in sectors such as agriculture and food, health, education, housing, e-commerce and financial services.

To curb misleading health and nutritional claims by food processing companies, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has joined hands with ad watchdog Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI).

Speaking to *BusinessLine* FSSAI CEO Pawan Agarwal said: “Since ASCI already keeps track of advertisements that make misleading health and nutritional claims, they can give us periodic alerts regarding such issues.”

ASCI already works with the Department of Consumer Affairs on misleading advertisements in six priority sectors, including agriculture and food, health, education, housing, financial services as well as e-commerce. Last year, the

FSSAI IN NEWS

Department appointed ASCI to monitor the GAMA (Grievances against Misleading Advertisements) web portal to process complaints.

Similar joint-regulation initiatives might be undertaken by ASCI and FSSAI to protect consumers from misleading, false and unsubstantiated claims by food companies.

ASCI can first take the ads up with businesses that make misleading claims and if the food business operators do not take corrective actions, then the FSSAI can look into the issue and appropriate measures can be taken, Agarwal said.

ASCI Secretary-General Shweta Purandare said that the council is in dialogue with FSSAI on the issue.

Labelling issue

Meanwhile, FSSAI is also taking up the issue of labelling. “Ingredients should be so written that a buyer need not necessarily be a science expert to interpret it. I do believe that labelling should inform the consumer in a manner that it does not require a high level of expertise. Efforts have to be made towards simplification. We are also looking into international best practices in this regard and studying how far it is practical to adopt them,” Agarwal added.

The scientific panel for labelling norms has recently gone through the various issues and has come up with recommendations, which are coming up for approval soon, he said.

While ASCI works more on self regulation, FSSAI will have more teeth with the soon-to-be-notified recall policy spelling out a proper mechanism.

The latest data show that ASCI’s Consumer Complaints Council upheld complaints against 90 out of 156 advertisements in March and 10 of these were against food and beverage companies.
