WORKSHOP ON SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION FRAMEWORK FOR FOOD SAFETY

FSKAN
FOOD SAFETY KNOWLEDGE ASSIMILATION NETWORK

12th July, 2016

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India
The “Workshop on “Scientific Cooperation Framework for Food Safety” was held on 12th July, 2016 in Gulmohar Hall, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi. The meeting was attended by more than 120 participants representing concerned key officials from the Ministries, public and private Institutions engaged in Research and Development in areas of food safety, hygiene and nutrition and Research Funding Agencies, thus largely contributing to the success of this workshop.

The objective was to sift through those proposals and screen proposals having potential of falling within the objectives and responsibilities of FSSAI for funding purpose and to identify gaps where new studies and research are required. The workshop also aimed at facilitating a scientific cooperation framework by coordination of research activities, exchange of information and expertise, development and implementation of joint projects and best practices in the fields of food science, technology and nutrition. The focus of the day was on networking and discussion, as means to greater understanding between the different stakeholders, increased collaboration and to form concrete recommendations for improving current practices.

**Session 1: Inaugural Session**

Mr. Pawan Agarwal, CEO, FSSAI welcomed the participants on behalf of the FSSAI and briefly apprised the participants about the mandate of FSSAI pertaining to R&D in food sector. He informed that earlier in response to an expression of interest, FSSAI had received around 90 research proposals from various scientific institutions for taking up R&D studies in the areas of food safety and nutrition. Out of the proposals received, 44 projects were identified in the first level of in-house screening. These proposals would be discussed later in the workshop in five parallel technical sessions, with project investigators in each group making a presentation on their proposals. He also introduced the concept of FSKAN (Food Safety Knowledge Assimilation Network) among the participants and emphasized on the significance of this network which will facilitate a platform for virtual network of people and resources in academic /scientific institutions with an aim to provide effective and efficient access to knowledge.

Thereafter, Mrs. Anuradha Prasad, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) enlightened the participants about the research funding schemes under MoFPI in food sector.

Dr. N.K.Ganguly, Adviser to Department of Health Research, National Institute of Immunology and Chairperson, Scientific Committee, FSSAI emphasized that the definition of food has been changed over times and concepts like Genetically Modified foods (GMOs), food fortification, probiotics, oral nutrient supplements have been introduced which should be also be kept in mind while framing such strategies.

Sh. K.B. Agarwal, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare praised FSSAI for its effort of inviting the scientific research community to engage with FSSAI and extended his best wishes for initiating this endeavor.
Mr. Ashish Bahuguna, Chairman FSSAI delivered the presidential address at the event. He spoke about the need to streamline research in food safety, identify gaps in research and also ensure that there is proper allocation of funding for research in the sector.

A logo on the FSKAN initiative depicting a network engaged in scientific research in the area of food safety was also launched in the workshop by Mr. Pawan Agarwal, CEO, FSSAI. The logo depicts a network engaged in scientific research in the area of food safety.

Session 2: Strategic Partnership-

Dr. J. Lewis, Consultant, FSSAI opened the session with a brief presentation on Food Safety Knowledge Assimilation Network (FSKAN). He informed that FSKAN is an outreach program launched by FSSAI, on 12th July 2016, to facilitate scientific cooperation framework for coordinating joint projects and exchange of information and to establish a system of network of organizations. The primary objective of FSKAN will be coordinating various science based activities, exchange of information, development/implementation joint projects, exchange of expertise and best practices and in the fields within Food Authority responsibility.

Dr. Lewis opined that FSS Act, 2006 which is a science based act mandates the Authority to establish scientific cooperation with organizations for joint projects or exchange of expertise and best practices in the fields of the Authority’s responsibilities safety and health of consumers. He also expressed that food safety is the outcome of the risk assessment process whereby an assurance that the food is acceptable for human consumption according its intended use. Since knowledge lies in a vast domain of scientific research and scholarship in many forms and formats. Assimilation is the process of extracting the precise information required for conducting the risk assessment. Hence the acronym FSKAN and its logo are an expression of its objective and purpose.
Dr. Jagdish Arora, Director, Information and Library Network Centre (INFLIBNET) presented in brief the objectives and various services under INFLIBNET to promote and establish communication facilities to improve capability in information transfer and access that provide support for building a network of Scientific/ Research Institutes/ Universities etc. He also explained about the envisaged strategic partnership of INFLIBNET with FSSAI for e-content development, training and awareness programs and skill development.

Representatives from Research Institutes like Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR), Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR), Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Department of science and Technology (DST), Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) and International Life Science Institute (ILSI) shared their views on the launch of FSKAN and prospective on how these Institutes/ Organizations can work in collaboration for creation of a scientific network.

Invitees from Industry R&D like CHIFFS, Hindustan Lever Ltd., Coca Cola, Britannia, Nestle India, Mondelez, Heinz, GSK etc. also shared the areas of their involvement in R&D in various food categories in India and expressed their desire to associate with FSSAI for FSKAN. Representative from United States Pharmacopeia (USP) delivered a presentation and apprised the invitees about the activities of their organization and in particular USP’s Food Fraud Database, Food Fraud Mitigation Guidance, and related training and advising services which serves as a critical resource for industry, regulators, and other stakeholders to inform risk based decisions on food fraud vulnerability and mitigation.

Session 3: Technical Parallel Sessions-

After the tea break, the invitees were divided into six groups to deliberate on specific categories of research proposals. Each group was chaired by an Expert and senior FSSAI official(s) to facilitate the discussions.

**Group I**- Chemical contaminants, adulterants and other hazards across food chain- *Dr. K.K. Sharma, Principal Scientist, IARI*

**Group II**- Cereals and Pulses- *Dr. Dr. B. Sesikeran, Former Director, National Institute of Nutrition*

**Group III**- Edible Oils and Fats- *Dr. Kanungo, Former ADG, MoHFW*

**Group IV**- Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, Nuts & Spices- *Dr. Sudarshan Rao, Deputy Director, National Institute of Nutrition*

**Group V**- Milk, Meat, Poultry and Fish and their products- *Dr. V. V. Kulkarni, Director, National Research Centre on Meat*

**Group VI**- Strategy and Process for FSKAN- *Mrs. Madhavi Das, CMSO, FSSAI*
The session primarily focussed on sharing participants’ vision on science based collaborations within its objectives. Project Investigators (PIs) gave a brief presentation within their group to highlight the outcome/benefits of their project for FSSAI with respect to specific food safety issue, risk related concern, nutrition or any other facet and how the remedy/reduction/evaluation addressed by the project is beneficial to FSSAI; whether the solution proposed in not available in the scientific literature – or if available it is not applicable to Indian conditions, practices or dietary habits; whether with a sharper focus/fine tuning the same output can be achieved in shorter time lesser funding and whether new instrumentation/equipment requested, if any, is currently unavailable at the Institution/Facility to commence the research.

During the elaborated discussions, participants also deliberated on the core/thrust areas within the ambit of their group which needs immediate attention or require study or research and also on how the existing proposals can be fine-tuned to achieve the same.

**Session 4: Recommendations of Group Chairman**

Chairman of each session presented the recommendations of their Group to the house, announcing the shortlisted projects and the need for modifications/fine tuning, if any, and to re-submit the revised proposals to FSSAI.

While these five groups were emphasizing on research proposals in specific categories, the sixth Group, being Chaired by Ms. Madhavi Das, CMSO, FSSAI was focused on developing a strategy and framework for executing the functions under FSKAN.
It was noted that the framework for scientific cooperation has following objectives:

- Formulation and execution of joint projects where gaps or uncertainty in risk assessment for food safety exist and
- Exchange of information with scientific experts nationally or internationally on emerging food safety issues and best practices in the fields within the Food Authority’s responsibilities

FSSAI will call for interested institutions to become members of FSKAN; and will build an Institution – Expertise Matrix, with the objective to attract and engage them with food safety issues. As a FSKAN collaborator, institutions will actually be engaged with real time food safety issues of national importance and thereby be counted as contributors that impact the safety and health of the consumer. Typically, food safety issues will be identified by FSSAI using the process of risk assessment and these will be listed for exchange of information and where necessary a joint project.

**Session 5: Constitution of Affinity Groups**

During the session, Dr. Lewis apprised the participants about the concept of constitution of Affinity Groups. It was informed that in order to forge together collective information where FSSAI can draw best practices and updated knowledge on subject, ’Affinity Groups’ will be constituted who will work in collaboration with FSSAI on a continuing basis in future for identifying gaps where new research or studies are required. The group will be allowed to select a co-coordinator among themselves for each group who will be called as “Expertise Domain” for FSSAI.

Apart from these breakout sessions, a side event was also organized. Members of Scientific Committee and the Experts were invited to deliver a 5-minute talk on a food safety related topic relevant to the current scenario for video recording. FSSAI recorded 14 such videos during the workshop which will be used for training, education, awareness programmes or such similar programmes.

**Conclusions, Recommendations and Next Steps**

Mr., Pawan Agarwal, CEO, FSSAI and Mr. Ashish Bahuguna, Chairperson, FSSAI gave their concluding remarks and thanked the Chairmen of each group, members of Scientific Committee, Project Investigators (PIs) and appreciate their active and valuable contribution in the workshop.

Based on the recommendations that emerged in the discussions during the parallel technical sessions, research proposals falling within the mandate of FSSAI were shortlisted and the PIs were suggested to modify their proposals and re-submit the revised proposals within 15 days.
Also, FSSAI launched its new initiative, FSKAN (Food Safety Knowledge Assimilation Network), which would be a framework for scientific cooperation in the area of food safety and nutrition in workshop at New Delhi attended by over 100 scientists and researchers across the country. In this workshop, gaps where the research in the area of food safety and quality is required were also identified. The network would facilitate the establishment of a scientific cooperation framework by exchange of information and coordination of research activities across the country.

**Action Points:**

1. Based on the recommendations made by various Groups, FSSAI will note down the identified key issues in area of food safety and quality that require attention of Researchers/Scientists working in those areas.
2. FSSAI will provide an opportunity to Project Investigators to review their projects in light of the discussions and send them back to FSSAI for consideration. Project Investigators will be requested to send the revised proposal within 15 days after which they will be scrutinized on the basis of recommendations of the workshop.
3. FSSAI will develop a framework for the functioning of FSKAN and will initiate working on the operational aspects in partnership with INFLIBNET.