

**STRATEGY FOR HARMONISATION OF INDIA'S  
DOMESTIC FOODSTANDARDS WITH CODEX STANDARDS  
AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICES**

Under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 and the ensuing FSS Regulation of 2011, it is the responsibility of FSSAI to frame standards for food products and for food safety and to monitor their implementation in the country. Several standards have been notified and more are required to be framed and notified. The work on the standardisation process has evolved over these years. The standards are, essentially, based on scientific data and other factors relevant to the safety of food products for protecting the health of consumers. Several of the food standards have been drawn from provisions of the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act. However, there is an on-going demand for review of these standards taking into account the latest development in food science, food consumption pattern, new specifications, presence of new contaminants and toxins as well as use of new food additives and ingredients required by the producers and manufacturers. In the recent past, FSSAI also invited suggestions from the industry and a number of these were also received.

Under Section 16(3)(m) of the FSS Act, 2006, it is also the responsibility of FSSAI to promote consistency with the relevant international standards. This would facilitate trade and ensure availability of safe food to the consumers. The standards and other guidance texts adopted by Codex Alimentarius Commission are the relevant international standards and are also the reference point within the frame-work of WTO. It is incumbent upon member nations to apply the national treatment clause, meaning thereby, all imported foodstuff will be given a treatment equal to those applicable to the domestic producers, manufacturers and the market. The FAO and WHO of the United Nations regularly encourage countries to harmonise their standards with those of the Codex.

In light of the above, it is considered appropriate to review India's standards and harmonise them with the Codex and other international best practices to the extent possible and necessary taking into account our needs. In doing so, it is necessary to review the existing standards and draft new standards and codes of practice for implementation in the country. The process would also require sufficient amount of capacity building among the stakeholders to ensure proper implementation and monitoring. With a view to achieving this objective, the following strategy is proposed to be followed by FSSAI:

**1. Scope of Work**

The work involved in this respect is expected to be as follows:

- (a) Review of existing FSS standards with respect to Codex standards and standards of other countries and identify areas requiring improvement;
- (b) Harmonization of such national standards with Codex and other international best practices;
- (c) To develop an approach for undertaking the required changes in the existing standards as well as introduction of new standards; and
- (d) On the basis of identified needs, to develop new standards and codes of practice as well as revise existing standards.

## 2. Process proposed for Harmonisation of Standards

Taking the recently approved categorization of food products (the Indian Food Code) as the basis, the proposed process comprises of, where necessary, reviewing the Food Safety and Standards (Food Products Standards and food Additives) Regulations, 2011; Food Safety and Standards (Contaminants, Toxins and Residues) Regulation, 2011; and, Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restriction) Regulations, 2011 and other Regulations by following two approaches as given below:

- Revision or Formulation of Vertical Standards for different food products or group of food products;
- Revision or Formulation of Horizontal Standards.

a) Vertical Standards: Vertical Standards would mean quality standards of food products, e.g., fresh and processed fruits and vegetables, milk and milk products, meat and meat products, fish and fish products, poultry products, fats and oils, etc. In this context, category specific and/or product specific food safety standards (additives, contaminants, pesticide residues, hygiene requirements, residues of veterinary drugs, labelling etc.) will be reviewed. The following two-pronged strategy is proposed to be followed in the following hierarchy:

- i) Review the domestic standards under FSSR and initiate the process of revision/harmonisation. In such cases, it is proposed to review the international standards and identify the necessary changes required for harmonisation with the Codex standards; simultaneously, identify the products where we do not have domestic standards under FSSR but a relevant Codex standard is available. In such cases, it is proposed to adopt/adapt such Codex standards based on India's needs;
- ii) There are several products for which there are neither domestic standards under FSSR nor are there Codex standards, e.g., ethnic foods of Indian origin. In such cases, it is proposed to take up identification of products and the process for their standardization in consultation with sector specific experts;

In respect of (i) above, it is also proposed to review the Codex texts and other internationally followed best practices as well as standards adopted by the EU, USFDA, Canada, etc. while framing the proposals for standards.

b) Horizontal Standards: Horizontal Standards are those which apply across all products categories. For instance, food additives, food contaminants (like heavy metals, toxins, etc.), food hygiene (microbiological standards), pesticide residues, residues of veterinary drugs, food labelling, food inspection and certification, methods of sampling and analysis, and nutrition requirements. These would also need to be equipped with Codes of Practice for uniform application across all vertical standards.

With regard to horizontal standards, it is proposed to prioritize the work in such a manner that we take up review of standards and their harmonisation in respect of additives generally recognised as safe. Such additives are listed in the Table 3 of the General Standards for Food Additives (GSFA) under the Codex. Simultaneously, it is proposed to review and harmonise ingredients/nutrients (including Ayurveda and other ingredients as specified under Section 22 of the FSS Act) and which are also generally recognised as safe.

The work will be initiated with the development of vertical standards. While doing so, the horizontal standards will also get developed. With a view to speeding up the harmonization process, the work on development of several horizontal standards will also need to be simultaneously initiated as mentioned in the preceding paragraph under (b) above. In addition, it is proposed to develop and notify Codex of Practice, such as application of GAP, GMP, GHP, GLP, FSMS, ISO standards, etc.

### **3) Procedure proposed to be followed**

After the identification of work referred to above is completed, it is proposed to utilize the knowledge available in the country in terms of experts in FSSAI, food industry (small, medium, large), relevant Govt. institutions, commodity experts, academicians, consumer organisations as well as the representatives of trade bodies (AIFPA, FICCI, CII, etc.). Because of the volume of work involved, several experts are to be identified to carry forward the work in a collaborative spirit. The draft standards and codes of practice will be developed by such expert groups. These documents will then be considered by a working group of FSSAI. It is proposed to follow an iterative process with the expert groups to check for consistency with the intent of FSS Act and Regulations before circulating the draft texts to a large group of stakeholders by placing them on the FSSAI website for comments/suggestions. After receipt of comments, the draft texts will be placed before the relevant scientific panels, where applicable and then before the Scientific Committee for consideration.

Once the Scientific Committee has approved the draft texts and FSSAI has accepted them, these will be notified to the WTO as per obligations under the WTO Agreement. A minimum of 60 days period will have to be provided to the WTO members for comments before the going through the process of adoption and notification of the standards and other texts by the FSSAI.

### **4) Proposed Time Frame**

The work involved is quite substantial. For the purposes of monitoring the progress, it is proposed that efforts should be made to follow the time lines given below in terms of completion of the activities:

15 March 2013: Receipt of nominations of experts;

April 2013: Consideration and acceptance of nominations by FSSAI, and work assignment to expert groups;

July 2013: Receipt of draft standards and codes of practice;

Oct. 2013: Review by FSSAI working group in consultation with the expert groups and invite stakeholder comments/suggestions on the draft texts;

Dec. 2013: Receipt of stakeholder comments/suggestions on the draft texts;

April 2014: Review by relevant Scientific Panels and/or the Scientific Committee;

July 2014: Acceptance of the draft standards/texts by FSSAI and notification to WTO;

Oct. 2014: Receipt of comments from WTO members and from within India;

Nov. 2014: Where necessary, review by the relevant Scientific Panel and/or by the Scientific Committee; and

Dec. 2014: Adoption of the final standards/texts and notification.

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