



How to ensure safe practices across food businesses

Food is the closest product of human consumption and it has the power to delight consumers. This aspect alone makes it very critical for food products to be safe for human consumption and for food businesses to test the safety of their products.

By **Dr. Pankaj Jaiminy**

Food producers across the country are increasingly growing sensitive about the fact that the food they produce should be the safest for human consumption. Industrialisation has transformed the quality of the value chain that raw materials pass through. Prior to its widespread development, it was safer to source raw materials in a purer form. However, with the advent of globalization, raw materials are today sourced from various parts of the world and the safety of the value chain is now the responsibility of each of the member that constitute the value chain.

Sensitizing members of the value chain about the importance of safety along with partnership among

stakeholders is key to overhauling the food safety environment in India. This involves partnership between producers of food, various stakeholders such as regulators and policy makers and the government. One critical aspect of food testing in India that has witnessed a radical change in approach is the change from testing for adulteration to testing for safety. While the two aspects might seem similar, testing for safety requires a higher extent of precision and expertise. Food was traditionally adulterated to achieve higher profits while compromising on the quality of raw materials. However, with stringent laws in place, the focus has now shifted to ensuring the safety of food products. At times, there is a vast difference of time and location between food's country of origin and consumption.

It is therefore imperative for today's food businesses to test the safety of their food products. The Food Safety and Standards (FSS) Act has helped food manufacturers to drive the focus on quality and move beyond adulteration. A majority of the testing labs today carry out tests at the part per billion (ppb) trace level as per international standards. The implementation of mass spectroscopy method along with state of the art technology is required for detection of contaminants at the ppb level. An encouraging number of labs in India operate on mass spectroscopy instruments, which examine contaminants through unique mass number and characteristics.

These methods, although internationally acclaimed, require high levels of customization as per local needs. Still, the test results can be inconsistent based on the type and location of food items. But food testing methods have immense scope and they can be consistently improved upon in order to be effective from time to time. Processes that are highly impactful today might not be as impactful 10 years from now. Process and policy are two sides of the same coin and they consistently need to move parallel in order to be highly effective. Collaboration is key to drive innovative thought processes.



The Make in India campaign has encouraged a considerable number of food producers to set shop in India. The next few years will witness increasing number of global brands establish manufacturing units in India. Most global brands are self-regulated and require the larger infrastructural landscape in any market to be able to support their self-regulatory patterns of functioning. Global businesses should be empowered in the country through strong partnership with regulators and policy makers. Talent is also one of the challenges the sector faces. Students aspire to enter the sector and should be encouraged by providing them with the right kind of environment to further their career. As infrastructure improves, the opportunities for talent will become more lucrative and a higher level of expertise will be infused into the sector.



Traceability is a critical part of food safety testing. As complicated supply chains from farm to fork challenge the industry it is critical for businesses to adopt a nimble approach towards traceability. A proactive step to this effect is to have a constructive approach towards increasing safety standards. While cost effectivity to adopt the concept is initially low, in the long run it helps ensure the safety of the end consumer and in the upkeep of the brand value of the food manufacturer. Industry bodies and governments should take the lead in ensuring the adoption of such safe practices across food businesses of all sizes. Such practices can help reduce the instances of product recalls and win the trust of the end consumer as well.

Our experience through the recent past has been that irrespective of the size of business, food manufacturers are proactively adopting the concept of food safety. It is indeed capital intensive, however, there is an increased level of sensitivity towards the concept. The Food Safety and Standards Authority has taken commendable efforts to ensure that self-mandate is complimented by favorable infrastructure and policy. If the FSS act has to succeed in the country, collaboration is a must among stakeholders, including the ones that are even the most remotely associated with the mainstream supply chain.

The state of development of a nation is not always reflective of the level of food safety in a country. But as a country develops, food safety incidents help the authorities to plug issues along on the path to development. India is well prepared to succeed as a nation and the state of food safety in the country is set to succeed like never before. It is now the responsibility of the consumers, business and regulators to join hands and work towards making the food on our plates as safe as possible. **PG**

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