

A food supply chain service provider's perspective



Shriram Hariharan
Managing Director,
ImpelPro SCM Solutions Pvt Ltd

Every year, almost one out of ten people fall ill due to food borne diseases. World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that children less than five years of age accounted for one third of deaths from food borne disease, that is, 420,000 deaths globally. Unsafe food creates a vicious cycle of disease and malnutrition, particularly affecting infants, young children, elderly and the sick. As a matter of fact, these are avoidable through implementation and practices of food safety at every level of operations.

What is Food Safety? It is about carrying out activities of manufacturing, processing, handling, storing, selling, importing and transporting food in a controlled way to prevent possibility of contamination to make sure food is safe at the time of consumption.

August 2006 witnessed a remarkable shift in the country's food laws from a rudimentary attention on food adulteration to a focused approach towards food safety. The Food Safety and Standards Act (FSSA) 2006, under the Food Safety Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) and the Rules and Regulations 2011 made thereunder, came into force to ensure availability of safe and wholesome food for human consumption.

FSSAI started numerous initiatives and efforts to educate, interpret and implement the new rules and regulations. Considerable efforts in the area of consumer awareness, product

approval, labeling and nutritional claim, import regulation and other pertinent matters, were put in for effective implementation.

Authorities can only conceptualise and enact laws and, at best, inspect and penalise for non-compliance. But the responsibility of implementation and practice is in the hands of stakeholders whose action or inaction impacts the very purpose of the act.

The Relevance of Food Supply Chain Service Provider (SCSP)

In this context, the SCSP plays a key role in moving and handling products from source to consumption points, and during this journey performs various acts like transportation, storage, handling, value addition etc. SCSP, in the role of the 'Food Business Operator' (FBO) as designated by Food Safety Standard Act, is responsible for ensuring that those requirements under the act and the rules and regulations are 100 per cent complied with, for the business under his control.

The following are the areas of activities where controls need to be established and complied with by a socially responsible SCSP. A detailed check list of control points under each of the following activities need to drawn and practiced.

- Licensing under FSSAI
- Sourcing of product and acceptance

- Primary transportation
- Receiving at storage
- Documentation, system update and storage
- Secondary transportation and last mile distribution
- Other critical capabilities like product traceability, product recall, etc.

A FSSAI compliant SCSP is one who has put in place processes and controls in business and practices the same to ensure that products passing through system are safe for human consumption.

What Remains to be Done

Although we have a legal framework in place, there are still a few glitches for effective implementation, which FSSAI needs to address. Major challenges facing FSSAI are insufficient trained human resources and inadequacy of quality government laboratories.

In terms of human resources, most of the states operate far below the desired requirement of trained officers to efficiently fulfill the responsibilities. Due to this, there are considerable delays, particularly in the area of import clearances. There are interpretation issues because of which there is no uniformity of administration across region, mainly on imports. Food being perishable, delay leads to spoilage and waste apart from commercial loss to the FBO. In this highly competitive world, business urgency cannot be ignored.

Ironing Out the Problems

In order to improve the overall impression and effectiveness of implementation, FSSAI needs to address grey area such as:

- Ensuring adequacy of staff coupled with training facilities
- Creating new labs and upgrading existing food testing labs
- Review and modification of testing methods and practices
- Continue to work on improving consumer awareness and FBO interaction

- Wherever FSSR standards not available, adoption and acceptance of globally respected Codex Alimentarius as a standard process
- Inclusion, widening and interpretation on the scope of processing aid – improve clarity on the functional aspects
- Uniformity of implementation across the country

Once FSSAI effectively addresses all of the above, we can claim complete success of the efforts that were initiated in August 2006. We wish the FSSAI the very best and look forward to a Food Safe India!

