

FOOD LABELLING: READ BEFORE YOU EAT

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ABSTRACT

Food labelling plays a very important role in safeguarding public health. In India, with the diverse food culture and increasing food industry, food labelling has gained significant importance in recent years. It provides consumers with essential information about the products they purchase and consume. Food labelling conveys the details regarding the nutritional content, ingredients, allergens and others which enable the consumers to make informed choices. FSSAI, in India, mandates the development of standards for food products and provides the guidelines for food safety and labelling. It regulates the current food labelling practises which is required to be displayed on packaged food products. Potential measures have been suggested to improve food labelling in India as it helps to enhance consumer awareness and promote transparency. This also ensure the safety and quality of food products. Food labelling in India can be improved, leading to enhanced consume trust, informed decision making and a safer food market.

Keywords: Food Labelling, FSSAI, Consumer, food Industry, Food Safety.

Introduction

In the past decade, India has seen a remarkable growth in the food industry Due to urbanisation and changing consumer preferences, there is a great expansion of food processing units. in India, there is a great variety of food in the market including packaged foods, beverages, snacks and traditional culinary items. Therefore, there is a great need of standardised and clear food labelling practises which ensures consumer safety and public health concern. It helps in providing accurate and comprehensible information to the consumers. Food labelling distinguishes between various food categories and gives information about the nutritional value catering to specific dietary requirements. Due to diverse cuisine and vast food market, there is significant importance of food labelling in India. It is a critical component which helps the consumer is to make a proper purchase and choice of food. Food labelling conveys details regarding the ingredients, nutritional information and other knowledge to the consumers.

Food labelling allows the consumers to make informed choices based on their dietary preferences, nutritional needs and health concerns. It also provides them detailed information about the ingredients, additives and potential allergens that may cause any adverse reaction to the consumer. Food labelling provides public health safety with accurate and transparent listing of ingredients. It helps in recognising and avoiding the foods that may be detrimental to specific health conditions such as high sugar content for individuals with diabetes. It is a great tool for quality assurance which provides authenticity of the food products. It promotes the manufacturing companies to adhere to standardised methods of process and ensure that the product is safe and healthy for the consumers. Clear and transparent food, labelling, induces trust and confidence to the brands of food industry. The consumers rely on the information provided on the labels and develop loyalty towards brands that prioritise their well-being. Clear, transparent and comprehensive food labelling increases market competitiveness by giving fair trade practises.

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)

In India, the primary regulatory body which is responsible for ensuring food safety and labelling regulations is the Food safety and standards Authority of India (FSSAI). It was established under the Food Safety and Standards Act 2006 and plays an important role in providing safe and quality food products to the consumers across the country. It establishes guidelines for food safety and labelling and regulates the food imports and exports. FSSAI mandates specific information on the food labels like

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name of the food, ingredients, vegetarian or non-vegetarian, allergen information, food additives declaration, net quantity and nutritional information. These requirements are designed to provide transparency about the food product to the consumers. To provide informed dietary choices to the consumers, it regulates the declaration of nutritional information like energy, protein, fat, carbohydrate and other values present in the food product.

FSSAI mandates the labels of packaged food in a prominent and easily readable font in either English or Hindi language. The declaration of the country of origin of imported food products is also important on the food labels. This helps consumers to make choices based on their preferences for imported products. Food labels must include information about the manufacturing date, best before/ use by date and shelf life of the product. This helps in making the consumers aware of the freshness and safety of the food. It is also mandatory to declare the presence of major allergens on the food products such as wheat, milk, fish, shellfish, eggs, peanuts. This helps individuals with food allergies, and people who are intolerant to specific foods to identify and avoid allergenic ingredients. FSSAI updates and revises its rules and regulations in compatibility with international standards and deals with the major challenges in the food industries. It provides good support to food businesses to ensure compliance with labelling requirements.

Food Labelling Practice

Current food labelling practices in India are regulated by FSSAI. It aims to give essential information about the product's relevant details like nutritional composition (calories, protein, fat, sodium, carbohydrates, fibre) ingredient list (food additives, major allergens), quantity (in grams kilograms litre millilitre), country of origin, manufacturing, date, and best before to guide consumers regarding products, freshness and safety. In many regions and state levels also need to be printed local languages. There are additional labelling requirements needed for special categories of food products like health supplements, genetically modified foods and infant formula.

Suggestions

Food labelling in India can be improved by many following practices. This will enhance consumer's trust and a safer food market. Any proposed improvements to food labelling practices in India require a proactive approach for further advance.

- Increase monitoring and inspection of food products to ensure compliance of labelling regulations
- Explore QR codes or multiple mobile applications to give additional product information beyond the label
- Encourage food businesses to adopt responsible labelling practices voluntarily
- Establish stricter rules and penalties for non-compliance with labelling such as fines, product recalls and license suspension or revocation.
- Implement digital platforms, innovative technologies or data bases where consumers can access comprehensive information about the product. Usage of smart labels and Blockchain will provide consumers with easily accessible information about the food products.
- Conduct consumer awareness camps, the way to educate them about the importance and understanding food labels. Targeted consumer awareness campaigns on the importance of food labelling will make the consumers understand nutrition information, manage dietary requirements and making informed choices.
- Promote nutritional education programmes to improve the education level of consumers and make healthier food choices
- Develop educational resources to help the consumers to interpret and utilise the information provided on the food labels effectively
- Establish a dedicated authority for enforcing food, labelling standards, with penalties against violators
- Developing a system of random product sampling to verify the accuracy of labels.
- Establish Industry collaboration to share their best practices and foster self-regulation.
- Seek feedback from consumers to understand their needs and perspective and incorporate them into labelling policies

- Collaboration between government agencies and food industries and consumers organisations to develop and implement effective food labelling strategies. Also, collaboration of education institutes, health professionals and consumer organisation will develop educational materials and programmes that enhance consumers knowledge and skills in interpreting food labels.
- Enhance transparency and clarity by providing comprehensive information on food labels.
- Mandatory implementation of front of packing labelling systems (FOPL) such as the traffic light system or a nutrient specific label to provide quick and easy to understand information on the nutritional quality of food products
- encourage you the use of eco-friendly and recyclable packaging materials through labelling guidelines,
- Inclusion of symbols and icons that are easy to understand to convey important information about allergens, Vegetarian /non-vegetarian status and nutritional content
- Simplification of labelling requirements to make them more user-friendly for consumers and business people
- Harmonious labelling standards across various food categories to ensure consistency.
- Development of a unified approach, for both packaged and unpackaged food products labelling requirements.
- Colours, contrast and font size used on the labels are legible and accessible to individuals.
- Embracing digital technologies and solutions and mobile apps to enhance food labelling practises.
- The enforcement efforts to ensure compliance with food, labelling of regulation should be strict
- facilitate the training programmes and workshops for business people to understand and implement labelling requirements effectively
- Support research and developmental efforts to develop cost-effective and sustainable labelling solutions.
- Monitoring market trends, emerging issues and consumer preferences to cope up with new challenges and incorporation of necessary updates into labelling policies.
- Invest in research and surveillance to access the effectiveness of food, levelling regulations and identify areas for improvement.

Conclusion

By implementing the above recommendations, India can enhance food labelling practises, promote consumer empowerment and ensure the safety and transparency of the food products. To ensure the practicality and feasibility of implementing these recommendations. It is always important to consult with the regulatory authority is a relevant stakeholders and industry experts.

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