



“Improving Food Safety In India”

Collective inputs from over 200,000 Citizens in circle

“Transform India with Modi”

(Current state, Issues, Root Causes and Proposed Solutions)

June 12, 2015

Improving Food Safety in India

Executive Summary

Food Safety standards in India have always been a question mark and cases of food poisoning at a small scale are frequent. However, recently several independent tests conducted by various state labs in India on a popular noodle brand found high levels of MSG and lead. These noodles have been frequently consumed by citizens of all ages for decades and a favourite amongst kids, unaware of the potential negative impact to health.

While the exact impact is yet to be better understood, what has emerged as a critical need is the overhauling of India's Food Safety and Standards Body, Processes, Systems and Control to ensure that food product approvals are based on standards and transparency.

The subject of 'Improving Food Safety in India' was covered in detail the 200,000 strong citizens' community for governance of India 'Transform India with Modi'. With a large number of citizens participating in the discussion, the following identifies the collective issues, root causes and solutions to improve food safety in India.

Issues Identified:

1. Harmful food colours are added to food
2. Big food manufacturers do not follow complete safety standards
3. High levels of MSG and lead are common in packaged products
4. Roadside vendors and small food shops do not prepare the food hygienically.
5. Bacteria of human excreta is common in street food
6. Kitchens of many restaurants are dirty with rodents running around
7. In small food plants, the food is prepared under unhealthy conditions
8. Food handlers don't use gloves while touching the food
9. Adulterated raw material is used to prepare food
10. Fake products of certain brands are being sold openly in markets
11. Fruits are injected with chemicals to make them taste better
12. Rotting chicken is sold to unsuspecting people in restaurants
13. On many packed food items, the sellers modify the expiry date to reduce their losses
14. Shopkeepers knowingly buy batches of expired items at low cost so that they could earn higher profits
15. Vendors mix urea in milk

16. Roadside vendors cook the food once and sell it for days
17. A very high level of pesticide contamination is found in vegetables, fruits but also in other food items like food grains, pulses, onions, potatoes
18. Meat/Poultry storage standards are not maintained by all
19. The folks serving/selling food in India esp roadside vendors are ignorant or just care about their earnings.

Root Causes Identified:

1. Retailers/manufacturers try to make more profits by adulterating food material
2. Big food manufacturers do not want to spend big amounts to put standards in place for manufacturing
3. Food manufacturers intentionally ignore the FSSAI guidelines
4. Government food safety and evaluation techniques are outdated and lack the latest knowledge
5. Food safety bodies lack systems, processes and controls
6. Food manufacturers bribe the food inspectors to get approvals for their products
7. Systemic corruption in Food Safety/Approval bodies is prevalent
8. FSSAI is not a driven organization by its virtue
9. Companies value profit over health of people
10. Government bodies have no control over road side vendors
11. Restaurants do not pay too much attention to the cleanliness of the kitchens since they are not visible to the customers
12. In many cases, small vendors are not even aware that they are using adulterated raw material
13. Farmers are unaware that their use of certain pesticides could lead to big problems
14. Retailers try to reduce losses by reprinting expiry date on products and selling them
15. People are not encouraged to report adulteration in food items
16. Even if a customer wants to report issues of food safety, he does not know where to call
17. No periodic checks/raids are done by the Food department to catch the offenders

Solutions Identified:

1. The Ministry should completely revamp FSSAI
2. FSSAI's working should be modernised and the team should be trained on the latest techniques on finding adulteration in food items
3. FSSAI's guidelines should be strictly implemented
4. Food Testing labs should be set up and upgraded in all states, as per international standards

5. A committee should be established to make a crackdown on food inspectors who take bribes
6. Government food safety evaluation techniques, processes and controls should be modified
7. Steps should be taken to regularize street food vendors and issues licenses to them
8. Directives should be issued on the cleanliness required in the kitchen spaces of restaurants
9. Food inspectors should make surprise visits to food joints to ascertain the level of hygiene and to check for adulteration
10. Violators should be heavily penalized
11. Repeat offenders' license should be revoked
12. Injecting chemicals into fruits and vegetables should be made illegal
13. Chemical farming should be strictly banned
14. Proper systems and processes should be devised for the food safety bodies
15. District wise checking of hotels and restaurant kitchens must be done on a regular basis
16. Anytime issues are found in a batch of product, recalls should be mandated and same needs to be communicated to public via all media including social media
17. Organic labelling along the lines of (USDA organic) must be introduced
18. A citizen circle like Fight Corruption Together or Make Railways Better should be created by Food Ministry and LocalCircles on Improving Food Safety so anyone from anywhere can report issues easily
19. A consumer help line for reporting unsafe, adulterated or unethical practices around food by large corporates should also be started
20. Organic farming should be promoted
21. The expiry date should be engraved on the product packaging so that it cannot be changed
22. The expired items must be compulsorily taken back by the producer
23. Private food testing labs should be opened in cities and citizens should be allowed to get food samples.

Improving Food Safety In India –A few Citizen quotes:

1. The defaulters as declared by FSSAI , should be severely punished and punishment should be displayed on website to serve as a deterrent to others – **Sunhash Vaid**
2. We can't achieve 100% in a year but need to take proper steps for safety of foods. I believe Government Action is not the only thing that is required but we need a change in the mind-set of the people – **Subhadip Majumdar**
3. The trend in our country is the Food inspector or his assistant makes a surprise visit and starts bargaining for his due and when talks fail then only cases are registered.

The Food inspectors under the guise of inadequate staffing collect huge haftas and turn a nelsons eye to even serious issues and put suffocating questions to the complainant. as such there should be A supervisory body, a constitutional authority drawn from various fields and experts in Food analysis who should make rounds and make surprise checks and punish the erring officers – **Oruganti Srinivas**

4. A good initiative indeed, provided it goes to the logical end with action.
It is a common knowledge that cattle and birds in the poultry are injected with steroids to increase the yield not caring for the pain induced on the animal. The product is also contaminated with chemical and may not be safe to consume. This should also find a place in the 'solutions for Safety of Food' since poultry products such as milk (and milk products) meat, eggs etc. are items of daily consumption and require attention from the administration with regard to its safety – **Suresh Prabhu**
5. In addition to these, Municipal representative, police, food inspectors and such persons of the locality are to be notified, with their contact numbers who may be contacted by the public whenever poisonous food selling or such incidents come to their notice for taking immediate action. Nothing is being done strictly to implement things. Discussions only do not help – **Aju Mukhopadyay**
6. Unless batch testing is implemented at packaged food manufacturer level on a self-certification basis followed by random checks on market shelves, the system is not going to improve. Merely prescribing norms does never mean they are followed. The idea of imposing standards on roadside vendors though attractive will only lead to more corruption. Sale of additives that are harmful should be totally banned, so they do not reach the roadside stalls – **Chandrashekar Sharma**
7. The main cause related to food quality that the inspection agencies in India are not fare to consumers and not taking the responsibilities for fast action. Moreover, the rules to penalise the culprits are outdated .The Government should bring strict rules for action against defaulters. The amount of penalties should be very huge with prison so that the penalty collected from the defaulters may be used for buying the latest equipment and establishing the new labs to check the adulterated foods – **T D Bhatia**
8. The existing practices and Law to be strictly adhered to by the respective State Governments .An awareness camp to be done throughout the year by Medias. Connectivity between Growers and officials to become more and locally made Indian products without hectic hazardous chemicals -Organic indigenous products to be supported. All the Fruits have chemical impacts, packed items have lot of unknown chemical items .Unless the Central and State Governments bring some awareness it's very difficult. Media and Government official's role is more important. It's the profit making middlemen few corporate admin people and few power politicians are the main cause for all - **Krishnan MS**

9. If there is any prevalent system for food safety it needs to be looked in to carefully. Whatever is missing needs to be added? Simply revamping will not work. I hold the view that fault finding is the first step for improving any system – **Mohan Lal Bhargava**
10. Strict implementation of the rules. In big cities like Chennai, Madurai, Salem the land lord are exploiting the tenants charging ten month rent as advance. They do not give receipt and threaten to stop supply of current as they have the fuses of the mains in their area and simply remove the fuses. The plight of the tenants is highly deplorable. Immediate actions are needed to regulate these cheating by the tax evading cheating land lords – **Sethuraman Jambunathan**