FSSAI is committed in its endeavour to ensure science based standards for articles of food. Food testing becomes an integral part of Food Safety Regulation and Enforcement. A network of food testing laboratories (State Food Testing Labs, and Referral labs) has been established across the country.

However, the testing facilities available in these laboratories are facing challenges in terms of - 1) availability of sophisticated analytical equipment and 2) trained scientific and technical manpower.

In order to strengthen and develop a robust Food Testing Laboratory network in the country, FSSAI has formulated a scheme for Strengthening of Food Testing Laboratories (SOFTeL) in the country. The scheme consists of a bouquet of six initiatives.

* This scheme is in the process of formal approval

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1. Strengthen State Food Testing Laboratories (FTLs)

- Proposal to upgrade/strengthen at least one FTL in each State/UT and two labs in larger States to create a network of modern FTL in the country at the State level.
- Nearly 45 State FTL would be strengthened.
- Special attention and support to 4 NER states (Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Sikkim) for construction of building for the FTL.
- The States will be required to sign an MOU to provide requisite qualified scientific/technical manpower for O&M of sophisticated analytical instruments.
- Provision of other miscellaneous lab equipment.

2. Strengthen Referral Food Testing Laboratories

- Current Status a) 12 Referral labs notified by FSSAI b) 2 referral labs directly under the control of FSSAI namely, CFL Kolkata and FRSL Ghaziabad; working under various Government Departments/Ministries.
- FSSAI is also considering another eight Government/University laboratory for bringing them under the umbrella of referral food testing labs.
- Strengthening of Referral FTL would be undertaken based on a gap analysis in terms of test facilities available to ensure that these laboratories have the latest state-of-the-art analytical facilities.

3. Support Mobile Food Labs (MFL)

- Purpose: for executing the functions of surveillance and creating awareness regarding the food safety and also to provide facilities for testing of common adulterants to the common man.
- Proposal to provide 1 MFL in every 20 districts (with at least 1 MFL in each State/UT) i.e. establishment of 62 Mobile Food Testing labs.
- Cluster of districts would be decided in consultation with the respective State/UT
- MoJ would be signed with them for provision of requisite staff and future O&M costs.
- To be run by respective State/UTs Governments or their agencies or reputed NGOs/Trusts/Societies working in related area

4. Capacity Building of Food Testing Personnel

- Purpose: Capacity building of the food analysts and other laboratory staff with a view to ensure that they are well acquainted with the latest analytical techniques and methods.
- Regular training programmes to be organised for the scientific and technical staff working in FTLs both at respective labs as well as other state-of-art laboratories in the country.
- To ensure that all the State FTLs attain NABL accreditation and brought at par with best of the laboratories in the country.

5. Incentivize States to Use facilities of FSSAI Notified Private Labs

- FSSAI has already notified 112 NABL Accredited private labs under the FSS Act, 2006
- Another 8-10 private labs under consideration for notification.
- Food Business Operators (FBOs) can utilize their analytical facilities for getting their enforcement samples analysed.
- Incentivizing the States to use these facilities would help in reducing the burden on Government testing infrastructure in the States/UTs as it would complement government lab capacity.

6. Develop Food Testing Culture in Schools/Colleges

- Purpose: To promote a culture of food safety and Hygiene amongst the young people right from school level.
- Proposal to cover 500 schools/colleges across the country for establishing basic facilities at level 1.
- Another 1000 schools/colleges to establish facilities for food testing at level 2.

To support this initiative and seek more information, Contact: SoFTel@fssai.gov.in