

FSSAI issues guidance note for spices from post-harvest to transportation

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With the demand for Indian spices growing globally, it is throwing up several challenges, mainly for food sustainability, traceability and safety standards, to the spice industry in the country, and keeping in view the requirement, FSSAI, the country's apex food regulator, has released a guidance note for handling of spices right from post-harvest unto packaging and transportation to the market.

The document, which shall be for reference only with no legal implications, covered subjects of post-harvest, drying and storage of whole spices to grinding, blending, storage, packaging and transportation of spices.

It was divided into five main sections.

The first section gives an overview of the spices processing industry in India. The second section contains guidance for implementation of good manufacturing practices and good hygiene practices as outlined in Part II of Schedule 4 of the Food Safety and Standards (Licensing and Registration of Food Businesses) Regulations, 2011, which are required to be followed at each step in the supply chain, to ensure food safety.

“The third section of this document is recommendatory in nature and provides the basic knowledge and criteria for implementation of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) system by the food businesses. This section includes the detailed manufacturing process with a process flow chart and relevance of main processing steps and two tables: Hazard Analysis and HACCP Plans,” stated a senior official with FSSAI, adding that Tables of Hazard Analysis are expected to help the industry to identify the food safety risks related to each processing step, to identify the Critical Control Points (CCPs), recommended corrective actions and other related information. The sample HACCP plans could be used as reference by the industry and modified or altered based on their operations.

The fourth section provides an inspection checklist for food business operator to audit their facility and operations. This would help the FBOs to evaluate themselves based on the indicative scoring, while the last section gives important templates and forms, which will be required by FBOs to maintain the records. This includes mandatory forms as prescribed by FSSAI and a few templates for maintaining records of processes critical for food safety.

It is pertinent to mention here that India is the world's largest producer and exporter of spices of the 109 varieties listed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), as the country produces and exports about 75 varieties of spices. Indian spices are known over the world for their aroma, texture and taste.

India primarily exports pepper, chilli, turmeric, ginger, cardamom, coriander, cumin, fennel, fenugreek, celery, nutmeg and mace garlic, tamarind and vanilla. Processed spices such as spice oils and oleoresins, mint products, curry powder, spice powders, blends and seasonings are also exported. India's share in the world trade of spices stands at 45 per cent in terms of volume and value.

Spices are considered the most valued product in the trade of commodities. The major exporting countries in global trade of spices are India and China, and the major markets for consumption are the United States and Europe.

In terms of the value of world trade, pepper, cardamom, ginger, turmeric, chilli, cinnamon nutmeg/mace, cloves, pimento and vanilla are the most important spice crops from tropical regions, while cumin, coriander, sesame seeds, mustard, sage, bay, oregano thyme and mint are the most important spice crops from the non-tropical regions.

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