



Front-of-Pack Labelling

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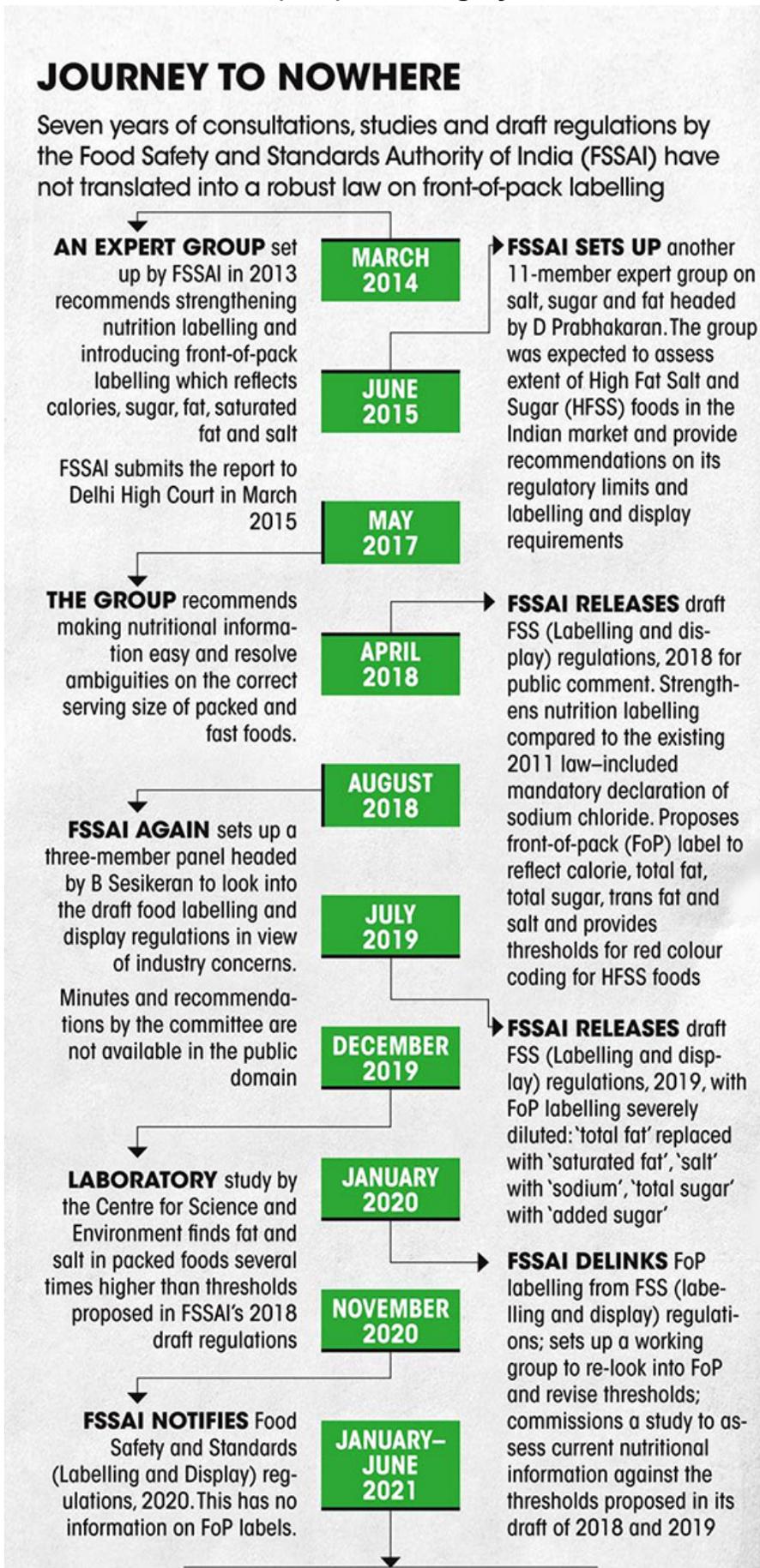
Why in News

The **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)**, in 2018, released the **Draft Food Safety And Standards (Labelling And Display) Regulation.**

However, even after so many expert panel recommendations and regulations, **India still does not have a clear labelling or Front-of-pack (FoP) Labelling System**, which can warn consumers about harmful levels of fat, salt and sugar in processed foods.

Key Points

- About Front-of-Pack (FoP) Labelling System:



WORKING GROUP proposes thresholds, which are very relaxed compared to global best practices as well as those proposed by FSSAI in 2018 and 2019. The industry pushes for weak laws (with no red colour coding). FSSAI proposes including 'positive nutrients' in FoP

labels as well as reducing the categories to set thresholds. This was a surprise. This meant summary indicators were now in the picture and warning labels not a preferred option. Work on thresholds to start again. Yet another study to analyse FOP to be commissioned.

- **FoP labelling system** has long been listed as one of the **global best practices** to nudge consumers into healthy food choices.
 - It works just the way cigarette packets are labelled with images to discourage consumption.
- As India is experiencing a **dietary shift**, with **people increasingly consuming more processed and ultra-processed foods** and a burgeoning market, these factors prompt the need for FoP labelling for India.
 - It will play a handy role in fighting **increasing obesity and many non-communicable diseases**.
- The **World Health Organization (WHO)** defines FoP labels as nutrition labelling systems that are presented on the front of food packages in the principal field of vision; and present simple, often graphic information on the nutrient content or nutritional quality of products.
 - To complement the more detailed nutrient declarations provided on the back of food packages.
- The **Codex Alimentarius Commission**, an international food standards body established jointly by WHO and the Food and Agriculture organization (FAO), mentions that “FoP labelling is designed to assist in interpreting nutrient declarations”.
- **About the Draft Food Safety And Standards (Labelling And Display) Regulations:**
 - The rules mandates **colour-coded labels on food items**.
 - The draft regulation has been brought to **encourage consumers to make healthier food choices** and inform them about what the product actually contains.
 - The front of all packaged food items will have to **display the total number of calories, saturated and trans fats, salt, and added sugar content** as well as the proportion of the daily energy needs fulfilled by the food item.
 - FSSAI has also **changed the symbol of vegetarian food from a green circle to a green triangle** to help color blind people distinguish it from the brown circle denoting non-vegetarian food.
 - According to the proposed regulation, if the total amounts of calories, fats, trans-fats, sugar, and sodium per serving exceed the stipulated limits, it would be **indicated in red colour**.

- **Issues Pertaining to these Rules:**

- **Masking of Positive Nutrients:** Most consumer organisations objected as 'positive nutrients' will mask the negative impact of high fat, salt and sugar in the food and the industry will use it to mislead the consumer.

FSSAI proposed to also consider 'positive nutrients' in the FoP label. It was about giving scores to 'positive nutrients' such as proteins, nuts, fruits and vegetables in the name of promoting wholesome foods.

- **Restricted Target Audience:** The labelling format appears to be aimed only at individuals who are literate and nutritionally aware.

Further, limited general and nutrition literacy mean understanding of the text-intensive nutrient information is difficult.

- **Objections from Food Industry:** Indian food industries have expressed many concerns over the proposed format, especially using the colour red as it indicates danger and could dissuade consumers from their products.

Way Forward

- **More Focus on Pictorial Representation:** Almost a quarter of the Indian population is illiterate, therefore pictorial representation would allow better engagement and understanding.

It might be beneficial for front-of-pack labelling in India to be symbol based, with food images, logos, and health benefits.

- **Need for More R&D:** Mandatory front of pack labelling must be preceded by strong research and in a format that is understandable and acceptable to all.

Source: DTE