



## Front of Package Labelling (FOPL) System

**For Prelims:** FOPL System, FSSAI, WHO, FAO, Non-Communicable Disease.

**For Mains:** Front of Package Labelling (FOPL) System and related concerns, Health, Consumers.

### Why in News?

Recently, **40 global** health experts **claimed** that the **“health star rating”** system that the [Food Safety Standards Authority of India \(FSSAI\)](#) plans to adopt to help consumers reduce their intake of unhealthy foods is **“not evidence-based” and has failed to alter buyer behavior.**

- FSSAI is an autonomous statutory body established under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 (FSS Act).

### What is the Background?

- In India, **Front of Package Labelling (FOPL)** was **first recommended in 2014** by an expert committee constituted by FSSAI in 2013.
- In 2019, the FSSAI issued draft notification [Food Safety Standards \(Labelling and Display\) Regulations.](#)
  - The draft mandates colour-coded labels on food items.
- In 2019 December, the FSSAI delinked FOPL from general labelling regulations.
- On 15<sup>th</sup> February 2022 the **FSSAI decided to adopt the “health-star rating system”** in its draft regulations for **Front of Package Labelling (FOPL).**

### What is Health Star Rating (HSR) System?

- Health-star rating system **gives a product 1/2 a star to 5 stars.**
- The HSR format ranks a packaged food item based on salt, sugar, and fat content and the rating will be printed on the front of the package.
- The rating will be the **first such in India**, a country burdened with lifestyle diseases, and is aimed at guiding consumers to opt for healthy food.

### What is a Front-of-Pack (FoP) Labelling System?

- 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](#) mentions that “FoP labelling is designed to assist in interpreting nutrient declarations”.

## What is the Need for Health Rating System for Food?

- **Save Healthcare Costs:**
  - Most of the countries have **started to reap the benefits from positive consumer behaviour** since the implementation of the FoPL.
  - It has helped those governments to **save money from direct and indirect healthcare costs.**
    - **Chile and Brazil are among the countries that have adopted 'high-in'** warning labels upfront on their food packs, which has succeeded in reducing consumption of unhealthy ultra-processed foods and beverages.
- **To Promote a Healthier Lifestyle:**
  - In India, front-of-package warning labelling is a **major component of a comprehensive strategy** to promote a healthier lifestyle, as they enable consumers to identify products high in sugar, sodium, saturated fats, trans fats, and total fats, which are critical nutrients associated with [Non-Communicable Diseases \(NCDs\)](#).

## What are the Related Concerns?

- **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.
- **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.
- **Can Confuse Consumers:** HSR system can lead to a **“health halo”**, which can confuse consumers as stars can be interpreted as an endorsement of a product.

## Way Forward

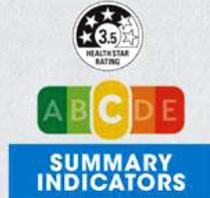
- **More Focus on Pictorial Representation:**
  - Almost a quarter of the Indian population is illiterate, therefore pictorial representation would allow better engagement and understanding.
  - It might be beneficial for front-of-pack labelling in India to be symbol based, with food images, logos, and 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.
- **Should be based on Science and Public Health Interest:**
  - The decision to choose a label **should be kept free from commercial interest to avoid any conflicts of interest.**
  - The choice of the label should be based on science and public health interest must be at the centre of debate.

# HEALTH INDICATORS

Most countries follow either of these four packaged food labelling formats, or their variation. Of these, the "Warning Label" system is increasingly being considered the best in guiding consumers to healthier food choices



**TRAFFIC LIGHT**



**SUMMARY INDICATORS**



**REFERENCE INTAKE OR GUIDELINES DAILY AMOUNT**



**WARNING LABEL**  
**CHILE and ISRAEL**

| WHAT IT IS  | ADOPTED BY  | COMMENT  |
|---|---|--|
| Traffic lights-like colour coding for salt, sugar, fats and saturated fats. Green for low, amber for medium and red for high        | UK (2006), Ecuador (2014), Iran (2017), Sri Lanka (2016 for beverages and 2019 for foods)                                     | Can provide conflicting information as a product can be simultaneously red and green   |
| Overall rating for nutrition. These are of two types:<br>(i) Health Star (0.5 to 5 rating)<br>(ii) Nutri-score (A to E)             | New Zealand and Australia adopted Health Star (2014); France (2017), Belgium (2020) and Luxembourg (2021) adopted Nutri-score | Not nutrient specific; diabetics, hypertensive cannot know about items high in sugar, salt. Vulnerable to manipulation as industry can improve score by adding fruit, fibres |
| Information on amount of energy and nutrients with percentages of daily reference intake exhausted on consumption as per serve size | Malaysia and Thailand. Also adopted voluntarily by industry bodies in a few countries   | Summary of information on negative nutrients at the back of the pack. Too many numbers. Difficult to understand. Industry's favourite  |
| Nutrient-specific warnings, conveyed through tools such as colours, shapes and graphics   | Chile (2016); Peru (2019); Mexico, Israel and Uruguay (2020); Brazil, Columbia (in 2022), Canada (to be implemented)          | Easy to understand, give clear information, most advanced type interpretive label, current best practice   |

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

### Q. Consider the following statements: (2018)

1. The Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 replaced the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954.
2. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is under the charge of Director General of Health Services in the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

### Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

### Ans: (a)

- Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, GoI. It has been established under Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 which consolidates various acts and orders that have hitherto handled food related issues in various Ministries and Departments.
- The Food Standards and Safety Act, 2006 replaced several Acts and Orders like the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954, Fruit Products Order, 1955, etc. Hence, statement 1 is correct.
- FSSAI is headed by a non-executive Chairperson, appointed by the Central Government, either holding or have held a position not below the rank of Secretary to the GoI. It is not **under the charge of Director General of Health Services**. Hence, statement 2 is not correct.

**Source: BS**

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/front-of-package-labelling-fopl-system>

