



FSSAI Lacks Data on Genetically Modified Organisms

For Prelims: FSSAI Lacks Data on Genetically Modified Organisms, [RTI \(Right to Information\)](#), [Food Safety and Standards Authority of India \(FSSAI\)](#), [Genetically Modified Organism \(GMO\)](#).

For Mains: FSSAI Lacks Data on Genetically Modified Organisms, Implication of Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) on Human Health.

[Source: DTE](#)

Why in News?

Recently, an [RTI \(Right to Information\)](#) investigation has found that the [Food Safety and Standards Authority of India \(FSSAI\)](#) lacks data on [Genetically Modified Organism \(GMO\)](#) in produce imported **over the past 5 years**, raising concerns about the presence of GM varieties in sold fruits and vegetables.

- The RTI has also revealed that FSSAI does not have information on tests undertaken to check for the presence of such varieties.

What is Genetically Modified Organism (GMO)?

- **About:**
 - A GMO refers to an entity, whether it's an animal, plant, or **Microorganism**, that has undergone modifications **to its DNA using genetic engineering methods**.
 - Across generations, specific traits have been cultivated in crops like corn, animals like cattle, and even domestic companions like dogs through selective breeding. Yet, in recent decades, the progress of biotechnology has enabled researchers to directly manipulate the genetic makeup of microorganisms, plants, and animals.
- **Genetic Modification:**
 - It involves altering the DNA of an organism to introduce specific traits or characteristics. There are several techniques used in genetic modification, each with its own advantages and applications.
- **Usage of GMO Across World:**
 - Globally, about a dozen **GMO species are being farmed** on a large scale. According to a report by The Royal Society, a London-based fellowship of scientists, some 28 countries allow large-scale **farming of these GMO crops**.
 - In India, the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, prohibits **import, manufacture, use or sale of GM food** without FSSAI's approval.
 - So far, India has allowed cultivation and import of only **one GMO — cotton, a non-food crop**.
 - In 2022, India also allowed commercial cultivation of [GM mustard](#), but the move has been challenged and is pending at the [Supreme Court \(SC\)](#).
- **Import of GMO in India:**
 - The US, Brazil and Argentina **are the top three countries** in terms of land under GMO cultivation. They are **also major exporters of foods to India**.

- Argentina and Brazil **are India's top two sources of degummed soyabean oil** in 2022-23.
 - Overall, the import of fresh fruit and vegetables in **India has increased by 25% in the past decade**, as per the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

What are the Concerns Raised by the RTI Investigation?

- **Food Safety Concerns:**
 - Uncertainty about GM presence in imported produce raises concerns about the safety and health implications for consumers.
 - If GM produce is present and consumed unknowingly, it raises potential health risks, considering the **uncertainty regarding the long-term health impacts of GMOs**.
- **Regulatory Ambiguity:**
 - Lack of clarity and data on GM varieties may lead to **ambiguity in regulating and monitoring the import and sale** of genetically modified fruits and vegetables.
 - It **questions the efficacy of regulatory oversight by FSSAI** regarding the importation and sale of GM produce.
- **Public Confidence:**
 - It might erode public confidence in the **oversight and safety measures pertaining to food imports**, potentially impacting consumer choices and trust in food safety regulations.

What is FSSAI?

- **About:**
 - FSSAI is an autonomous statutory body established under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 (FSS Act).
 - The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India is the administrative Ministry of FSSAI.
 - The Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer of FSSAI have already been appointed by Government of India. The Chairperson is in the rank of Secretary to Government of India.
- **Headquarters:** Delhi.
- **Functions of FSSAI:**
 - Framing of regulations to lay down the standards and guidelines of food safety.
 - Granting FSSAI food safety license and certification for food businesses.
 - Laying down procedure and guidelines for laboratories in food businesses.
 - To provide suggestions to the government in framing the policies.
 - To collect data regarding contaminants in foods products, identification of emerging risks and introduction of a rapid alert system.
 - Creating an information network across the country about food safety.
 - Promote general awareness about food safety and food standards.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

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)

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