



QR Codes for Food Labels

For Prelims: QR codes for Food Labels, [Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, Front-of-Pack Labeling \(FOPL\), Quick Response Code](#), Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2020.

For Mains: QR Codes for Food Labels, Food Processing and Related Industries in India Scope' and Significance, Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

[Source: TH](#)

Why in News?

Recently, [Food Safety and Standards Authority of India \(FSSAI\)](#) has recommended the inclusion of **QR codes on food products** for accessibility by visually impaired individuals stating that this will ensure **Access to Safe Food** for all.

- The FSSAI in 2019 proposed the [Front-of-Pack Labeling \(FOPL\)](#), a key strategy to alert and educate consumers in making an informed choice.

What is QR Code?

- A [QR \(Quick Response\) code](#), is a type of **two-dimensional matrix barcode** that can store various types of data, such as alphanumeric text, website URLs, contact information, and more.
- It was invented in **1994 by the Japanese company Denso Wave**, primarily for the purpose of **tracking and labeling automobile parts**.
- QR codes are characterized by their distinctive square shape and a pattern of black squares on a white background, which can be **scanned and interpreted using a QR code reader or a smartphone camera**.

What are the Key Recommendations of the FSSAI in this Regard?

- **FSSAI's Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2020:**
 - The Recommendations are consistent with the **FSSAI's Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2020**.
 - It ensures that food manufacturers adhere to labeling requirements, which are essential for food safety and consumer protection.
- **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016:**
 - By including QR codes for accessibility by visually impaired individuals, the move is in accordance with the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016**.
 - It promotes inclusivity and equal access to essential information.
- **Information Provided by QR Codes:**

- The QR codes will encompass **comprehensive details about the product**, including, but not limited to, ingredients, nutritional information, allergens, manufacturing date, best before/expiry/use by date, allergen warning, and contact information for customer enquiries.
- The inclusion of a QR code for the **accessibility of information** does not replace or negate the requirement to provide mandatory information on the product label, as **prescribed by relevant regulations**.

What are the Present Concerns Related to Access to Safe Food?

- India is experiencing a significant rise in [Non-Communicable Diseases \(NCDs\)](#), such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases.
- The [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) has noted a global increase in NCDs over the last two decades.
- These diseases are partly attributed to the **consumption of aggressively marketed, cheaper, and easily available** pre-packaged foods, which are becoming increasingly popular among consumers.

What is the Significance of the Move?

- **Accessibility for Visually Impaired Individuals:**
 - These codes can be scanned using smartphone applications, which can then read out the information to the user.
 - This ensures that visually impaired consumers have the **same access to critical information about food products** as sighted individuals, promoting inclusivity and equal access to safe food.
- **Comprehensive Information:**
 - The level of details provided in the QR code empowers all consumers, including those with dietary restrictions or allergies, to make informed choices, reducing the risk of adverse reactions or health issues.
- **Informed Decision-Making:**
 - Consumers can quickly verify the claims made by manufacturers and make choices that support their health and dietary needs.
 - This is particularly crucial in a market saturated with pre-packaged foods, as consumers **can distinguish between healthier and less healthy options**.
 - By providing nutritional information and allergen warnings through QR codes, consumers are better equipped to make healthier food choices.
- **Global Significance:**
 - The use of QR codes on food products is not unique to India. Countries like the US, France, the U.K., and India are prominent users of QR codes on food products.
 - This aligns with global trends, as consumers worldwide increasingly use QR codes to access **information about the products they purchase**.

Conclusion

- The inclusion of QR codes on food products in India is a significant step toward improving public health, enhancing consumer protection, and promoting inclusivity. It aligns with global trends in food labeling and empowers consumers to make informed choices about their dietary preferences.
- This initiative demonstrates the commitment of Indian authorities to address the challenges associated with the growing consumption of pre-packaged foods and the rise of NCDs.

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)

Exp:

- 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.**
- FSSAI has been created for laying down science based standards for articles of food and to regulate their manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import to ensure availability of safe and wholesome food for human consumption.
- Therefore, option (a) is the correct answer.

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