

# Food companies may soon have to validate health claims

## New rules to Food Act coming; PFA, 6 other Acts to be repealed from Jan

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*Mumbai, Nov 14*

Tea that makes you slim or calms your mind, beverages that make you tall or cooking oils good for your heart – health claims made by food companies will have to be validated, says the soon-to-be notified rules of the integrated Food Act.

The implementation of these rules will also consign the 56-year-old Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954 (PFA), and six others similar laws to history – an eventuality envisaged in the Food Safety and Standards Act (2006).

The second version of rules to implement the FSSA have been finalised and expect to be notified by December. From January next year,

different States will be in a position to repeal the PFA and six other Acts, said the first chairperson of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), Mr P.I. Suvrathan.

The other Acts set to be repealed include the Fruit Products Order, 1955, Meat Food Products Order, 1973, and the Vegetable Oil Products (Control) Order, 1947.

### JUSTIFY CLAIM

The PFA was more “rudimentary” and required that the claims and labels not be misleading.

The new rules outline requirements that need to be met for food-companies to make a claim. Internationally known and research-supported facts, such as the

benefits of calcium to bone-health, are not the problem, he says.

But other health-related claims will have to be justified by the companies and whetted by State-level scientific committees, who could refer it to the Centre, if required, he added.

The draft regarding making scientific claims is also expected to be ready by January.

While food-industry representatives laud the progressive changes, a top representative with a multinational food and consumer-goods maker cautions that validation of scientific claims before getting the product in the market should not end up delaying approvals.

The earlier system, allowed companies to launch products, and authorities had the liberty to randomly pick up products and check the claims, he explained.

### AYURVEDA PRODUCTS

The new rules take a wide sweep when it comes to claims, including looking at ayurveda products that are not under the medicinal category. If a product does not cure a disease, it is not a drug, Mr Suvrathan explains.

Nutraceuticals, functional foods and health supplements have already been classified as food under the FSSA, but further streamlining is taking place, he said.

And while genetically

modified food will be under the proposed Biotechnology Regulatory Authority, here too, as in the case of ayurveda products – labelling will be under the FSSAI and a process of consultation is to start next month, he added.

### 'DECRIMINALISES' LAW

The other major step in the rules, is that it ‘decriminalises’ the law and takes a “fast track” approach, by putting a financial penalty for minor violations, replacing the earlier imprisonment. And this would start at the district level with an adjudicating officer, he said.

In fact, food-safety officers are being trained in safety and surveillance, and five rounds of training already over, he says.