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FSSAI Plans Centralised Food Surveillance System with Digital Alerts

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FSSAI Plans Centralised Food Surveillance System with Digital Alerts

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WHY IN NEWS:

The **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** on **May 22, 2026** announced plans for a **centralised food surveillance system** integrating market sampling, laboratory testing, and **digital alert generation** across states. The system aims to strengthen real-time food-safety monitoring and unify currently fragmented state-level testing infrastructure under a single national data and pattern-recognition layer.

ABOUT FSSAI

- **Statutory body** established under the **Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 (FSSA)**.
- **Established:** September 5, 2008. **Operational since:** **August 5, 2011** (date FSS Rules and core Regulations came into force).
- **Headquarters:** **FDA Bhawan, New Delhi**.
- **Nodal ministry:** **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW)**.
- **Structure:**
 - **Chairperson** — rank of Secretary, Government of India.
 - **Chief Executive Officer (CEO)**.
 - **Scientific Panels** (subject-wise) and a **Scientific Committee** for risk assessment.
- **Reach:** **8 regional offices, 200+ NABL-accredited laboratories**.

Statutory Mandate

FUNCTION	DESCRIPTION
Standards	Lay down science-based standards for articles of food
Regulation	Regulate manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import to ensure safe, wholesome food
Licensing	License and register food businesses
Surveillance	Sampling, audits, inspections and enforcement
Information	Public information dissemination on food safety

EXISTING FSSAI DIGITAL ARCHITECTURE

SYSTEM	FUNCTION
FoSCoS (Food Safety Compliance System)	Online licensing/registration portal (launched June 2020)
FoSCoRIS	Risk-based inspection system
FSS – Food Safety on Wheels	Mobile testing laboratories
FoSTaC (Food Safety Training and Certification)	Mandatory food-handler training
INFoLNET	Indian Food Laboratory Network – interconnects notified labs

CURRENT TESTING INFRASTRUCTURE: KEY GAPS

- **State Food Safety Commissioners report to state health departments**, not directly to FSSAI – diluting central oversight.
- **Lab capacity is uneven** across states: Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala are strong; many northern states have weak infrastructure.
- **Sample-to-result turnaround** often runs into **weeks**, delaying enforcement.
- **Inter-state contamination tracking** is fragmented – outbreaks can spread across borders before detection.
- Historically, **27–30% of samples fail standards** in FSSAI’s annual Public Lab Testing Reports – pointing to entrenched compliance gaps.

PROPOSED CENTRALISED SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM: FEATURES

- **Unified data layer** consolidating sample results from all state labs into a single national database.
- **Digital alerts (push notifications)** to FSSAI HQ and state Food Safety Officers when contamination patterns emerge.
- **Pattern recognition across product categories** — e.g. milk adulteration, **argemone in mustard oil, ethylene oxide (ETO) in packaged spices**, edible-oil adulteration.
- **Inter-state food-trade traceability** — link consignments to lots and labs.
- **Consumer-facing alert app** is planned, allowing public access to recall and warning notices.

INTERNATIONAL COMPARABLES

SYSTEM	COUNTRY / REGION	OPERATIONAL SINCE
RASFF (Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed)	EU + EFTA + Switzerland (binding)	1979
Reportable Food Registry / CARVER + Shield	United States (US FDA)	2009 (RFR)
INFOSAN (International Food Safety Authorities Network)	WHO global network	2004 (India is a member)

The proposed Indian system is conceptually closest to **EU RASFF**, adapted to India's federal structure.

KEY FSSAI INITIATIVES

- **Eat Right India movement (2018)** — covers **Eat Right Campus, Eat Right School, Clean Street Food Hub** certification.
- **Food fortification:**
 - **Mandatory rice fortification** under PMGKAY (announced 2022; phased rollout).
 - **Voluntary salt iodisation** and **edible-oil fortification** with vitamins A and D.
- **Project BHOG** (Blissful Hygienic Offering to God) — food-safety certification of places of worship.
- **RUCO** (Repurpose Used Cooking Oil) — converts used cooking oil into **biodiesel**.
- **State Food Safety Index (SFSI)** — annual ranking of states, **launched 2019**, published on **World Food Safety Day (June 7)**.

RECENT FSSAI ACTION CONTEXT

- **2024:** Regulatory action on **MDH and Everest masala** following **ETO pesticide** detection — Hong Kong and Singapore imposed sales bans.
- **2024:** Ban on **calcium carbide** for artificial fruit ripening.
- **2024:** Tightening of **energy-drink regulations** after paediatric cardiac events.
- **2025:** Cleansing of **nutraceutical and supplement claims**; stricter label scrutiny.

FEDERAL GOVERNANCE CHALLENGE

- The **FSSA, 2006** creates a national architecture, but enforcement is delivered through **state Food Safety Commissioners and Designated Officers**, who report to state governments.
- Coordination flows through the **Central Advisory Committee** and periodic Commissioners' conferences.
- A unified surveillance data layer must therefore navigate **federalism — pooling state-collected data into a central platform without diluting state enforcement powers**.

RECENT LEGAL & LABELLING FRAMEWORK

REGULATION	YEAR	HIGHLIGHT
Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations	2020	Consolidated labelling code
Front-of-Pack Labelling (FOPL) — Health-Star Rating	Draft 2022	Industry resistance has slowed final notification
Sale of Date-Expired Food Regulations	2024 update	Stricter penalties on expired-food sale

WAY FORWARD

- **Strengthen Central Lab capacity** — expand the **National Food Laboratory** and Reference Lab network.
- **Mandatory upload** of state-lab results to the FSSAI data layer within fixed turnaround times.
- **Risk-based and AI-assisted sampling** rather than purely random sampling.
- **Public dashboard** with anonymised contamination maps to drive consumer awareness.
- **Notify FOPL regulations** to empower consumer choice.

- Align with **WHO INFOSAN** for global recall coordination.

UPSC RELEVANCE

- **GS Paper 2 — Governance:** Statutory regulators; centre–state coordination; transparency and citizen interface.
- **GS Paper 2 — Social Justice / Health:** Right to safe food; nutrition policy; public-health regulation.
- **GS Paper 3 — Science & Technology:** Digital surveillance; data interoperability; food-testing technologies.
- **GS Paper 3 — Agriculture:** Food-processing standards; export quality (spice-ETO episode).
- **Mains themes:** Regulatory federalism; consumer protection in food markets; comparative best practice (RASFF vs. India); fortification as public-health intervention.
- **Prelims angle:** FSSA 2006, FoSCoS, SFSI, World Food Safety Day, Project BHOG, RUCO, Battery vs. Food Waste Rules distinction, INFOSAN, Eat Right India.

FACTS CORNER

FSSAI established under: Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.

Operational since: August 5, 2011.

Headquarters: FDA Bhawan, New Delhi.

Nodal ministry: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW).

FSSAI Chairperson: Rank of Secretary, GoI.

FoSCoS: Online licensing/registration portal — launched June 2020.

State Food Safety Index (SFSI): Launched 2019; published annually on June 7.

World Food Safety Day: June 7 (UN observance since 2019).

Project BHOG: Food-safety certification of places of worship.

RUCO: Repurpose Used Cooking Oil — biodiesel from used cooking oil.

EU RASFF: Operational since 1979 (binding for EU + EFTA + Switzerland).

WHO INFOSAN: International Food Safety Authorities Network — India is a member.

Flagship fortification: Rice fortification under PMGKAY.

Sources: [FSSAI](#), [MoHFW](#), [PIB](#)

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