

## Self-regulation for Food Cos, QSR Chains On Menu

**RAISING THE BAR** Companies selling food products and restaurants serving fast food will rate themselves on key parameters

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**New Delhi:** The government will establish a self-regulation platform for food companies, retailers stocking packaged food and fast-food restaurant chains, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) chief executive Pawan Agarwal said. The move will help benchmark them against the best in class, thus raising standards and making companies mindful of rules and consumers.

Companies such as Hindustan Unilever, PepsiCo, Nestle, Parle Products, Danone, ITC, Patanjali and Mondelez, retailers like Walmart and Future Group, Aditya Birla Retail and Spencer's Retail and quick service restaurant (QSR) chains including KFC and McDonald's will be put on an equal self-compliance footing under the plan.

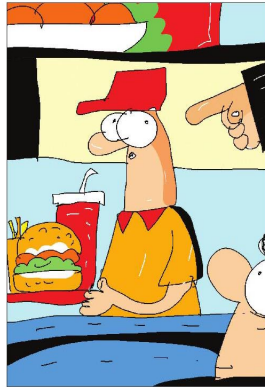
"This will encourage healthy competition among companies,

retailers and QSR chains and will be an open platform for consumers to see for themselves," Agarwal told ET. "The companies will be ranked on basis of their declarations and the platform will also mention names of companies which haven't shared the required information."

FSSAI's "food safety and shared responsibility" score will be a publicly accessible online platform for companies to rate themselves against parameters such as compliance with regulations, nutritive content, dealing with consumer grievances, upstream and downstream supply chain capacity and promoting food safety in schools. It's been dubbed ReFoc for responsible food companies score.

Companies welcomed the move. Representatives of about 40 of them have been invited to provide feedback on the initiative on Wednesday.

"By engagement, sharing, cross-learning and healthy com-



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petition, we want to raise the bar not only for food safety but make foods businesses more responsive to consumers and government regulation," Agarwal said. "As we move forward, we will make this matrix more robust."

The regulator has invited the top 200 companies by sales to join the platform in the first phase of the self-regulation exercise. The FSSAI said it will make public names of companies that don't want to participate.

While all categories will have a repository of good practices, companies that want to share additional information will be provided a template to do so.

Nestle, the country's largest packaged foods maker, welcomed the move. "We believe in providing, transparent and responsible communication to the consumers as well as other stakeholders," a Nestle spokesperson said. "We welcome initiatives which encourage sharing of information and will continue to engage with all relevant stakeholders on this subject."

A spokesperson for HUL said: "This will not only encourage the food business to take full responsibility of food safety but also ensure that regulators

can review with consistency the efforts being made by the companies on safety and hygiene."

Danone India managing director Rodrigo Lima said: "Food safety cannot be the responsibility of the regulator alone, self-regulation by food businesses and awareness of consumers will go a long way in creating an atmosphere of trust and quality. This resonates well with our mission of bringing health through food to as many people as possible."

KFC India managing director Rahul Shinde said the move was a progressive one.

"We are committed to contribute to the larger objective of ensuring health, hygiene and safety standards for consumers and proactively working on bringing global best practices and driving knowledge sharing programmes with the regulators," said Shinde.