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Green Practices, Standards and Conformity Issues in the Indian Food Processing Industry

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Abstract:

The food processing industry of India is significantly affected by the substandard quality issues. Insufficient focus on safety and quality standards has affected export of processed food products and also resulted in low competitive advantage in the global market. Even in the domestic market due to increased awareness, people demand secure, non-toxic and pesticide-free products. The paper reviews literature related to food standards and aims to comprehend food safety regulations existing in India along with the present state of preparedness of the food industry to comply with the international standards. The policy measures to be undertaken to this effect are also examined. Promotional activities like credible labelling and certifications are essential to popularize the safety attribute of processed food products and up-gradation of Agmark standards to Codex Alimentarius requirements by the Indian government are necessary to ensure high quality of food products. One of the main precautionary methods for food safety concern is effective implantation of traceability. In order to improve food traceability system and increase the business performance of food industry, management should focus on regulatory framework, food safety, food quality, and certification. The suggestions presented if implemented efficiently would assist in growth of the Indian agro industry, both at the domestic and global level.

Key words : Food Processing, Agmark Standard, Indian Agro industry

I. Introduction

The demand for processed food items is continuously rising. Furthermore, Indian food industry is growing swiftly and India is the second largest producer of food globally (IBEF, 2011). The Indian food processing industry assists in contributing significantly to GDP and export along with generating employment. It is Indian economy's emerging sector and growing at a remarkable rate of more than 10 percent per annum (Ali et al., 2009). Moreover, upward mobility of income class Indian consumers along with enhanced desire for food hygiene, convenience, quantity and variety is boosting the demand for processed food products and furnishing notable market opportunities for both foreign and domestic food processing firms.

II. Literature Review

In views of Huang (1996), Sirieix et al. (2011) and Yin et al. (2010), the two relevant dimensions of food quality are food safety and sustainability, hence green food devoid of pesticides and chemical residue has become popular around the world. Ehmke et al. (2008) and Birol et al. (2009) have reflected in their studies that consumers from developing countries also seek and demand safe food, like from the developed nations. Nandi et al. (2016) stated that haphazard use of synthetic chemicals, adulteration of food and pollution has made consumers increasingly cautious towards food scares and therefore they are demanding safe food. Aertsens et al. (2011) and Cerjak et al. (2010) pointed out in their studies that the main drivers of demand for green food products are relevant attributes such as healthiness, enhanced quality and wholesome taste associated with these products.

Satyan and (2011) found that leading Indian food multinationals find it difficult to increase global market share because of perception of poor quality of Indian products by the West. Kumar et al. (2011) stated that initially increased costs are incurred due to compliance with food safety practices, but higher price is realized by farmers for their milk production by an increased food

safety practice adoption rate. Ali et al. (2015) remarked that consumers are becoming increasingly conscious of the role of healthy and safe food with rising incidences of heart and food-borne diseases, problems like diabetes and obesity. Kumar et al. (2011) reported that the Indian government has undertaken an initiative, known as the 'Clean milk production scheme', towards ensuring milk safety and quality in the dairy supply chain, for targeting the rising consumer demand and dairy processing industry requirements. National Street Vendor Policy is introduced by the National Street Vendor Alliance of India to raise the quality of Indian street food by increasing access to sanitation, space and water (Downs et al., 2014). According to Kumar and Basu, (2008) the food legislation in India is exceedingly complex, apart from being anachronistic.

Connolly et al. (2016) proposed that an important component of a strong food safety system is increasingly recognised to be implementation of traceability. Van Rijswijk et al. (2008) have studied the food traceability system and found it to be the principal preventive method for issues of food safety. Faisal and Talib (2016) noticed that globalised food-supply chains and rise in consumer awareness about safe foods have made traceability an emerging issue in the food sector. Nandi et al. (2016) opine that consumer's perceived food quality and safety can be effectively boosted by the introduction of a sound food traceability system. Marotta et al. (2014) stated that reformulation is one of the prospective measures to promote healthy and safe consumption but it is marginally practiced in European countries. He further elaborated that collaborative actions should exist between the government and food industries to promote reformulation in the food sector. Traill et al. (2012) found that mandatory regulations or voluntary alliances among food industries are required to implement reformulation of product labelling focussed on improving food safety. Unnevehr and Jagmanaite (2008) and L'Abbe et al. (2009) have pointed out that collaboration among the government, food processers and agriculture activities have positively impacted the way in which the food sector reformulated its high trans-fat comprising products in the North American market, thus transitioning towards healthier food options. Jairath et al. (2013) found that in India the food operators licensed under the FSSA 2006 are insignificant and majority of food exports are rejected from India on grounds of poor food hygiene and due to lack of conformity to SPS standards.

According to Young et al. (2010), green attributes of the food products are communicated to consumers through eco-certifications or eco-labelling. Phulia and Sharma (2014) discussed that the German government introduced an eco-labelling program known as "Blue Angel" in 1977, which is one of the oldest and most effective eco-labelling program, based on comparison with related products. A common standard for farm management practices around the world, Eurepgap, requires food is produced considering social and environmental issues (Eurepgap 2005). Botero (2011) opined that the eco-certification of coffee by the major coffee firms has been possible due to the corporations' reactive response to the pressures levied by the NGOs and as a result, Nestlé and Starbucks have aligned with distinct NGOs along with choosing different certification systems to promote sustainability in their products. Sharma et al. (2010) proposed for American food industry, standards for self-regulatory activities and found that the external threats such as negative publicity, litigation and government regulations have motivated the American food industry to self-regulate since 2006 and as a result, it has promoted a number of pledges for responsible food labelling, sold fewer unwholesome food products in school and reduced food marketing to children. Wang et al. (2008) noticed that gradual introduction of standards such as Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) systems in low-value marketing supply chains can remarkably decrease the risk of food safety, hence it is being integrated into the Chinese dairy industry. Rousseau and Vranken (2013) analysed how information provision about health effects by policy makers on organic apple labels, in the Belgian food market, can increase consumer's willing to pay. After provision of information through labels, consumers are willing to pay positive price premium of 57 eurocent/kg for labelled organic apples.'Organic' certification represents around 3% of food products sales in Europe, Japan and the United

States and is strongly valued in many niche markets and local food chains there (IFST 2005). Xu and Wu (2010) discussed that in China there are three food certification schemes for categorising food products- normal/ safe food, green food and organic food, which are accredited by government authority agencies. According to Paull (2008), organic food is certified in compliance with global standards like IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements) and is devoid of any pesticide and genetically modified components.

Fernando et al. (2014) found that the government of India in 1991 introduced a voluntary eco-labelling scheme, known as the Ecomark scheme, which was mainly ineffective. According to Nittala (2014), no product carries this mark as of 2013. Suneja (2010) and Mehta (2007) opined that eco-labelling in India was unsuccessful because it was not aggressively promoted by the government and companies did not prefer it. Green Signal is a new voluntary private eco-labelling scheme launched in 2011 by Centre for Innovation Incubation and Entrepreneurship ('IIM-A releases Green Signal', 2011). According to Nittala, (2014), consumers distrust eco-labels and remain suspicious of the certification process of green products. Ottman et al. (2006) proposed that to avoid green marketing myopia three relevant principles need to be followed- customer value positioning, calibration of knowledge and credibility of product claim besides, trustworthy third parties should be used to obtain product endorsements or eco-certification. Ortega et al. (2014) carried out a study on food safety and found that asymmetric information contributes to profit-seeking behaviour of agents which in turn leads to food safety issues. According to Downs et al. (2014) and Witkowski (2007), the Indian food industry is experiencing a rise in promotion of processed food and application of labelling methods such as health claims targeted towards product saleability; hence the role of statutory standard setting bodies' like 'The Advertising Standards Council of India' and 'Food Safety and Standard Authority of India' is becoming increasingly relevant. Downs et al. (2014) also found that no strict regulation vis-à-vis health claims exist in India although it is mandatory to include nutritional information on the product label [Food Safety and Standards (Packaging and Labelling) Regulations 2011]. Compulsory labelling of saturated and trans-fat are included in the regulation and manufacturers are also required to mention if the product contains trans-fat in case of hydrogenated fats like Vanaspati although the quantity limit is not yet decided. Sarkar (2012) argued that eco-labelling screening process is needed in the green food product industry in India to convey the product's reliability and increase adoption rate of green food product.

III. Food Regulation in India

Food Safety and Standard Authority of India (FSSAI): India consisted of multiple laws and regulations for food products which led to inconsistency and incoherence in the regulatory scenario of the food sector and hence, the sector was prescribed different standards regarding contaminants, food additives, preservatives, food colours and labelling by various Ministries and Departments. Therefore to rationalise the multiplicity of laws, an integrated food law was suggested by a Group of Ministers which was constituted by the Indian Government. The Food Safety and Standards Bill, 2005 was drafted by the group and after being passed by the parliament, the Food Safety and Standards Act 2006 came into effect from 24, August 2006. Various central Acts like Fruit Products Order , 1955; Prevention of Food Adulteration Act,1954; Vegetable Oil Products (Control) Order, 1947; Meat Food Products Order,1973; Edible Oils Packaging (Regulation) Order 1988; Milk and Milk Products Order, 1992; Solvent Extracted Oil, De- Oiled Meal and Edible Flour (Control) Order, 1967 were repealed after the introduction of this Act.

By moving from multi-departmental and multi-level control to a single line of command, the act aims to create a single point of reference for all the food safety and standards associated matters. For this purpose, the Act also established a unified and independent statutory structure known as the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). This authority at the centre of the nation enforces various provisions of the act, along with State Food Safety Authorities. FSSAI has been mandated to perform functions relating to framing of regulations for formation and enforcement of food standards, guidelines for accreditation

of certification bodies and laboratories, promoting awareness about food standards and food safety by creating an information network across India, conduction of training programs for those who are involved or intend to get involved in food sector, checking imported food for safety and quality. There are 198 laboratories which are being used by FSSAI for testing of samples of food, out of which 112 are FSSAI notified NABL (National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories) accredited private labs, 72 labs are state labs functioning under the State/ Union government and 14 are Referral labs. Under this act, it is required for every firm in the food sector to get a license and registration certificate, besides that, every seller is expected to be able to trace any food article to its distributor and every distributor to its manufacturer. Recall procedures can be initiated by anyone in the sector if the person finds that the food sold has violated necessary standards according to this Act. FSSAI has framed standards for various food products like dairy products, oils, fruits and vegetables, cereal, meat and meat products, fish and fish products, confectionary, beverages etc. These standards are prescribed under the following regulations-

A. Food Safety & Standards (Licensing and Registration of Food Business) Regulations, 2011- It specifies general requirements regarding sanitation and hygiene practices to be observed by all food operators. The regulation also requires food businesses to be licensed and petty food business operators to be registered.

B. Food Safety & Standards (Food Products Standards & Food Additives) Regulations, 2011- This regulation specifies food standards for different products and regulates usage of food additives, colours, preservatives, flavouring agents, artificial sweeteners and other substances.

C. Food Safety and Standards (Packaging and Labelling) Regulations, 2011- It prohibits false and misleading statements and lays down packaging along with labelling requirements. According to the regulation the label on the packaged food article should mention- name of food article, ingredient list, nutritional information, vegetarian/ non-vegetarian dot, food additive declaration, manufacturer or packer information, net quantity, batch/code/lot number, manufacturing date, packing date, best before/use by date, usage instructions etc. From 1st January 2013, the Ministry of Consumer Affairs has made labelling of genetically modified products compulsory if used/added to the food product (Bhardwaj, 2013).

D. Food Safety & Standards (Contaminants, Toxins and Residues) Regulations, 2011- This regulation prescribes limits for metal and crop contaminants in the food article.

E. Food Safety & Standards (Prohibition & Restriction on Sales) Regulations, 2011- The regulation prohibits certain admixtures meaning any material other than chicory added to coffee, similarly water is not to be added to milk and so on. It also regulates and restricts sales of certain products like tobacco cannot be sold without proper health warning, Mineral water without BIS certification mark etc.

IV. Voluntary Product Certification Acts

The government established BIS (Bureau of Indian Standards) under the Bureau of Indian Standards Act in 1986 to promote, establish and publish Indian standards. A voluntary certification scheme known as the ISI Mark is operated by the organisation for certification of food products and consumer goods (BIS, 1986). Although the certification is voluntary in nature, for some products like drinking mineral water, milk powder the ISI mark certification is mandatory. (BIS, 1993). Through the Agricultural Produce (Grading and Marketing) Act of 1937, AGMARK is enforceable in India. AGMARK is a voluntary certification scheme for agricultural products operated by the Directorate of Marketing and Inspection (an agency under the Government of India) to assure the agricultural commodities conform to an established set of standards approved by the agency.

International Food Authorities: The World Health Organization (WHO) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) formed Codex Alimentarius Commission in 1961 to ensure fair practices in food trade and protect the health of the consumers. Elaborate international negotiations are involved in the establishment of food standards (FAO/ WHO, 2006) which when taken together are known as 'Codex Alimentarius' meaning food code in Latin. Models for national legislation on food

articles are represented by the Codex food standards and they are not legally binding on countries. Apart from the standards, advisory provisions known as codes of practices and guidelines are also included in the Codex Alimentarius which usually address food operators. These standards and guidelines established by the Codex Alimentarius are identified by the WTO (World Trade Organisation) as the basis for harmonisation. Majority of the standards are of vertical nature which is product specific and all principal types of food products (processed, semi-processed or raw) are addressed by them. Codex standards of horizontal nature are included on labelling, sampling, methods of analysis and are commonly known as general standards. For example: 'General Standard for the Labeling of Pre-packaged Foods'. Concerns regarding human health, food safety, animal and plant health along with labelling requirements may lead national authorities to implement measures which may restrict the free flow of trade. Two WTO (World Trade Organisation) treaties were finalised to address the aforementioned concerns. They were the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (the SPS Agreement) and the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (the TBT Agreement). SPS Agreement ensures that nations only apply measures to safeguard human and animal health (sanitary measures) and to protect plant health (phytosanitary measures) based on risk assessment, that is, the measures must be scientifically justified and not constitute disguised barriers to international trade nor be discriminating. No scientific proof of the necessity of measures is required if they are in conformity with the international standards. Codex Alimentarius mainly consist of the standards on food and food safety. The importance of SPS Agreement is highly augmented by the inclusion of Codex Alimentarius in it and hence the WTO members who observe Codex standards do not need to justify the necessary SPS measures they implement, otherwise, they need to prove their measures are of scientific nature.

V. Government Initiatives

The government of India has also implemented various schemes to improve food quality and safety such as Research and Development Scheme, Setting Up/Up-gradation of Quality Control/ Food Testing Laboratories Schemes, Implementation of Food Safety and Quality Management System Scheme [such as Total Quality Management (TQM), ISO 2200, ISO 9000, Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), Good Hygiene Practices (GHP), Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) etc].

VI. Discussion

Indian consumers are now aware of the availability of a myriad of food choices as a result of media penetration and international exposure besides; the processed food sector has the potential to grow exponentially due to rising export demand for value-added food products and domestic demand for branded packaged food. Insufficient focus on safety and quality standards has affected export of various processed food items and also resulted in low competitive advantage in the global market. Even in the domestic market due to increased awareness people demand secure, non-toxic and pesticide-free products. And there exists low availability of organic products in the market and retail outlets. Therefore, low product development and innovation due to a paucity of investments and incentives along with impaired bank credit access are one of the key challenges faced by the sector. Hence, opportunities for product innovation and extensions exist and need to be tapped. Low consumer awareness, insufficient political will, unclear and confusing communications between regulatory body and food operators are few other reasons for the failure of eco-labelling scheme 'Ecomark' in India. Promotional activities like credible labelling and certifications are essential to popularize the safety attribute of processed food products and up-gradation of Agmark standards to Codex Alimentarius requirements are necessary to ensure high quality of food products. India can become world's leading supplier of processed food if issues of branding and quality are addressed (Dharni & Sharma, 2008). Enhanced processed food quality can be achieved through the proper implementation of the FSSA Act 2006, which also has the potential to regulate the production and marketing of processed foods from both the organised and unorganised sectors. The integration of food safety laws

will assist in boosting the food processing industry as it is science-based, transparent and industry-friendly. One of the main precautionary methods for food safety concern is effective implantation of traceability. In order to improve food traceability system and increase the business performance of food industry, management should focus on regulatory framework, food safety, food quality, and certification. Another potential initiative to enhance quality and safety is food reformulation process which can be achieved by compulsory governmental regulation and collaboration between government and agro-industries. In order for the industry to prosper, food processing sector combined with marketing should focus on assuring value addition, enhancing food quality along with generating export and employment opportunities. The insufficient number of food testing laboratories in India restricts effective implementation of the food law. Thus measures to enhance food safety and quality should also include increasing the number of accredited laboratories in each state along with licensing and registering food operators under the FSS Act, 2006. Compulsory recording, monitoring and surveillance regarding the execution of food safety law by the relevant food regulation authorities are necessary to counter the inefficient implementation of food safety laws in the country.

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