

# FSSAI delay in making must front-of-pack label draws ire

## Authority More Concerned About Food Industry: Experts

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Several public health experts and consumer bodies played the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India's (FSSAI) proposal to give the food industry four years before making front-of-pack labeling mandatory and for fixing high cut-offs for sugar, salt and fat content in processed food. Accusing the authority of being more concerned about the welfare of the food industry rather than that of citizens, they demanded clear cut warning labels on the package of foods containing high salt, sugar or fat.

In a press conference held on Wednesday, experts trashed the authority's proposed Indian Nutrition Rating (INR) system for rating foods with stars instead of straight forward warning labels. "The health risk from high sugar content in a bottle of fruit juice doesn't get mitigated just because it has some fruit juice in it. Health risk from high sugar and fat in a bar of chocolate will not get reduced just because you add

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MATTER OF CONCERN

fruits and nuts to it. But that is precisely what the INR system of the FSSAI with points for 'positive nutrients' will do. A bar of chocolate will get a higher number of stars because it contains nuts or fruits. That is misleading and ridiculous," said Vandana Prasad of the Public Health Resource Network.

Front-of-pack labeling has been in discussion since 2012 with the food industry strongly opposing it. "After a decade of back and forth on this important public health measure to reduce consumption of ultra-processed food, the FSSAI now wants to give the industry four more years to

comply with the absurdly relaxed cut-offs for fat, sugar and salt. When the industry can change packaging and ingredients within a few months, why not make it mandatory within one year?" asked Arun Gupta, convener of Nutrition Advocacy in Public Interest (NAPI).

The draft Food Safety and Standards (Labelling & Display) Regulations 2020 have defined high fat, sugar, salt (HFSS) food according to the WHO norm as processed food in which the value of energy (kcal) from total sugar or total fat is 10% or more of total energy, and sodium is 1 mg or more per kilo calorie. But it has fixed much higher reference values for food risk factors in its rating system

"It is surprising that the food risk factor 'sugar' has been capped at 21 g per 100 grams in solid foods, which is way higher than WHO's norms, which are based on well researched nutrient profiles for food products in several regions, including Asia," said epidemiologist HPS Sachdev.