



# The Indian Journal for Research in Law and Management

Open Access Law Journal – Copyright © 2026

Editor-in-Chief – Dr. Muktai Deb Chavan; Publisher – Alden Vas; ISSN: 2583-9896

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-Share Alike 4.0 International (CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0) License, which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium provided the original work is properly cited.

---

## Consumer protection and food label transparency- evaluating FSSAI's role

*Jahnvi goel*

### ABSTRACT

Food labels have become crucial for consumer protection as more individuals rely on packaged foods and develop lifestyle disorders. Food packaging increasingly contains health information that aids consumers in making decisions. However, a lot of food labels in India are difficult to read due to unclear language, false claims, and insufficient disclosures. Under the Food Safety and Standards Act of 2006<sup>1</sup>, food labeling in India is primarily regulated by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). To increase openness and safeguard customers, FSSAI has implemented a number of reforms. The efficacy of the current system is still called into question by problems including enforcement, corporate influence, and delays in enacting significant reforms, particularly Front-of-Package Labeling (FOPL)<sup>2</sup>.

### INTRODUCTION

Transparent labeling protects customers from deceptive advertising and aids in their decision-making. Inadequate labeling results in major issues such as artificial additives, sodium, bad fats, and hidden sugars all contribute to lifestyle disorders including diabetes, obesity, and high blood pressure. Furthermore, products marketed as "natural," "healthy," or "diet-friendly" frequently contain components that don't match these claims, deceiving customers into paying more and without sufficient information about the goods they purchase, consumers are unable to make decisions. The Indian Constitution's Article 21<sup>3</sup> guarantees the right to life,

---

<sup>1</sup> The Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, No. 34, Acts of Parliament, 2006 (India).

<sup>2</sup> Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2020, Gazette of India, pt. III Sec. 4 (Nov. 17, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> India Const. art. 21.

health, and the right to information is protected by Article 19(1)(a)<sup>4</sup>.

Therefore, transparent labeling is both a constitutional mandate and a regulatory requirement.

## **INDIAN REGULATIONS CONTROLLING FOOD LABELS**

1. India's food system is based on the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006. It unifies food regulations and gives FSSAI the authority to establish guidelines for food safety, labeling, and packaging.

2. Food packaging and labeling that misleads consumers regarding the nature, composition, or quality of the product is prohibited by Section 23. Manufacturers are responsible for making sure labels are accurate.

3. Advertisements that misrepresent health advantages are restricted by Section 24. The Act prohibits claims that are not supported by science.

## **REGULATIONS FOR FOOD SAFETY AND STANDARDS (LABELLING AND DISPLAY), 2020**

In an effort to raise consumer knowledge and standardise food disclosures, the Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2020:

### **a) Disclosure of Allergens and Additives**

Major allergies like gluten, nuts, soy, milk, and eggs must be listed by producers in accordance with these regulations. Additionally, artificial colours, preservatives, and additives must be identified precisely rather than utilising ambiguous terminology.

### **b) Nutritional Data and %RDA**

Manufacturers are required to show:

- \* The worth of energy
- \* Protein
- \* Carbs
- \* Sugar
- \* Obesity.
- \* Levels of sodium,

---

<sup>4</sup> India Const. art. 19, § 1, cl. a.

in addition to their proportion of the Recommended Dietary Allowance (%RDA), which is calculated using a typical diet of 2,000 kcal. In order to improve visibility and readability, recent regulatory modifications have also pushed for bolder fonts for significant nutritional indicators including added sugar, sodium, and saturated fat.

### **c)Declaration of Quantitative Ingredients (QUID)**

Ingredients must be stated in descending order based on their weight at the time of manufacture in accordance with the QUID framework. Additionally, the precise percentage of a component that is highlighted in a product's branding, such as "fruit juice" or "almond milk," must be displayed.

## **THE FRONT-OF-PACKAGE LABELLING (FOPL) DEBATE**

The absence of efficient Front-of-Package Labelling (FOPL)<sup>5</sup> remains a significant weakness in India's food labelling system notwithstanding recent reforms. In order to notify consumers when products include levels of sugar, salt, or saturated fat, FOPL contains warning labels that are placed on the front of food packaging. Since consumers typically only look at products for a few seconds before making a purchase, these labels are considered public health tools.

The Supreme Court of India voiced concerns about the delays in the implementation of effective Front-of-Package warning labels in public interest litigation pertaining to food labelling regulations. The Court stated that lengthy debates and corporate resistance shouldn't take precedent over medical requirements.

The judiciary asked regulatory organisations to expedite reforms, emphasising that consumers have a right to know the nutritional dangers associated with packaged foods.

**In Union of India v. Center for Public Interest Litigation<sup>6</sup>**, the Supreme Court affirmed that a crucial component of Article 21 is the availability of wholesome food in this historic decision. The Court emphasised that regulatory bodies must make sure that food items on the market don't present health dangers. The decision reaffirmed FSSAI's obligation to protect consumers from dangerous or deceptive products and to maintain food safety regulations.

## **THE WAY FORWARD: EMPOWERING THE INDIAN CONSUMER**

---

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization advocates interpretive front-of-package warning labels to reduce the consumption of foods high in fat, sugar, and salt. See World Health Organization, *Guiding Principles and Framework Manual for Front-of-Pack Labelling for Promoting Healthy Diet* (2019).

<sup>6</sup> *Centre for Public Interest Litigation v. Union of India*, (2013) 16 S.C.C. 640 (India).

1. WHO<sup>7</sup>-backed Thresholds include FOPL<sup>8</sup> warning labels must be unambiguous, distinct, and based on strict World Health Organization (WHO) nutrient cut-offs, rather than lenient star-rating systems.
2. Passing laws is futile if consumers don't look at them. India needs massive public awareness campaigns—akin to the "Jago Grahak Jago" initiatives, focused purely on how to read a food matrix.
3. With the explosion of quick-commerce apps, food label transparency must seamlessly transition online, ensuring full ingredient lists are viewable *before* a consumer clicks add to cart.

## CONCLUSION

The continuous discussion about front-of-package labelling emphasises how difficult it is to strike a balance between commercial interests and health requirements. Strong legislation is not necessary for effective food control; instead, strict enforcement, court supervision, and extensive consumer education are. In the end, clear food labelling aids consumers in making dietary choices. FSSAI has the structural teeth to transform India's food ecosystem, but to truly champion consumer protection, it must pivot from a policy of *compromise* to a policy of *uncompromising transparency*.

As the number of nutrition-related illnesses in the nation rises, it is critical for health that food labels be truthful, transparent, and accountable.

---

<sup>7</sup> World Health Organization, *Noncommunicable Diseases Country Profiles 2024* (2024).