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FOOD LABELLING LAWS IN INDIA: THE CONSUMER'S RIGHT TO KNOW WHAT THEY ARE EATING

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ABSTRACT

Food is one of the most basic necessities of human life. Consumers rely on food labels to make informed decisions regarding the products they purchase and consume. A food label serves as a source of information about ingredients, nutritional value, expiry date, allergens, vegetarian or non-vegetarian status, and safety warnings. In India, food labelling is primarily governed by the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, and the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). These laws aim to protect consumers from misleading advertisements, false claims, and unsafe food products. However, despite the existence of comprehensive legal provisions, many challenges continue to affect the effectiveness of food labelling, including misleading packaging, poor enforcement, low consumer awareness, and non-compliance by manufacturers.

This paper examines the legal framework governing food labelling in India and analyses the extent to which it protects the consumer's right to know what they are eating. It discusses the constitutional basis of consumer rights, the provisions of the Food Safety and Standards Act, the Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2020, and the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. The paper also evaluates judicial decisions and compares India's food labelling regime with international practices. It concludes by suggesting reforms that can strengthen transparency and consumer protection through better enforcement, digital technology, and increased public awareness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Food labels play a significant role in modern society. Consumers today are increasingly conscious about the quality, nutritional value, and safety of the food they consume. Rising health concerns such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, food allergies, and lifestyle disorders have made food

labels more important than ever before. Labels help consumers understand the contents of packaged food and enable them to choose products according to their health, religious beliefs, dietary preferences, and ethical values.

The right to know what one is eating is an important aspect of consumer protection. A consumer cannot make an informed choice unless adequate information about the product is made available. If food manufacturers provide false, incomplete, or misleading information, consumers may suffer financial loss as well as serious health risks.

India has developed a legal framework to regulate food labelling through the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). The Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 consolidated various food laws into a single legislation and empowered FSSAI to establish uniform standards for food safety and labelling.

Despite these legal developments, many issues continue to exist. Misleading health claims, hidden ingredients, confusing nutritional information, and poor compliance with labelling standards reduce consumer confidence. Therefore, it is necessary to examine whether the existing legal framework adequately protects the consumer's right to know.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are:

- To examine the legal framework governing food labelling in India.
- To analyse the relationship between food labelling and consumer rights.

To study the role of FSSAI in regulating food labels.

- To identify challenges in implementing food labelling laws.
- To suggest reforms for improving transparency and consumer awareness.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts a doctrinal research methodology. It is based on the analysis of statutes, government regulations, judicial decisions, books, journal articles, reports issued by FSSAI, and international guidelines relating to food labelling. The study is descriptive and analytical in nature.

4. UNDERSTANDING FOOD LABELLING

Food labelling refers to the information printed on food packages that provides details about the product. It includes:

- Name of the food product
- List of ingredients
- Nutritional information
- Net quantity
- Manufacturing and expiry dates
- Name and address of manufacturer
- Batch number
- Storage instructions
- Vegetarian or non-vegetarian symbol
- Allergen information
- Country of origin where applicable

The primary objective of food labelling is to ensure that consumers receive truthful, accurate, and sufficient information before making a purchase.

5. LEGAL FRAMEWORK GOVERNING FOOD LABELLING IN INDIA

5.1 Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006

The Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 is the principal legislation governing food safety in India. It replaced multiple food laws with a single comprehensive legal framework.

The Act established the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), which is responsible for:

- Framing food standards.
- Regulating food businesses.
- Ensuring consumer safety.
- Preventing misleading practices.
- Promoting awareness regarding food safety.

The Act prohibits the manufacture, sale, and distribution of unsafe or misbranded food.

5.2 Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2020

The Labelling and Display Regulations, 2020 provide detailed rules regarding information that must appear on food packages.

The regulations require mandatory disclosure of:

- Ingredients in descending order of weight.
- Nutritional information.
- Added sugar.
- Saturated fat.
- Trans fat.
- Sodium content.
- Serving size.
- Veg or non-veg logo.
- Allergen declaration.
- Expiry and best-before date.

The regulations also prohibit misleading statements and deceptive representations that may influence consumer decisions.

5.3 Consumer Protection Act, 2019

The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 strengthens consumer rights by prohibiting unfair trade practices and misleading advertisements.

The Act provides consumers with the right:

- To be informed.
- To choose.
- To seek compensation.
- To receive safe goods.
- To file complaints before Consumer Commissions.

Misleading food labels may amount to unfair trade practices under the Act.

5.4 Legal Metrology Act, 2009

The Legal Metrology Act ensures that packaged commodities correctly display:

- Weight
- Quantity
- Maximum Retail Price (MRP)
- Manufacturer details

This law complements food labelling regulations by ensuring transparency regarding quantity and pricing.

6. CONSUMER'S RIGHT TO KNOW

The consumer's right to know is one of the most important consumer rights. It means consumers should receive accurate and complete information before purchasing any product.

Although the Indian Constitution does not expressly mention a "right to know" in relation to food, courts have interpreted Article 21 (Right to Life) to include the right to live with dignity and good

health. Access to safe food and truthful information forms an important part of this constitutional protection.

Further, Article 19(1)(a), which guarantees freedom of speech and expression, has been interpreted to include the right to receive information. Therefore, consumers have a legal and constitutional interest in obtaining accurate information about the food they consume.

Food labels enable consumers to:

- Protect themselves from allergies.
- Avoid harmful ingredients.
- Maintain dietary restrictions.
- Compare nutritional values.
- Prevent food-related diseases.
- Exercise informed choice.

Thus, food labelling directly supports consumer autonomy and public health.

7. ROLE OF FSSAI

7.1. Formulating Food Standards

One of the primary responsibilities of FSSAI is to establish science-based standards for food products. These standards specify the quality, composition, safety requirements, permissible additives, contaminants, and labeling norms for different categories of food. By creating uniform standards, FSSAI ensures consistency in food quality across the country and protects consumers from unsafe or substandard products.

7.2. Regulating Food Labeling

FSSAI plays a significant role in ensuring transparency through food labeling regulations. Under the Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2020, food manufacturers must provide accurate information regarding:

- Name of the food product.

- List of ingredients.
- Nutritional information.
- Allergen declarations.
- Manufacturing and expiry dates.
- Vegetarian or non-vegetarian symbols.
- Name and address of the manufacturer.
- Country of origin (where applicable).
- Instructions for storage and use.

These requirements enable consumers to make informed purchasing decisions and reduce the possibility of misleading or deceptive practices.

7.3. Licensing and Registration of Food Businesses

FSSAI grants licenses and registrations to Food Business Operators (FBOs), including manufacturers, importers, distributors, retailers, and restaurants. Every eligible food business must obtain an FSSAI license before commencing operations. Licensing ensures compliance with hygiene, sanitation, and food safety standards.

7.4. Monitoring Food Safety

The Authority conducts surveillance, inspections, and sampling of food products to monitor compliance with safety standards. Food samples are tested in accredited laboratories, and products found unsafe or misbranded may be recalled, prohibited, or subjected to legal action. This regulatory oversight helps maintain public confidence in the food supply chain.

7.5. Protecting Consumer Rights

FSSAI contributes significantly to safeguarding consumers' right to know what they are eating. By mandating truthful and comprehensive food labels, it promotes transparency and helps prevent deceptive marketing practices. Consumers can identify nutritional values, allergens, additives, and ingredients before making purchasing decisions, thereby exercising informed choice.

7.6. Consumer Awareness and Education

FSSAI actively promotes awareness regarding food safety through campaigns and educational initiatives such as:

- Eat Right India
- Safe and Nutritious Food (SNF) Initiative
- Clean Street Food Hub Programme

These programmes encourage healthy eating habits, hygienic food practices, and informed consumer behaviour.

7.7. Regulating Food Imports

FSSAI oversees the safety and quality of imported food products entering India. Imported foods must comply with Indian food safety standards and labeling requirements before being permitted for sale in the domestic market. This helps protect consumers from unsafe or non-compliant imported products.

7.8. Scientific Advice and Policy Development

FSSAI establishes scientific panels and committees comprising experts in nutrition, toxicology, microbiology, food technology, and public health. These bodies conduct risk assessments and provide recommendations for developing evidence-based food safety regulations and policies.

7.9 Importance of FSSAI in Food Labeling

FSSAI has transformed food labeling in India by making it more consumer-centric and transparent. The introduction of mandatory nutrition labels, allergen declarations, standardized vegetarian/non-vegetarian symbols, and clearer ingredient disclosure has strengthened consumers' ability to understand the food they purchase. These measures also promote accountability among food manufacturers and discourage misleading claims.

8. JUDICIAL APPROACH

The Indian judiciary has consistently emphasized that consumers have a fundamental right to receive accurate and complete information about the food they consume. Although the Constitution of India does not expressly recognize the "right to know what one is eating," the courts have interpreted the **Right to Life under Article 21** to include the right to health, safe food, and protection against deceptive trade practices. Judicial decisions have therefore played an important role in strengthening consumer protection and ensuring greater accountability among food business operators.

1. Centre for Public Interest Litigation v. Union of India (2013)

In **Centre for Public Interest Litigation v. Union of India**, the Supreme Court highlighted the constitutional obligation of the State to safeguard public health by ensuring the availability of safe and wholesome food. The Court observed that food safety is closely connected with the right to life under Article 21 and stressed that regulatory authorities must effectively implement food safety laws to protect consumers.

Although the case primarily dealt with food safety standards rather than food labeling, the judgment reinforced the principle that consumers are entitled to accurate information about the food products available in the market. The decision also underscored the responsibility of regulatory authorities to strictly enforce food safety regulations and prevent the sale of unsafe or misbranded food.

2. Consumer Protection Against Misleading Labels and Advertisements

Indian Consumer Commissions have repeatedly held manufacturers and sellers liable where misleading labels, deceptive advertisements, or false nutritional claims induce consumers to purchase food products under mistaken beliefs. Courts have consistently maintained that consumers are entitled to truthful disclosure regarding the ingredients, nutritional composition, quality, quantity, and health benefits of food products.

Where manufacturers exaggerate health benefits, conceal harmful ingredients, or make unsupported claims such as "100% natural," "pure," or "healthy," such practices may amount to **unfair trade practices** under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. Consumer Commissions have

awarded compensation in several cases where misleading representations caused financial loss or affected consumers' ability to make informed choices.

3. Recognition of the Consumer's Right to Information

The judiciary has consistently recognised that the right to information is an essential component of consumer protection. Courts have observed that consumers can exercise free choice only when they receive complete, accurate, and understandable information about the products they purchase.

In the context of food products, this principle extends to disclosures relating to:

- Ingredients and additives.
- Nutritional values.
- Expiry and best-before dates.
- Allergen information.
- Vegetarian or non-vegetarian status.
- Manufacturer's details.
- Country of origin, where applicable.

Failure to provide such information not only violates statutory labeling requirements but also undermines the consumer's right to make informed purchasing decisions.

4. Judicial Support for Strict Regulatory Enforcement

Indian courts have consistently supported strict enforcement of food safety and labeling laws administered by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India. The judiciary has recognised that effective regulation is necessary to maintain public confidence in the food industry and prevent deceptive marketing practices.

Courts have also acknowledged that food labeling serves not merely as a commercial requirement but as a public health measure. Accurate labels enable consumers to avoid allergens, manage

medical conditions such as diabetes or hypertension, follow religious or ethical dietary practices, and make healthier food choices.

9. CHALLENGES IN FOOD LABELLING LAWS

Food labels are meant to help consumers make informed decisions about the food they purchase and consume. They provide important information regarding ingredients, nutritional value, allergens, expiry dates, and health claims. Despite the existence of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 and the Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2020, the implementation of food labeling laws in India continues to face several challenges. These challenges reduce the effectiveness of labeling regulations and often prevent consumers from fully exercising their right to know what they are eating.

9.1. Misleading and False Claims

One of the most significant challenges is the widespread use of misleading labels and exaggerated marketing claims by food manufacturers. Labels often display terms such as "natural," "healthy," "organic," "low fat," "high protein," or "immune-boosting" without sufficient scientific evidence or clear definitions. Such claims create a false impression that a product is healthier than it actually is.

Many processed foods contain excessive amounts of sugar, sodium, and unhealthy fats while highlighting only positive ingredients on the packaging. This practice, known as the "health halo effect," influences consumers to believe that a product is nutritious even when it may contribute to lifestyle diseases.

Although Indian regulations prohibit misleading advertisements and false claims, enforcement remains inconsistent, allowing many products with questionable claims to continue in the market.

9.2. Complex and Difficult-to-Understand Labels

Many food labels are difficult for ordinary consumers to understand because they use technical language, scientific terminology, and unfamiliar ingredient names. Nutritional information is often

presented in complicated tables that require consumers to understand concepts such as calories, saturated fat, trans fat, sodium, and recommended dietary allowances.

Additionally, manufacturers frequently use very small font sizes that make labels difficult to read, especially for elderly consumers or individuals with visual impairments. Consumers may therefore ignore important safety information due to poor readability.

As a result, the objective of informed consumer choice is not fully achieved.

9.3. Inadequate Front-of-Pack Nutrition Labelling

India has been debating the introduction of mandatory Front-of-Pack Nutrition Labelling (FOPNL) to provide consumers with simplified nutritional information on the front of food packages. However, there is still no universally adopted warning-label system similar to those implemented in countries like Chile or Mexico.

Without clear front-of-pack warning labels, consumers may not immediately recognize products that contain excessive amounts of sugar, salt, or saturated fat. Current nutrition panels are generally placed on the back of the package and often go unnoticed.

The absence of a simple warning-label system limits consumers' ability to make quick and informed purchasing decisions.

9.4. Weak Enforcement and Regulatory Compliance

While the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India has established comprehensive labeling regulations, enforcement remains a significant challenge.

Several factors contribute to weak implementation:

- Limited number of food safety officers.
- Insufficient inspections.
- Inadequate laboratory infrastructure.
- Delays in legal proceedings.

- Variations in enforcement across different states.

Small manufacturers and local food businesses may continue selling products with incomplete or inaccurate labels without facing immediate regulatory action. Consequently, regulatory compliance remains uneven throughout the country.

9.5. Growth of Online Food Delivery and E-Commerce

The rapid expansion of online grocery platforms and food delivery applications has created new challenges for food labeling laws. Consumers purchasing food through e-commerce websites often receive limited information before making a purchase.

Important details such as:

- Complete ingredient lists,
- Nutritional information,
- Allergen warnings,
- Manufacturing dates,
- Country of origin,

may not always be prominently displayed on online platforms.

This reduces transparency and may expose consumers, particularly those with allergies or dietary restrictions, to health risks.

9.6. Inadequate Allergen Labelling

Food allergies are becoming increasingly common, yet allergen labeling remains an area requiring stronger implementation.

Although Indian regulations require manufacturers to declare common allergens such as milk, peanuts, soy, wheat, tree nuts, eggs, and seafood, compliance is not always consistent.

Some manufacturers fail to mention possible cross-contamination during production, while others use unclear terminology that consumers may not easily recognize.

Incomplete allergen information can result in serious health consequences for individuals with food allergies.

9.7. Misuse of Organic and Natural Labels

Consumers increasingly prefer products marketed as "organic," "chemical-free," "natural," or "farm fresh." However, these terms are sometimes used for marketing purposes rather than reflecting genuine certification or production standards. Some products display words like "natural" despite containing preservatives, artificial flavours, or synthetic additives.

The misuse of such labels creates confusion among consumers and undermines trust in genuinely certified organic products.

9.8. Challenges in Country-of-Origin Labelling

With increasing globalization, consumers are interested in knowing where food products originate. Country-of-origin labeling has become particularly important for imported food items. However, processed foods often contain ingredients sourced from multiple countries, making accurate disclosure difficult. Complex global supply chains sometimes create uncertainty regarding the actual origin of ingredients. Incomplete origin information reduces transparency and affects consumers who wish to support domestic products or avoid products from particular regions.

9.9. Frequent Changes in Food Products

Manufacturers regularly modify product formulations by changing ingredients, nutritional content, or additives. Packaging updates may not always occur immediately, leading to discrepancies between the actual product and the information displayed on the label. Consumers may unknowingly purchase products based on outdated nutritional or ingredient information. Continuous monitoring of such changes remains a challenge for regulatory authorities.

9.10. Low Consumer Awareness

Even when food labels comply with legal requirements, many consumers do not possess sufficient knowledge to interpret them correctly. Studies indicate that a large section of the Indian population rarely reads nutritional information before purchasing packaged foods. Consumers often focus primarily on price, brand, taste, or promotional offers rather than ingredient lists or nutrition

panels. Limited awareness regarding calorie intake, sugar content, sodium levels, preservatives, and food additives reduces the practical effectiveness of labeling regulations. Public education and awareness campaigns are therefore essential to maximize the benefits of food labeling.

9.11. Inconsistent Penalties and Compliance

Although the law provides penalties for misbranding and misleading labels, enforcement actions are sometimes delayed or penalties are not sufficiently stringent to deter repeated violations. Large corporations may treat financial penalties as a routine cost of business rather than as an incentive to improve compliance. Strengthening monitoring mechanisms and imposing proportionate penalties would improve regulatory effectiveness.

9.12. Balancing Consumer Information and Business Interests

Food manufacturers often argue that excessive labeling requirements increase production costs, reduce packaging space, and impose additional regulatory burdens. At the same time, consumers demand greater transparency regarding ingredients, nutritional value, sustainability, genetic modification, and environmental impact. Policymakers therefore face the challenge of balancing consumer rights with practical concerns of the food industry while ensuring that labels remain clear, accurate, and useful.

10. COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Food labeling has become a key aspect of consumer protection across the world. Many countries have adopted stringent labeling regulations to ensure transparency, promote public health, and enable consumers to make informed food choices. While India has made significant progress through the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 and the Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2020, several developed jurisdictions have introduced more comprehensive labeling frameworks. A comparative analysis highlights India's strengths and identifies areas requiring further reform.

1. India

In India, food labeling is regulated by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).

The regulations require packaged food products to display essential information such as:

- Name of the product
- List of ingredients
- Nutritional information
- Net quantity
- Manufacturing and expiry dates
- Batch number
- Vegetarian or non-vegetarian symbol
- Name and address of the manufacturer
- Allergen declaration
- Country of origin (where applicable)

These provisions seek to protect consumers from misleading information and enable informed purchasing decisions. However, India still faces challenges in enforcement, consumer awareness, and the absence of mandatory front-of-pack warning labels for foods high in sugar, salt, and saturated fat.

2. European Union

The European Union has one of the world's most comprehensive food labeling systems. Food information is primarily governed by Regulation (EU) No. 1169/2011, which aims to provide consumers with clear, accurate, and easily understandable information.

Key features include:

- Mandatory nutrition declaration.

- Clear ingredient list arranged in descending order by weight.
- Mandatory highlighting of fourteen major allergens.
- Minimum font size requirements for better readability.
- Country-of-origin labeling for specified foods.
- Strict regulation of nutrition and health claims.
- Digital access to additional product information in some Member States.

Several European countries have also adopted **Nutri-Score**, a front-of-pack nutrition label that grades foods from **A (healthiest)** to **E (least healthy)**. This system allows consumers to compare products quickly and encourages manufacturers to improve nutritional quality.

The EU places strong emphasis on consumer understanding rather than merely providing technical information.

3. United States

In the United States, food labeling is regulated primarily by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), while certain meat and poultry products are regulated by the United States Department of Agriculture.

The United States requires packaged food products to display:

- Nutrition Facts Panel.
- Ingredient list.
- Serving size.
- Calories per serving.
- Added sugars.
- Total fat, saturated fat, and trans fat.
- Sodium and dietary fibre.

- Mandatory allergen declarations under the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act.

The FDA has periodically revised nutrition labels to reflect updated scientific knowledge, including making calorie counts more prominent and introducing mandatory disclosure of added sugars. Food manufacturers making health claims must possess scientific evidence supporting such claims.

The U.S. regulatory system strongly emphasizes evidence-based labeling and enforcement against deceptive marketing practices.

4. Australia and New Zealand

Food labeling in Australia and New Zealand is regulated through the Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ).

Their labeling framework includes:

- Mandatory Nutrition Information Panel.
- Ingredient declarations.
- Country-of-origin labeling.
- Allergen warnings.
- Date marking.
- Mandatory declaration of genetically modified ingredients.
- Clear food safety instructions.

Australia has also introduced the **Health Star Rating (HSR)** system, which rates packaged foods from **0.5 to 5 stars** based on their nutritional quality. Although voluntary, the system has been widely adopted and helps consumers identify healthier food options at a glance. The HSR system has encouraged food manufacturers to reduce sugar, sodium, and saturated fat in their products.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen food labeling laws in India and effectively safeguard consumers' right to know what they are eating, a combination of legal reforms, stricter enforcement, technological innovation, and public awareness is essential. The following measures can improve the transparency and effectiveness of the existing food labeling framework.

11.1. Introduce Mandatory Front-of-Pack Warning Labels

India should adopt a mandatory **Front-of-Pack Nutrition Labelling (FOPNL)** system for packaged foods high in sugar, salt, and saturated fats. Simple warning symbols or colour-coded labels can help consumers quickly identify unhealthy products without having to interpret complex nutritional tables. Such a system has proven effective in several countries by encouraging healthier food choices and motivating manufacturers to improve product formulations.

11.2. Strengthen Enforcement by FSSAI

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India should enhance monitoring and enforcement through regular inspections, random product testing, and prompt action against non-compliant food business operators. Increasing the number of food safety officers and improving laboratory infrastructure would ensure better implementation of labeling regulations across the country.

11.3. Impose Stricter Penalties for Misleading Labels

Manufacturers making false or misleading claims should face stricter penalties, including higher monetary fines, suspension of licenses, mandatory product recalls, and public disclosure of violations. Strong enforcement will discourage deceptive marketing practices and promote greater accountability within the food industry.

11.4. Simplify Food Labels

Food labels should be designed in a consumer-friendly manner using plain language instead of technical or scientific terms wherever possible. Larger font sizes, standardized formats, and easily

recognizable symbols should be adopted to improve readability, particularly for elderly consumers and individuals with limited literacy.

11.5. Improve Digital Disclosure of Food Information

With the rapid growth of online grocery shopping and food delivery platforms, detailed labeling information should be made available before purchase. E-commerce platforms should display ingredient lists, nutritional values, allergen information, expiry dates, country of origin, and storage instructions in a clear and accessible manner, ensuring that online consumers receive the same level of information as those purchasing products in physical stores.

11.6. Promote Consumer Awareness

Many consumers are unaware of how to interpret food labels. Government agencies, educational institutions, consumer organizations, and healthcare professionals should conduct awareness campaigns to educate the public about nutritional information, ingredient lists, allergen declarations, and health claims. Awareness programmes in schools and colleges can also promote informed eating habits from an early age.

11.7. Strengthen Regulation of Health and Nutrition Claims

Terms such as "natural," "healthy," "organic," "low fat," and "immune-boosting" should only be permitted where supported by scientific evidence and approved by regulatory authorities. Clear legal definitions for such expressions would reduce consumer confusion and prevent misleading advertising.

11.8. Encourage the Use of Technology

The use of QR codes on food packaging should be promoted to provide consumers with additional information that cannot be accommodated on physical labels. Scanning the code could provide details regarding nutritional composition, sourcing of ingredients, allergen information, manufacturing practices, certification, and sustainability initiatives, thereby enhancing transparency.

11.9. Strengthen Allergen Labelling

Manufacturers should provide clear and standardized allergen warnings using bold fonts or distinct symbols. Labels should also disclose the possibility of cross-contamination during manufacturing to protect consumers suffering from food allergies and intolerances.

11.10. Ensure Uniform Implementation Across States

Food labeling laws should be implemented uniformly throughout India. Regular training programmes for food safety officers, standardized inspection procedures, and better coordination between central and state authorities would reduce inconsistencies in enforcement and improve regulatory efficiency.

11.11. Encourage Industry Compliance

Food business operators should be encouraged to adopt ethical labeling practices beyond minimum legal requirements. Voluntary disclosure of sustainability information, sourcing practices, environmental impact, and nutritional improvements can enhance consumer trust and strengthen brand credibility.

11.12. Periodic Review of Food Labeling Regulations

Food labeling laws should be reviewed periodically to keep pace with scientific developments, changing consumer preferences, technological advancements, and emerging public health concerns. Continuous updating of regulations will ensure that India's legal framework remains responsive to modern challenges in the food sector.

An effective food labeling system is fundamental to protecting consumers' right to make informed choices and promoting public health. While India has established a comprehensive legal framework through the food safety and standards act, 2006 and the food safety and standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2020, greater emphasis must now be placed on enforcement, consumer education, technological innovation, and transparent disclosure. Implementing these suggestive measures would not only strengthen consumer confidence but also contribute to a safer, healthier, and more accountable food ecosystem in India.

12. CONCLUSION

Food labelling is an essential tool for protecting consumer rights and promoting public health. The right to know what one is eating is closely linked to informed decision-making, health, and human dignity. India has developed a comprehensive legal framework through the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, the Labelling and Display Regulations, 2020, the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, and related legislation. These laws establish mandatory disclosure requirements and prohibit misleading practices.

However, effective implementation remains a challenge. Weak enforcement, misleading marketing practices, low consumer awareness, and evolving food markets continue to reduce the effectiveness of the existing framework. While FSSAI has introduced several important reforms, greater emphasis must be placed on transparency, accountability, consumer education, and technological innovation.

As consumers become more health-conscious, food labels will continue to play a vital role in ensuring safe and informed choices. A strong and effectively enforced food labelling system not only protects individual consumers but also promotes public health, strengthens market fairness, and builds trust between consumers and food businesses.

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