

Health Star Rating

April 22, 2022

In news– Recently, over 40 global experts in a letter to the Union Health Minister have questioned the ‘star rating’ of food products likely to be recommended by Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) for packaged food.

FSSAI’s Health Star Rating (HSR) –

- The HSR format ranks a packaged food item based on salt, sugar, and fat content and the rating will be printed on the front of the package.
- In its meeting in **February 2022, the FSSAI decided to adopt the “health-star rating system”, which gives a product 1/2 a star to 5 stars**, in its draft regulations for front of package labelling (FOPL).
- The decision was **based on the recommendations of a study by the IIM Ahmedabad** the regulator had commissioned in September 2021.
- In the same meeting, the regulator decided that **FOPL implementation could be made voluntary for a period of four years.**
- The rating will be the first such in India, packaged food has had back-of-package (BOP) nutrient information in detail but no FoPL, which, as global experience suggests, has the ability to push healthy consumption behaviour with respect to packaged food.
- The **food regulator has exempted milk and dairy products from the proposed FoPL**, as they were in the earlier FSSAI draft notified in 2019.

What did experts say?

- These experts have said the **HSR system adopted in countries like Australia and New Zealand has not resulted in any meaningful behaviour change even** after eight years of implementation.

- Further, **the nutrition researchers and academics argue that the HSR system “misrepresents nutrition science”.**
- As per the **nutrition researchers, the algorithm of adding and subtracting nutrients does not fit with our understanding of biology.** For example, the presence of fruit in a fruit drink juice does not offset the impacts of added sugar in the body.
- There is no empirical evidence to suggest that adding these ingredients will lessen the negative impact of these foods on the body.
- They also say that the **HSR system can lead to a “health halo”,** which can **confuse consumers as stars can be interpreted as an endorsement of a product.**
- **They have called front-of-package warning labels such as black octagonal warnings** that indicate when food and drink products are high in sodium, sugar, salt and fats as the most effective models to date in informing consumers of the nutritional quality of packaged products.
- This endorsement is **based on evidence from countries such as Canada, Israel, Chile, Perú, Brazil, Argentina and Mexico that have made FOP warning labels mandatory.**

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)-

- It is an autonomous body established under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India.
- The FSSAI has been established under the Food Safety and Standards (FSS) Act, 2006.
- It is responsible for protecting and promoting public health through the regulation and supervision of food safety in India.
- The FSSAI has its headquarters at New Delhi and has 6 regional offices located in Delhi, Guwahati, Mumbai, Kolkata, Cochin, and Chennai.
- The FSSAI consists of a chairperson & 22 members.
- The non-executive Chairperson appointed by the Central

Government who is either holding or has held the position of not below the rank of Secretary to the Government of India.