

FDA Maharashtra considering dishes' calorie content on restaurant menus

Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Maharashtra, in another first, plans to make it mandatory for restaurants all over the state to mention the calorie content of each dish on their menus. It stated that this was being done so that the consumers could make informed choices, and a proposal in this regard had already been made to the government and a meeting with the stakeholders was also planned.

They are trying to convene the meeting before June 7, as FDA is planning to celebrate, for the first time, India Food Safety Day on June 7 in the presence of representatives from FSSAI and food safety officers (FSOs). The reason behind the move, according to the official, was that the public has now become very conscious of its calorie intake. But, when they are at a restaurant or even eating street food, they don't know the calorie content of each item on the menu. Therefore, FDA Maharashtra has adopted a top-down approach, starting with restaurants in the organised sector and later covering the street eateries.

Kamlesh Barot, past president, Hotel and Restaurant Association of Western India (HRAWI), informed, " We have not come across any such directive." He added, "We hoteliers are well aware of the calorie content of our dishes. However, it may not be an exact amount. We are of the view that, unlike the multinational companies (MNCs), where food is made robotically with standard operating procedures (SOPs), precise weights and processes, mostly in a commissary, table d'hote (TDH) and a la carte (ALC) (fixed menus and individual order) food items are never made using weighing scales." "The Internet-savvy youth today are more conscious of what they want to consume. They are well aware of the calorie count of their preferred dish, making the exercise of writing the calories on the menu an orthodox one. This kind of an initiative has never succeeded in any other country either," Barot said. He added, "The organised players, who constitute 30 per cent of this industry will become the laughing stock, while the unorganised players will continue conducting business as usual".When the organised sector is made the soft target with such arbitrary mandates, it just sets a wrong precedent for the entire industry. While considering such decisions, to take the viewpoint of stakeholders represented by a body like Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) or HRAWI, which represents 85 per cent of the industry, would be the ideal thing to do.