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# **Making FSSAI Food Adulterants' Detection Guidelines Accessible to Masses: A Case Study on Training Various Strata of Food Vendors and Handlers as an Extension of Responsible Research and Innovation**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Responsibility in science and technology has assumed a lot of significance among the policymakers and researchers. It has been defined as a dynamic and an iterative process in which all the stakeholders in research become mutually responsive and share responsibility for both the process and its outcomes. Food quality, safety and security in India has emerged as one such domain where various stages in the farm-to-fork value chain have been the subjects for research and development. One of the commendable outcomes has been the guidelines on food adulterants' detection given by the regulator in India, i.e., Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). The paper presents the training on FSSAI guidelines on food adulterants' detection, imparted to various food vendors and handlers, as an extension of responsible research and innovation, using the Case Study method. The paper concludes and recommends that in order to successfully implement any policy, regulation and guideline, especially the aforementioned, it is necessary that micro and small-scale food vendors and handlers are seen as partners in the formulation and implementation of these guidelines.*

**Key words:** *Responsible research, FSSAI Guidelines, Food Adulterants, Case Study.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Responsibility in science and technology has assumed a lot of significance among the policymakers and researchers. This started in Europe with the motive of making technology and science more socially relevant and ethical. It is being accepted gradually in India as well. Responsible Research has been defined as a dynamic and an iterative process in which all the stakeholders in research become mutually responsive and share responsibility for both the process and its outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Food quality, safety and security in India has emerged as one such domain where various stages in the farm-to-fork value chain viz. food procurement, processing, preservation, packaging, storage, transportation, distribution, policy formulation, and consumption have been the subjects for research and development. One of the commendable outcomes has been the guidelines on food adulterants' detection given by the regulator in India, i.e., Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). Though the guidelines are easily accessible through their website, but the compliance has been found to be difficult, especially by the food vendors and handlers at the micro and small scale level. The problem is exacerbated by their poor literacy levels and inability to understand various rules and procedures to be followed, leading to rejection of food samples and sealing of such outlets in some extreme cases, without them fully comprehending the reasons behind it.

The paper presents the training on FSSAI guidelines on food adulterants' detection, imparted to various food vendors and handlers, as an extension of responsible research and innovation, using the Case Study method.

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## METHODOLOGY

Case study method has been used in the paper to elaborate on the concept of responsible research. (Yin, 2012) defines the case study method of research as ‘an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon, set within its real-world context – especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’.<sup>2</sup> The present study justifies the case study research design, as the phenomenon examined is the food safety guidelines given by FSSAI<sup>3</sup> and the real-world context being the process of implementing these guidelines by those stakeholders, specifically the food handlers, who are an important target audience for these guidelines. Dissemination of FSSAI’s guidelines on food adulterants’ detection was achieved through research based pedagogical tools at various levels. First, food adulterants’ detection kits for various food groups were developed based on the FSSAI guidelines. Next, these kits along with pamphlets published in vernacular language were used to demonstrate the implementation of food adulterants’ detection guidelines in multiple hands-on training cum workshops.

## FINDINGS

During interactions with micro and small-scale food vendors and handlers, it has been found that the implementation of FSSAI guidelines on food adulterants’ detection is difficult for them. Some of the issues identified are –

- i. Language barrier as the guidelines are mostly in English, whereas the food handlers as the target audience may not be even literate.
- ii. The guidelines are available on the FSSAI website and it has been assumed that the food handlers directly from the website would access these. The food handlers may not be technology savvy to search for the website and then search for the guidelines on the website.
- iii. Administratively, the implementation has been punitive rather than consultative. A lot of mentoring and handholding is desirable at the grass-roots level.
- iv. Lack of awareness programme has been identified as a gap between FSSAI, administration, implementers, policy research institutes and the food handlers.

The aforementioned issues can be effectively resolved by a hands-on approach rather than a hands-off approach. One of the tools of this hands-on approach is the demonstration of food adulterants’ detection using kits along with pamphlets published in vernacular medium.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper highlights the issues in the implementation of FSSAI guidelines pertaining to food adulterants’ detection faced by food vendors and handlers in small restaurants or *dhabas*, canteens, street carts, food mobile vans, and sweet shops. It also presents the outcomes of the training programme conducted using research based pedagogical techniques, specifically food adulteration detection kits for the aforementioned stakeholders on the FSSAI guidelines as a case in the point of responsible research. It is imperative that in order to successfully implement any policy, regulation and guideline, especially the aforementioned, it is necessary that micro and small-scale food vendors and handlers are seen as partners in the formulation and implementation of these guidelines.

## REFERENCES

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