Nourishing India

Food & Health Policy Insights

Bi-monthly Newsletter

Volume 01 | Issue 02

August - October 2026



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MoFPI expands support for food-processing units through affordable credit and food irradiation infrastructure. FSSAI proposes changes to infant nutrition standards, pesticide residue limits in tea and quantitative thresholds for HFSS foods in schools, while revised Poshan 2.0 guidelines strengthen oversight of supplementary nutrition. State initiatives spotlight digital food subsidies, Himachal Pradesh's nutrition policy and Tamil Nadu's expanded school breakfast scheme. Globally, the US FDA enables sodium-reduction reformulation, while the EU's new packaging rules tighten requirements for food-contact materials.

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Editor's Note



Policy & Regulation

Food, Nutrition & Public Health

Science & Evidence

Global Standards & Collaboration

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the second issue of Nourishing India. India's food and health policy landscape continues to evolve, with developments across regulators, ministries, scientific institutions and international standard-setting bodies. Yet these developments are often fragmented, making it difficult to assess their broader implications.

Released every two months, Nourishing India brings together the key policy, regulatory and scientific developments of greatest significance for industry, public health and the evolving regulatory landscape shaping India's food, nutrition and health ecosystem. Beyond reporting developments, the newsletter provides context, examines their implications, and identifies emerging policy and regulatory trends. As public awareness of health, nutrition and food choices grows, access to clear and reliable information on food regulations, safety standards and emerging policy developments becomes increasingly important. We hope this edition continues to serve as a useful resource for policymakers, industry and other stakeholders. We welcome your feedback as we continue to refine future editions.

The Bigger Picture in Food Policy

Taken together, this edition's developments highlight the growing importance of connecting food-system investment with food safety, nutrition and effective implementation. From MoFPI's support for food-processing finance and preservation infrastructure to FSSAI's proposed changes in food standards, the revised Poshan 2.0 guidelines and state-level initiatives in nutrition and food processing, the focus extends beyond policy formulation to implementation, monitoring and accountability. International developments, including the US FDA's measures on sodium reduction and cadmium in baby foods and the EU's restrictions on PFAS in food-contact packaging, further illustrate the evolving relationship between product composition, food safety and regulatory compliance.

For industry, these developments reinforce the importance of anticipating regulatory changes, reviewing product and supply-chain practices and incorporating scientific evidence and regulatory readiness into business planning. For policymakers, the emphasis remains on clear standards, coordinated implementation and monitoring outcomes. While individual initiatives differ in scope and stage of implementation, their collective significance lies in how effectively policy objectives translate into practice across India's food, nutrition and health ecosystem.

Regards,

Garvita Midha

Strengthening India's Food Processing Sector: Financing, Preservation and Value Addition

KEY TAKEAWAY *— MoFPI's refinance scheme, administered through NABARD, and its food irradiation grants address two complementary financing needs in India's food-processing sector: improving access to term credit for eligible units and supporting investment in preservation infrastructure to enhance food safety, extend shelf life and promote value addition.*

India's food-processing sector connects agricultural production with manufacturing, retail and consumer markets. However, expanding processing capacity requires investment not only in machinery and production facilities but also in storage, transportation, preservation technologies and quality infrastructure. Recent initiatives by the Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) address two aspects of this challenge: access to credit for eligible food-processing units and financial support for specialised food irradiation infrastructure.

1. Improving Access to Affordable Credit

On 21 August 2026, MoFPI published guidelines for a refinance scheme administered by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) using the ₹983.02 crore (approximately USD 104.0 million) balance corpus of the Food Processing Fund. The facility is intended to encourage eligible lending institutions to extend term loans to food-processing units that have received grants under MoFPI schemes.

Under the scheme, NABARD's refinance rate is currently 4.25% per annum, while the final interest rate charged to eligible borrowers cannot exceed 10% per annum. The refinance may cover 85% of eligible loans in most regions and 100% in specified regions; loans to eligible Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) and Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) can qualify for 100% refinance irrespective of location. The facility is available during FY 2026–27 or until the allocated funds are utilised.

The scheme is targeted rather than universal: eligible units must have received a MoFPI grant, hold a qualifying term loan with at least 18 months of residual maturity, and meet the prescribed loan and asset-quality conditions. The refinance is provided to lending institutions, not directly to businesses by NABARD.

2. Supporting Food Irradiation and Preservation Infrastructure

Alongside credit support, MoFPI provides grant assistance for food irradiation units under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan SAMPADA Yojana (PMKSY) component for Integrated Cold Chain and Value Addition Infrastructure. Food irradiation uses controlled ionising radiation to treat food and agricultural produce to improve microbiological safety, control pests and extend shelf life. It can be integrated with cold storage, grading, packing and refrigerated transport to support preservation across the supply chain. Under the scheme guidelines, grant assistance is set at 35% of eligible project cost in general areas and 50% in specified difficult areas, and for eligible SC/ST beneficiaries, FPOs and Self-Help Groups (SHGs), subject to a maximum of ₹10 crore (approximately US$1.06 million) per project for eligible plant and machinery and technical civil works. Eligible applicants include companies, firms, FPOs, FPCs, SHGs, public-sector undertakings and other specified entities. Food irradiation must be a component of the project to qualify for assistance.

MoFPI has also invited proposals for multiproduct food irradiation units through its cold-chain scheme. The latest 2026 expression-of-interest deadline was extended to 30 September 2026 and has now passed. Separately, a parliamentary committee report recorded that 14 new food irradiation projects had already been approved under earlier rounds of the scheme with implementation expected over the following years.

Policy Implications

For Policymakers

Monitoring scheme uptake, timely project implementation and the operational utilisation of supported facilities will be important in assessing their reach and contribution to the sector.

For Industry and Agricultural Value Chains

The refinance facility may improve access to term credit for eligible food-processing units that have received MoFPI grants, while PMKSY grant assistance supports eligible investments in food irradiation and associated infrastructure. Together, these mechanisms can support the development of processing and preservation capacity, improve the handling of perishable produce and reduce avoidable post-harvest losses. These benefits will depend on effective supply-chain linkages and the utilisation of supported facilities.

The VeK View

Strengthening food processing requires coordinated support for capital investment, affordable credit and preservation infrastructure. The NABARD refinance scheme and MoFPI's food irradiation support address different constraints within this ecosystem. Monitoring credit uptake, project completion, utilisation of irradiation facilities and links with agricultural producers will be important in assessing their contribution to processing capacity and value addition.

A FSSAI Proposes Restrictions on Added Sugars in Infant Nutrition Products

KEY TAKEAWAY *— FSSAI's draft amendment proposes a stricter standard on the addition of sucrose and fructose in infant nutrition products intended for children up to six months of age. The proposal signals greater regulatory attention to early-life nutrition with its eventual impact dependent on the final requirements and their implementation.*

On 16 October 2026, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) published the draft Food Safety and Standards (Foods for Infant Nutrition) Amendment Regulations, 2026, proposing to prohibit the addition of sucrose and fructose in food products intended for infants up to six months of age. The draft was announced by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare on 17 October 2026.

Under the existing regulations, lactose and glucose polymers are the preferred carbohydrate sources in infant nutrition products, while sucrose and/or fructose may be added when required as a carbohydrate source, subject to prescribed limits. The proposed amendment would introduce a specific restriction on adding these sugars to products intended for infants in the first six months of life.

The proposal aligns with public health recommendations promoting exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months and reflects a regulatory focus on age-appropriate product composition. The draft has been opened for public consultation, with stakeholders invited to submit objections and suggestions within 60 days of the relevant Gazette copies being made available to the public. The restriction remains a proposal and will become enforceable only if the amendment is finalised.

Policy Implications

The proposed amendment could affect product formulation and compliance requirements for manufacturers of infant nutrition products. Its practical implications will depend on the final provisions and the implementation requirements established by FSSAI.

For Policymakers

Clarify the scope and applicability of the amended provisions for products intended for infants up to six months, in line with established nutritional standards and infants' nutritional needs.

For Industry

Review existing product formulations and ingredient specifications against the proposed restriction and monitor the final notification and implementation timelines to identify any necessary updates.

The VeK View

The proposed amendment highlights the role of food-composition standards in translating nutrition objectives into product-level regulatory requirements. For manufacturers, the consultation period provides an opportunity to assess potential formulation implications and engage with the proposed requirements. The final provisions should offer clarity on scope and implementation while maintaining a clear focus on the nutritional needs of infants.

B FSSAI Proposes Pesticide Residue Limits for Tea

***KEY TAKEAWAY** — FSSAI has proposed specific maximum residue limits for acetamiprid and imidacloprid in tea. The final requirements will depend on the outcome of stakeholder consultation and subsequent notification.*

On 16 October 2026, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) published draft amendments to the Food Safety and Standards (Contaminants, Toxins and Residues) Regulations, 2011, proposing maximum residue limits (MRLs) for two pesticides in tea. The proposed limits are 20 mg/kg for acetamiprid and 50 mg/kg for imidacloprid.

MRLs specify the maximum permitted concentration of pesticide residues in a food commodity and provide a regulatory basis for monitoring compliance. According to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the proposed limits draw on scientific assessments and international regulatory practices while taking into account the requirements of Indian agriculture. The Ministry also noted that the proposed acetamiprid limit is lower than the corresponding limits cited for Japan and the United States while the imidacloprid proposal references international Codex standards.

The draft amendment is open to stakeholder comments and suggestions within 60 days from the date the relevant Gazette copies are made available to the public. The proposed limits are not yet final and remain subject to the regulatory consultation and notification process.

Policy Implications

For Policymakers

Finalise the residue limits based on scientific evidence, relevant international standards and domestic agricultural practices, taking stakeholder inputs into account and establishing clear requirements for implementation and enforcement.

For Industry

Review pesticide-use practices against the proposed residue limits and applicable requirements and assess testing and quality-control procedures to prepare for implementation of the final standards.

The VeK View

The proposed amendment reinforces the role of commodity-specific residue standards in food safety. Clear limits can support compliance across the tea supply chain, while stakeholder consultation allows technical inputs to inform the final standards.

C Poshan 2.0: Revised Guidelines to Improve Oversight of Supplementary Nutrition at Anganwadi Centres

***KEY TAKEAWAY** — Revised supplementary nutrition guidelines under Poshan 2.0 introduce defined requirements for hot cooked meals and menu boards at Anganwadi Centres, alongside community-level oversight of meal quality and menu adherence. These measures strengthen transparency in nutrition service delivery and create clearer implementation responsibilities for states and local stakeholders.*

On 7 September 2026, the Ministry of Women and Child Development outlined key changes under the revised Supplementary Nutrition Programme (SNP) guidelines as part of the 9th Rashtriya Poshan Maah. The guidelines, implemented under Mission Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0, introduce two specific measures: defining hot cooked meals and mandating SNP Menu Boards at Anganwadi Centres. They also provide for Anganwadi Management Committees (AMCs), with guidelines issued on 25 June 2026, to strengthen community participation in service delivery.

What Changes

Menu transparency and meal quality: SNP Menu Boards are to be displayed at every Anganwadi Centre, making daily menus and beneficiary entitlements visible. AMCs and Mothers' Committees are expected to monitor meal quality and adherence to prescribed menus. States and Union Territories are also encouraged to operationalise weekly menu rotations using locally available foods such as millets, pulses and seasonal vegetables.

Community-level accountability: The guidelines call for the constitution and operationalisation of AMCs across Anganwadi Centres. During Poshan Maah 2026, each Centre was to hold at least one AMC meeting to review service delivery and strengthen community participation.

Policy Implications

For Policymakers

The revised guidelines provide a clearer framework for monitoring supplementary nutrition delivery. State administrations and local authorities will need to operationalise menu display and community oversight arrangements across Anganwadi Centres.

For Industry

The emphasis on locally sourced ingredients and menu diversity is relevant to food suppliers, producer groups and other stakeholders involved in supplementary nutrition supply chains. Implementation may also create opportunities for collaboration on locally appropriate recipes and nutrition education, subject to state procurement arrangements.

D Analogue Paneer: India Tightens Food Safety and Labelling Requirements

KEY TAKEAWAY *— State-level restrictions, food-service checks and FSSAI's proposed amendment signal a stronger push to distinguish milk-derived paneer from non-dairy analogues. The developments have implications for product labelling, restaurant procurement and enforcement across the dairy supply chain.*

In 2026, concerns around the marketing of non-dairy analogue products as paneer prompted action at both state and national levels. In April, FSSAI's Western Region issued a public notice directing food businesses to label cheese analogues accurately and prohibiting their sale as paneer. In August, Haryana imposed a one-year prohibition on the manufacture, storage, distribution and sale of analogue or non-dairy paneer. Maharashtra and Gujarat also introduced state-level restrictions on analogue dairy products.

On 24 September 2026, FSSAI proposed a draft amendment to the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restrictions on Sales) Regulations, 2011, seeking to restrict the use of the term "paneer" for products made from constituents not derived from milk. The draft would require businesses registered under the "Analogue in Dairy Context" category to discontinue using "paneer" in product names, labelling and marketing. The proposal remains subject to stakeholder consultation and final notification.

Policy Implications

For Policymakers

The developments highlight the importance of clear product definitions and consistent enforcement to prevent misleading representation and support informed consumer choices.

For Industry

Manufacturers, food-service businesses and retailers need to verify product composition, supplier declarations and applicable state restrictions. If FSSAI's draft is finalised, affected businesses may also need to revise product names, packaging and marketing materials.

E FSSAI Proposes Quantitative Thresholds for HFSS Foods in Schools

KEY TAKEAWAY *— FSSAI has proposed specific thresholds for identifying foods high in added fat, added sugar or salt under the existing school food regulations, drawing on ICMR-NIN's Dietary Guidelines for Indians, 2024.*

In August 2026, FSSAI issued draft amendments to the Food Safety and Standards (Safe Food and Balanced Diets for Children in School) Regulations, 2020, proposing the following thresholds:

- **Added fat**: More than 4.2 g/100 g in solid foods or 1.5 g/100 ml in liquid foods.
- **Added sugar**: More than 3 g/100 g in solid foods or 2 g/100 ml in liquid foods.
- **Salt**: More than 0.625 g/100 g in solid foods or 0.175 g/100 ml in liquid foods.

The existing regulations restrict the sale and promotion of foods high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) in school premises and within 50 metres of school gates. The proposed amendment would establish specific numerical criteria for identifying these foods. It remains a draft, subject to final notification.

Policy Implications

For Policymakers

Defined thresholds could support more consistent identification and monitoring of foods covered by the regulations.

For Industry

Food businesses supplying or marketing products in school settings should assess product composition against the proposed thresholds and monitor the final notification.

A Chandigarh and Dadra & Nagar Haveli Roll Out Digital Rupee-Based Food Subsidies

***KEY TAKEAWAY** — Chandigarh and Dadra & Nagar Haveli became the first Union Territories to operationalise CBDC-based food subsidy transfers for all eligible PMGKAY beneficiaries.*

On 14 August 2026, the Government of India launched Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC)-based food subsidy transfers under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) in Chandigarh and Dadra & Nagar Haveli. Under this model, subsidies are transferred to beneficiaries' Digital Rupee wallets for purchasing foodgrains from authorised merchants, with transactions recorded digitally to support traceability and purpose-specific use. The initiative builds on earlier pilots in Gujarat and Puducherry and introduces an alternative approach to food subsidy delivery.

The model's implementation will require attention to beneficiary access, ease of use, merchant readiness and grievance redressal. Assessing transaction reliability and identifying barriers faced by beneficiaries will be important in determining its effectiveness and potential for wider adoption.

Policy Implications

For Policymakers and Implementation Agencies

Monitor beneficiary access, transaction completion and grievance redressal to assess implementation and identify barriers to uptake. Ensuring reliable digital infrastructure, accessible wallet services and adequate support for beneficiaries and authorised merchants will be important when evaluating the model and considering its wider adoption.

For Industry

Authorised foodgrain merchants and digital payment service providers may need to assess their readiness to support CBDC-based transactions, including payment acceptance, transaction reconciliation and beneficiary assistance, in line with applicable operational requirements.

B Himachal Pradesh Approves State Nutrition Policy, 2026

***KEY TAKEAWAY** — Himachal Pradesh has approved a state-wide nutrition policy linking maternal and child nutrition, dietary diversity, food safety and interdepartmental coordination.*

On 22 October 2026, the Himachal Pradesh government approved the *Himachal Pradesh Nutrition Policy, 2026*, targeting malnutrition, anaemia, micronutrient deficiencies and poor dietary diversity. The policy adopts a life-cycle approach, with emphasis on the first 1,000 days of life, adolescents and vulnerable communities, particularly those in remote and tribal areas. It also promotes traditional Himachali foods, including millets, pulses, seasonal fruits and green leafy vegetables.

What the Policy Proposes

- **Coordination**: Establish State and District Nutrition Coordination Cells to align action across departments.
- **Programme integration**: Strengthen nutrition interventions under ICDS, PM POSHAN and the Public Distribution System.
- **Food safety**: Upgrade the Composite Testing Laboratory at Kandaghat and establish four additional laboratories.
- **Monitoring**: Develop a State Nutrition Portal and strengthen food and water quality surveillance.

The policy brings nutrition programmes, locally appropriate diets and food safety within a common state-level framework. Its impact will depend on implementation, interdepartmental coordination and measurable improvements in nutrition outcomes.

Policy Implications

For Policymakers and Implementation Agencies

Define departmental responsibilities, implementation timelines and measurable indicators to strengthen interdepartmental coordination and monitor nutrition outcomes particularly in remote and tribal areas.

For Industry

Align procurement and supply practices with public nutrition programme requirements, while exploring opportunities to strengthen local food value chains through the supply of diverse, locally sourced and quality-assured foods.

C Rajasthan Expands Food-Processing Infrastructure Under New Policies

***KEY TAKEAWAY** — Rajasthan's 2026 agriculture and food-processing policies aim to expand processing infrastructure, encourage private investment and strengthen value addition across agricultural supply chains.*

In August 2026, the Rajasthan government approved the *Rajasthan Agriculture and Food Processing Policy, 2026* and the *Rajasthan Food Park Development Policy, 2026*. Under the food park policy, the state plans to develop 39 food parks with land reportedly allocated at 35 locations as of September 2026. The policies cover value chains including fruits and vegetables, spices, cereals, pulses, oilseeds, dairy and honey, alongside infrastructure such as cold storage and silos.

The initiative signals a state-level push to strengthen agricultural value addition and food-processing capacity. Its impact will depend on implementation, infrastructure development and the uptake of policy incentives by businesses.

Policy Implications

For Policymakers

Align infrastructure development with regional agricultural priorities, strengthen interdepartmental coordination and establish monitoring mechanisms to support effective utilisation of food-processing facilities and linkages with farmers and markets.

For Industry

Food parks and processing infrastructure may create opportunities for investment in processing, preservation and product development, while strengthening linkages between farmers, processors, storage facilities and markets.

D Tamil Nadu Expands Breakfast Scheme to Middle-School Students

***KEY TAKEAWAY** — Tamil Nadu expanded its Chief Minister's Breakfast Scheme to students in Classes VI–VIII in government and government-aided schools in September 2026, extending the programme beyond primary-school children.*

The expansion, launched on 22 September 2026, extends the state's breakfast provision to older students. The programme aims to help children attend school without hunger and support their ability to concentrate in class.

The expansion illustrates how state governments are extending nutrition support through school-meal programmes. Its effectiveness will depend on consistent implementation, meal quality and monitoring of student coverage

Policy Implications

For Policymakers and Implementation Agencies

Ensure adequate procurement, meal preparation and distribution capacity to accommodate expanded school breakfast coverage, with clear monitoring mechanisms to track meal quality, nutritional adequacy and timely delivery across schools.

A US FDA Allows Salt Substitutes in 139 Food Standards to Support Sodium Reduction

KEY TAKEAWAY *— The US FDA's final rule expands manufacturers' flexibility to replace added sodium chloride with suitable salt substitutes across 139 standardised food categories supporting sodium-reduction efforts through product reformulation.*

On 9 October 2026, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a final rule permitting manufacturers to replace some or all of the added sodium chloride with safe and suitable salt substitutes in 139 standardised food categories. The measure aims to facilitate sodium reduction in commonly consumed foods, supporting efforts to lower population sodium intake and reduce the risk of high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease. Covered products include specified cheeses, breads, canned vegetables, tomato products, seafood and salad dressings.

Industry implications

The rule gives manufacturers greater flexibility to reformulate products while maintaining compliance with applicable food standards. It creates opportunities to explore sodium-reduction strategies without compromising product identity, safety or consumer expectations.

Relevance to India

The development is pertinent to India's ongoing Supreme Court proceedings on front-of-pack labelling (FOPL) for foods high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS). While the US rule addresses ingredient permissions to facilitate sodium reduction, India's proposed framework focuses on communicating nutritional risks to consumers. Together, these approaches illustrate two complementary regulatory pathways: encouraging healthier product composition and helping consumers make informed food choices.

B EU Introduces New Packaging Rules, Restricting PFAS in Food-Contact Materials

KEY TAKEAWAY *— The EU's Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation introduces PFAS limits for food-contact packaging, reinforcing the need for businesses supplying the European market to assess packaging safety and regulatory compliance.*

On 12 August 2026, the European Union's Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) began applying, introducing a harmonised framework for packaging across the EU. A key measure restricts food-contact packaging containing per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) above specified limits. PFAS, often called "forever chemicals" because of their persistence in the environment, have been used in certain food wrappers, takeaway containers, pizza boxes and other packaging for their grease- and water-resistant properties.

Industry implications

Food businesses and packaging manufacturers supplying the EU market need to assess packaging materials against the applicable PFAS limits and review supplier specifications and compliance documentation. The broader regulation also establishes phased requirements for packaging recyclability, waste reduction and reuse.

Public health and environmental relevance

Restricting PFAS in food-contact packaging aims to reduce potential consumer exposure to persistent chemicals while limiting their release into the environment. The regulation also signals a wider shift towards packaging systems that address both product safety and environmental impact.

Relevance to India

Indian food exporters, packaging manufacturers and businesses supplying the European market should monitor the regulation's requirements and implementation guidance. The development also highlights the growing importance of evaluating food packaging for chemical safety alongside its functional performance and sustainability.

C US FDA Advances Measures to Reduce Cadmium in Baby Foods

KEY TAKEAWAY *— The US FDA's proposed cadmium action levels and draft industry guidance highlight the role of ingredient sourcing, testing and preventive controls in reducing chemical contaminants in foods intended for infants and young children.*

On 22 October 2026, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) proposed action levels for cadmium in processed foods intended for babies and children under two years of age, as part of its Closer to Zero initiative. The agency also released draft guidance to help food manufacturers identify and control chemical contaminants through manufacturing practices and ingredient supply-chain controls. Cadmium can enter food through the environment and may pose health risks with excessive exposure, particularly during early childhood.



Industry implications

The proposed action levels encourage manufacturers to strengthen raw-material sourcing, supplier oversight, testing and process controls to minimise cadmium in products. The guidance also highlights the importance of identifying chemical hazards throughout the supply chain.



Relevance to India

The development underscores the importance of controlling contaminants in foods for vulnerable age groups. For manufacturers of infant and young-child foods, it highlights the value of preventive controls, ingredient testing and supplier verification in protecting product quality and consumer safety.

VeK is a policy advisory and research firm that works towards turning data into clear insight on policy and regulatory developments in India and worldwide.

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