



Food safety: What the consumer should know, from shipping till eating

K. Sunisha and V. Sreekutty Suresh

Department of Processing and Food Engineering, Kelappaji College of Agricultural Engineering and Technology (KAU), Tavanur, Malappuram (Kerala) India

(Email: sunishak.1@gmail.com)

The needs of modern man are evolving constantly and the recent trend seen is the increasing interest for safe and clean food options. Consumers are looking forward to products that are transparent and follow high ethical values. At the same time, they are not ready to do any compromise regarding the taste and appearance of the food commodity. This is a change maker because today's consumer is not just conscious about safe and delicious foods but also interested to learn about innovations in the food processing sector.

This article discusses about various factors the consumer needs to be aware starting from picking up a product till consuming it.

Factors at the market level: Very consumer subconsciously believes that packed foods available in the market are safe for consumption. But very often this is not the case. It is not completely possible to remove one hundred per cent micro-organisms in food or totally eliminate cross contamination. Therefore, it is the duty and need of the consumer to ensure the quality and safety of the food they consume. Food safety considerations in the market level include proper food labelling, use of appropriate amount and type of food additives, pesticide residues, good food packaging etc.

The basic elements that the consumer needs to ensure

is regarding the statement of identity, its net weight, manufacturer's address, nutritional facts, ingredients list etc. It is allowed to use various preservatives and colourants in foods in permissible amounts so as to ensure the freshness, appearance and shelf-life of food. But while considering the safety aspects, the nature of additive and its amount used need to be strictly studied, regulated and monitored as a part of scientific understanding and health concerns. The consumer needs to make sure that the additive used along with its quantity is mentioned in the label. Allergic ingredients if any use in processing food also needs to be noted so that they may not interfere with consumer's health.

Another important factor that is often ignored while thinking of food safety is its packaging. Proper food packaging ensures that the final product is safe and secure for consumption. Packets with improper seal, local printing inks used on packets that may be transferable to food, low grade plastics used for packing etc. are the possible unsafe factors of concern in food packaging.

How safe is the street food we love to eat: Though we have known that the street foods available are not exactly hygienic, the factors that pull us towards them are plenty. Being inexpensive, mouth-watering, tasty and easily available, street foods have always come under our



top preferences. Ones the aroma of steamed momos or crispy pakodas blow around, we forget or ignore the safety aspects of street foods. But do not forget the fact that most streets contain high volume of pathogenic bacterium including *E. coli*, *Salmonella* etc. The cases of street vendors following hygienic practices like use of gloves, covering prepared food, replacing used oil for frying, use of clean water for cooking and cleaning etc are often very rare. So it is within our decisions whether to take street foods or not. The case with star restaurants is not any different.

Where and whom to approach: The Food Safety and

Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has framed regulations in relation to the standards and guidelines of food articles. It has also created an information network across the country so that public, consumers, Panchayaths etc. are able to receive rapid, reliable and objective information about food safety concerns.

An online food smart consumer portal is available online to provide credible information to the consumer about safety, hygiene and nutrition. The consumers can also raise grievances through this portal and get their queries answered. Towards securing national food safety, FSSAI has brought each citizen board to share their concerns regarding food safety violations.

Conclusion:

It is now, therefore, now possible for the consumer to share their concerns, know their rights and track food business operators license/registration certificate authenticity and view related articles on food safety with the help of FSSAI portal. So there is no need to compromise our food safety concerns. Every consumer can start to do their part to ensure the safety of food. Therefore, good sanitation and careful food handling of any preparation by everyone in the food system will always help prevent food borne illness.



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