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Step-by-Step Guide for Food Businesses to Achieve a High Hygiene Rating

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The Hygiene Rating Scheme is a certification program under FSSAI's "Eat Right India" movement. It evaluates food service establishments such as restaurants, bakeries, sweet shops, and meat retailers based on their food hygiene and safety standards. The aim is to encourage businesses to maintain high hygiene levels while helping consumers make informed dining decisions. Ratings are displayed as smileys, ranging from 1 to 5, making it easy for customers to understand the level of compliance with hygiene norms.

To participate in this scheme, food businesses must meet specific requirements. They need a valid FSSAI license or registration and must follow hygiene practices as outlined in Schedule 4 of the Food Safety and Standards Regulations. It is also mandatory for these businesses to have trained Food Safety Supervisors who oversee hygiene standards and ensure food handlers are well-trained. Additionally, regular testing of food and water samples from FSSAI-approved laboratories is required to maintain compliance.

Food businesses can enroll in the scheme through the Hygiene Rating Portal. After completing a self-assessment of hygiene standards, businesses undergo inspections conducted by accredited agencies or food safety officers. Based on their compliance, they are awarded a hygiene rating. Ratings are displayed prominently at the establishment to build trust and confidence among customers.

The ratings are assigned as percentages and converted into smileys, with 5 smileys representing excellent hygiene and 1 indicating urgent improvement is needed. The ratings are valid for two years, although re-inspections may be triggered if complaints are received. If a business scores poorly, it is encouraged to address non-compliance issues and request a re-verification after making the necessary improvements.

Inspections and verifications are carried out by agencies recognized by FSSAI, such as Hygiene Rating Audit Agencies (HRAAs) or Food Safety Officers. These inspections involve a thorough review of the establishment's hygiene practices, physical premises, and documentation. However, any misrepresentation of facts or unethical practices during the audit can render the verification invalid. To maintain transparency, all findings are uploaded to the Hygiene Rating Portal.

The Hygiene Rating Audit Agencies play a crucial role in the scheme. These agencies, recognized by FSSAI and Quality Council of India (QCI), are responsible for inspecting businesses and verifying their hygiene ratings. Their auditors, known as Hygiene Rating Auditors (HRAs), must be well-trained and adhere to strict guidelines to ensure fair and unbiased assessments.

The Food Safety Department also has a significant role in implementing the scheme at the state level. It encourages businesses to participate, oversees the awarded ratings, and ensures the program is executed effectively. The department also monitors the compliance of auditors and agencies involved in the verification process.

The Hygiene Rating Certificate awarded to businesses provides essential information, including the hygiene rating, the establishment's details, and a QR code. By scanning the QR code, customers can access further details such as the inspection date, any consumer complaints, and the corrective measures taken. Certificates must be displayed prominently to ensure visibility for customers.

In conclusion, the Hygiene Rating Scheme is a valuable initiative to promote food safety and empower consumers. It not only helps businesses improve their hygiene practices but also fosters trust and accountability in the food industry. Through rigorous inspections, transparent processes, and consumer-friendly tools like hygiene certificates, this scheme contributes significantly to healthier and safer eating experiences in India.

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