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FSSAI Clarifies Testing Standards for In-Shell Nuts: Regulatory Guidance for Industry Compliance

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Background and Confusion

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) issued an office order in March 2025 to address confusion among stakeholders regarding the testing standards applicable to in-shell nuts like almonds. The confusion arose because FSSAI-notified laboratories were using various standards for testing these products, leading to inconsistent results and interpretations.

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Need for the Office Order

The inconsistent application of standards created uncertainty in the food industry, particularly for importers, exporters, and manufacturers of in-shell nuts. This lack of uniformity potentially compromised food safety regulations and made it difficult for businesses to comply with regulatory requirements. The FSSAI recognized the need to identify the correct standard testing process to ensure consistency, accuracy, and compliance with food safety standards.

Clarity Offered by FSSAI

The FSSAI clarified that sub-regulation 2.3.47 (5) of the Food Safety and Standards (Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Regulations, 2011 prescribe the standards for dry fruits and nuts, which explicitly covers unshelled (in-shell) nuts as well. The order directs all FSSAI-notified food testing laboratories to test in-shell nuts exclusively against these specified standards.

It is important to note that Section 43(1) and 43(2) of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006: empower the FSSAI to notify food testing laboratories and specify the standards they must follow. The FSSAI uses these provisions to designate qualified laboratories and establish uniform testing protocols.

Further 2.3.47 (5) of the Food Safety and Standards (Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Regulations, 2011 outlines the standards for dry fruits and nuts, including in-shell varieties.

Under the sub-regulations dry fruits and nuts are defined as products obtained through the drying process of sound, clean fruits and nuts that have reached proper maturity. These products may be presented with or without stalks, in both shelled and unshelled forms, pitted or unpitted, or even pressed into blocks.

The regulations specify stringent quality standards to ensure consumer safety and product integrity:

Products must be completely free from mould, insects (both living and dead), insect fragments, and rodent contamination

They should exhibit uniform colour and possess the natural pleasant taste and flavour characteristic of the specific fruit or nut

Off-Flavors, mustiness, rancidity, and any evidence of fermentation are strictly prohibited

No artificial collaring agents are permitted

Specific quantitative requirements include:

1. Extraneous vegetable matter (such as stalks, shell pieces, pits, fibre, and peel) must not exceed 1.0 percent
2. Damaged or discoloured units (affected by sunburn, scars, mechanical injury, discoloration, or insect damage) must not exceed 2.0 percent
3. Acidity of extracted fat, when expressed as oleic acid, must not exceed 1.25 percent

These standards ensure that dry fruits and nuts sold in the market maintain high quality, safety, and consistency for consumers.

Conclusion

The FSSAI's March 2025 office order represents a significant step forward in clarifying testing protocols for in-shell nuts, addressing previously identified inconsistencies that threatened both industry operations and consumer protection. By explicitly directing all notified laboratories to adhere to sub-regulation 2.3.47 (5) of the Food Safety and Standards (Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Regulations, 2011, the authority has established a uniform benchmark that eliminates ambiguity and ensures all stakeholders operate under the same expectations.

This standardization not only strengthens compliance but also enhances consumer confidence in the quality and safety of nut products available in the Indian market. For the food industry, particularly businesses involved in the import, export, and manufacturing of in-shell nuts, this clarification provides essential guidance that facilitates smoother operations and reduces regulatory uncertainty. The FSSAI's proactive approach demonstrates its commitment to maintaining high food safety standards while supporting the growth of India's food sector through clear, consistent regulatory framework.

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