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Spice Crackdown: FSSAI’s October 2025 Manufacturing Sweep Explained

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India’s love affair with spices is legendary, but the powders and pods that colour our curries have lately been under a cloud. Between November 2024 and February 2025, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India quietly pulled more than ten thousand samples of whole and ground spices from every corner of the country. The results were sobering: excess lead in chilli powder, illegal colours in turmeric, inflated moisture in coriander, misleading labels on pepper and cardamom. Instead of merely naming and shaming, the regulator has decided to move upstream. On 17 September 2025 it issued a terse, four-page circular that sets aside the whole of October for a concentrated enforcement drive aimed exclusively at the factories where these adulterated products originate.

The legal authority for the blitz comes from the Food Safety and Standards Act of 2006 and the cluster of regulations made under it in 2011. These rules set numerical ceilings for contaminants, prescribe microbial limits, insist on truthful labelling and authorise central and state food safety officers to enter premises, draw sealed samples and prosecute violators. Section 16(5) of the Act empowers FSSAI to order thematic, time-bound campaigns when surveillance data reveals sector-wide risk. The September circular is exactly such an order; it is addressed to every state commissioner of food safety and each of FSSAI’s own regional directors, telling them to suspend routine sampling agendas for thirty-one days and focus only on manufacturing units that produce thirteen specified spices.

Beginning 1 October, teams will arrive at spice-grinding mills, chilli-cleaning plants, turmeric polishing units, cardamom-sorting sheds and pepper-cracking facilities. Officers will lift samples under the formal procedure laid down in the Sampling and Analysis Regulations. The samples will be sent to a National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL) facility that possesses full scope for pesticide residues, aflatoxins, heavy metals, extraneous colour, moisture, total ash, acid-insoluble ash, microbial load and label verification. Results are expected within a fortnight, and each datum must be uploaded immediately onto FoSCoS, the national food-compliance portal, so that headquarters can watch the map of violations in real time.

The circular is unusually strict about geography and timing. Retail shops, cold stores, transporters and even railway wagons are deliberately kept outside the net; only premises that actually transform raw spice into branded or unbranded product will be inspected. This factory-only approach recognises that most adulteration happens during grinding, blending and re-packing, stages where cheap fillers, illegal dyes and undeclared starch slip in. By zeroing in on the source, FSSAI hopes to prevent suspect consignments from ever reaching the market.

Manufacturers have barely a fortnight to prepare. The regulator expects every licence-holder to pull out its latest batch records, calibrate on-site labs, check that printed labels carry the new FSSAI logo with the 14-digit licence number, and keep retained samples ready for cross-checking. Any unit that refuses to cooperate or is found shuttered during repeated visits will be marked non-compliant, inviting suspension or cancellation of its licence.

State food safety departments, for their part, must collate inspection diaries, photographs, seizure memos and laboratory reports into a single consolidated return in the format appended to the circular. The deadline is non-negotiable: 20 November 2025. Annexure A captures numbers (samples drawn, compliant, non-compliant, unsafe, misbranded) while Annexure B demands narrative detail on exactly which parameter failed and why. FSSAI has warned that late or incomplete submissions will be viewed as dereliction of statutory duty, attract internal audit and could figure in the annual appraisal of senior officers.

For consumers the October drive offers a quiet promise: the next packet of garam masala or turmeric that lands on the kitchen shelf should carry a lower risk of hidden poison. For the industry it is a final wake-up call. Compliance, once dismissed as paperwork, is now inseparable from market access. If the factories pass the October test, Bengaluru’s breakfast sambar, Delhi’s butter chicken and Mumbai’s pav bhaji will taste exactly as they should, vibrant, aromatic and, above all, safe.

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