Nutrition Labelling on Food Products – Supreme Court's Directions to FSSAI

Prelims: *Current events of National and International Importance | Polity / Health*

Why is in news?

*On 26 November 2026, the Supreme Court in **3S and Our Health Society vs Union of India** directed the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to finalise a single-phase front-of-pack nutrition labelling (FoPNL) regime, reiterating a four-month timeline for the draft regulations.*

Key directions of the Supreme Court

- Single-phase implementation: Warning labels should apply to packaged products exceeding the prescribed threshold for any one nutrient of concern, rather than being introduced in multiple phases.
- Separate warnings: A distinct red, hexagon-shaped warning label is to be used for each nutrient of concern – ***HIGH FAT, HIGH SUGAR and HIGH SALT*** – with corresponding pictograms.
- Prominent display: Each warning hexagon should occupy at least 4–5% of the principal display panel, unless reasons are recorded for a departure. FSSAI must also prescribe a legible font size.
- Revised nutrient thresholds: FSSAI must revisit its proposed thresholds using evidence-based values so that limits are neither so low that almost every product is labelled nor so high that unhealthy products escape scrutiny.
- Total sugars and saturated fat: These, along with salt, are to be treated as nutrients of concern; the Court distinguished total sugars/saturated fat from added sugar/added fat.
- Four-month regulatory timeline: FSSAI is to publish draft amendment regulations, invite stakeholder comments for 60 days through domestic and WTO consultations, examine the comments and complete the statutory process.
- Transition period: Food Business Operators (FBOs) are to receive a 365-day transition period after the updated standards are rolled out. Further extensions should not ordinarily be granted; compliance is to be monitored.

About Front-of-Pack Nutrition Labelling (FoPNL)

- FoPNL places ***simplified nutritional information*** or warning symbols on the front of packaged food, enabling consumers to identify products high in nutrients associated with health risks.
- It complements the detailed nutrition information generally provided on the back or side of food packages.
- Interpretive or warning labels can help consumers compare products quickly, including where nutrition literacy is limited.

Institutional and legal framework

- FSSAI is a statutory authority established under the ***Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006***; it functions under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- The Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 provides for science-based standards and regulation of the manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import of food.
- The case is 3S and Our Health Society vs Union of India, 2026 INSC 1275, decided on 26 November 2026.

Public health significance

- Right to health and informed choice: Clear labels help consumers understand the nutritional composition of packaged foods.
- Child health: The Court linked nutritional literacy with school education and called for practical learning activities, including interactive workshops and co-curricular initiatives.
- Accountability: The Court directed FSSAI to report progress; the matter is to be listed after ten weeks for an update.
- Policy balance: Evidence-based thresholds are necessary to avoid both warning-label fatigue and under-warning of products with high levels of nutrients of concern.

Prelims watch-outs

- FoPNL means ***Front-of-Pack Nutrition Labelling***; it is distinct from the full nutrition information panel.
- FSSAI is a statutory body under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.
- Salt, total sugars and saturated fat are the nutrients highlighted in the Court's directions.



Reference

[The Hindu | Supreme Court's food labelling directions to FSSAI]



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