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Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution highlights key Achievements & Initiatives of last four years

Farmers & Consumers' interest high on Government's agenda: Shri Ram Vilas Paswan

Shri Ram Vilas Paswan, Union Minister for Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution held a Press Conference to brief about the initiatives and reforms done by the Ministry in last four years in New Delhi today. Shri Paswan said that the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution achieved significant mile stones since May, 2014. A number of initiatives were taken to make foodgrain management more efficient and to ensure food security in the country. Shri Paswan said that interests of farmers and consumers are high on the agenda of the Government.

Department of Food & Public Distribution

I. National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA)

Implementation of NFSA: NFSA has been implemented in all States/UTs benefitting around 80.72 crore population. Government has decided to keep the Central Issue Price under NFSA Scheme unchanged at Rs. 1/2/3 per kg of coarse grain/wheat/rice. As a result food subsidy is now Rs. 1.43 lakh crore which is 26% higher to Rs. 1.13 lakh crore in 2014-15.

Deletion of ration cards: As an outcome of digitization of Ration Cards/beneficiary records, de-duplication due to Aadhaar seeding, transfer/migration/deaths, change in economic status of beneficiaries and during the run-up to and implementation of NFSA a total of 2.75 crore ration cards have been deleted/cancelled. Based on this the Government has been able to achieve ***Rightful Targeting of Food Subsidies of about Rs 17,000 Crore per annum.***

Releasing of Central Assistance: In 2016-17, Rs. 2500 crore and in 2017-18, Rs. 4500 crore were released to State Governments as Central assistance to meet the expenditure incurred on intra-State movement of foodgrains and fair price shop dealers' margins.

Direct Benefit Transfer (Cash): "Cash Transfer of Food Subsidy Rules, 2015" were notified on August 21, 2015 under which food subsidy is directly credited to the account of the beneficiaries. At present Chandigarh, Puducherry and Dadra & Nagar Haveli are implementing this scheme. The Department of Food & PD is making systematic progress towards cash transfers of food subsidy. Recently, the Department of Food & PD and World Food Program jointly launched a Handbook to guide the States in implementation of cash transfers of food subsidy.

II. Major Reforms in Public Distribution System (PDS):

Aadhaar Seeding in PDS: To weed out duplicate/in-eligible/bogus ration cards and to enable rightful targeting **83.41% i.e. about 19.41 crore ration cards (as on 29th May, 2018)** have been Aadhaar seeded. Under Section-7 of the Aadhaar Act 2016, the Department has notified the use of Aadhaar to receive subsidized foodgrains or Cash transfer on 08th February, 2017.

Automation of Fair Price Shops: On the basis of pilots and learnings from the States/UTs, in November, 2014 Department of Food & Public Distribution prescribed the guidelines and specifications for use of PoS at FPS. At

present 3,16,600 FPSs (as on 29th May, 2018) out of 5,27,930 have PoS.

Digital/Cashless/Less-cash Payments in PDS: To promote the use of less-cash/digital payment mechanisms, the Department has issued detailed guidelines for use of AePS, UPI, USSD, Debit/Rupay Cards and e-Wallets on 7th December 2016. **At present in 10 States/UTs a total of 51,479 FPSs are enabled for digital payments.**

Apart from the above, 100% digitization of Ration Card data has been done, all States have transparency portal, 30 States have online allocation of foodgrains and 21 States/UTs have computerised supply chain management system.

New central sector scheme ‘Integrated Management of PDS’ (IM-PDS): The scheme has been approved with an outlay of Rs. 127.3 crore to be implemented during FY 2018-19 and FY 2019-20 for establishing Public Distribution System Network (PDSN) to establish central data repository and central monitoring system of PDS operations and to also enable implementation of national level portability.

III. Reforms in Procurement of Foodgrains

During Rabi Marketing Season (RMS) 2018-19, a quantity of 347 Lakh MT of wheat was procured which is highest in last five years.

During Kharif Marketing Season (KMS) 2016-17, a record quantity of 381.06 Lakh MT of paddy (in terms of rice) was procured.

IV. Improving Storage of Foodgrains

Construction of Godowns: A total storage capacity of 22.23 lakh MT has been added during last four years under the PEG Scheme.

Silos - Use of modern technology in storage: A road map for creation of 100 Lakh MT storage capacity in the form of Steel Silos by FCI and other agencies including State Governments on PPP mode for wheat and rice has been approved. Construction has been planned in a phased manner. 6.25 Lakh MT Steel Silos have been completed and contracts for 23.5 Lakh MT capacity have been awarded.

Supply of Foodgrains to other country: Supply of 1.10 Lakh MT of wheat has been given to Afghanistan as donation/humanitarian assistance from FCI stocks.

Online Procurement Management System (OPMS): FCI has developed software for OPMS which is being used for procurement in the KMS 2016-17. So far, 17 out of 19 major procuring States have fully implemented OPMS.

Depot Online system: To bring all operations of FCI Godowns online and to check leakages and automate operations at depot level, a “Depot Online” system was launched in 31 Depots on pilot basis across 27 States in March, 2016. Now, the **Depot Online System is being successfully running in 530 depots of FCI and 156 depots of CWC.**

V. Transforming Warehouse Development & Regulatory Authority (WDRA)

Simplified Registration Rules, 2017: To simplify the process of registration of warehouses and for their better and effective regulation and supervision, new rules namely, the Warehousing (Development and Regulation) Registration of Warehouses Rules, 2017 have been notified.

Registration of Repositories: To provide safety, credibility & improve the fiduciary trust of banks in NWR system, WDRA has started online warehouse registration process and issuance of electronic NWRs through repositories. WDRA has engaged two repositories, namely National Electronic Repository Ltd. (NERL, sponsored by NCDEX) and CDSL Commodity Repository Limited (CCRL, sponsored by CDSL) for creation and management of e-NWRs. Both the repositories have started operations for issuing e-NWRs w.e.f. 26.09.2017.

VI. Foodgrain allocation to ensure adequate standards of nutrition in SC/ST/OBC Hostels

Government of India revamped and notified a new scheme in September 2017, under which foodgrain at subsidized prices is being allocated for welfare and development of weaker sections of society to ensure adequate standards of nutrition in Welfare Institutions and SC/ST/OBC Hostels. As per the schematic guidelines, the hostels with at least 2/3rd of the resident students belonging to SC/ST/OBC community are eligible to get subsidized foodgrain for all the resident students, including those who belong to other categories. The Central Issue Price of foodgrain under the scheme is fixed at BPL rates. The scale of issue of wheat and rice (ratio to be decided on the basis of food habits in different areas) is as per the nutrition requirement of the residents, subject to a maximum of 15 kg per resident per month.

Pension Scheme and Post Retirement Medical Scheme in Food Corporation of India (FCI)

There was a long pending demand from employees of FCI for introduction of Pension Scheme and Post Retirement Medical Scheme. Both the schemes were approved by Government of India in August 2016 and will cover serving and retired employees of FCI. **Pension Scheme has been implemented with effect from 01.12.2008 and Post Retirement Medical Scheme is effective from 01.04.2016.**

Department Consumer Affairs

I. Better Consumer Protection

To modernize the 31 year old Consumer Protection Act, 1986, **the Consumer Protection Bill, 2018 was introduced in Parliament on 05.01.2018.** The Bill provides for setting up of an executive agency to be called Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA), which will look into unfair trade practices, misleading advertisements etc., provision for 'mediation' as an alternate disputes resolution mechanism to facilitate quick disposal of consumer disputes, provision for product liability action arising out of injury to a consumer from a defective product and several provisions relating to simplification of the adjudication process in the consumer Commissions.

For the first time, a two day International Conference on Consumer Protection was organized by India for East, South and South East Asian countries on 26-27, October,2017 with the theme 'Empowering Consumer in New Markets'. Moving forward, institutionalizing regional co-operation was discussed. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi inaugurated two days International Conference and delivered his keynote on consumer protection.

II. National Consumer Helpline (NCH)

For effective and quick redressal of consumer grievances, the National Consumer Helpline (NCH) has been strengthened. Earlier, complaints used to be 11,000 to 12,000 per month where as now NCH handles nearly 40,000 consumer grievance per month. It has Toll Free No. 1800-11-4000. For the ease of complainants an easy to remember short code 14404 has been put in place. The number of helpdesk have been increased from 14 to 60 at Delhi to make the helpline more effective.

Six Zonal Helplines with 10 helpdesks each have been added in order to facilitate people from different regions of the country to get information in their language and also register their complaints in their own language.

This convergence programme under the NCH has partnered with 430 corporates which ensures faster resolution of the complaints.

III. Better Quality Assurance

A new **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) Act, 2016** has been brought into force with effect from 12th October, 2017. The new Act has provisions of bringing under compulsory certification regime any goods or article of any scheduled industry, process, system or service which it considers necessary in the public interest or for the protection of human, animal or plant health, safety of the environment, or prevention of unfair trade practices, or national security. It also provides for notifying multiple types of conformity Assessment Schemes, including Self declaration of conformity, to facilitate ease of doing business for the manufacturers. It has provision for making hallmarking of the precious metal articles mandatory.

A new state-of-the-art version of the National Building Code of India 2016 (NBC2016) was released.

IV Quantity Assurance

To safeguard the interest of consumers and ease of doing business, the Legal Metrology(Packaged Commodities) Rules were amended w.e.f. 1st January, 2018 as follows:-

- a. Goods displayed by the seller on **e-commerce platform** shall contain declarations required under the Rules.
- b. Specific mention is made in the rules that no person shall declare different MRPs (dual MRP) on an identical pre-packaged commodity.
- c. **Size of letters and numerals** for making declaration is increased, so that consumer can easily read the same.
- d. The net quantity checking is made more scientific.
- e. Bar Code/ QR Coding allowed on voluntarily basis.
- f. Provisions regarding declarations on Food Products have been harmonized with regulation under the Food Safety & Standards Act.
- g. Medical devices which are declared as drugs, are brought into the purview of declarations to be made under the rules.

Dissemination of time “second” will be done through Regional Reference Standard Laboratories at an estimated cost of Rs. 100 crore. This will help in international trade, banking systems etc.

V Prices of essential Food Commodities

For the first time, a buffer stock of up to 20.5 lakh MT of pulses has been created through the Price Stabilization Fund (PSF) scheme of the Department of Consumer Affairs with the objective of managing price volatility of pulses for consumers. As on 04.06.2018, the available stock in the pulses buffer is 11.92 lakh MT after disposal of 8.58 lakh MT from 20.50 lakh MT procured/ imported. About 8.5 Lakh farmers were benefitted through purchase of pulses at MSP for the buffer. Such efforts for improving availability by much higher production of pulses led to moderation in their prices benefiting consumers at large.

Prices of 22 essential commodities are being monitored on a daily basis from 102 centres across the country. Of these, since 2014, 45 new price reporting centres have been added across the country, including 2 in the North-Eastern Region.

VI Digital Initiatives.

- A new portal INGRAM under National Consumer Helpline was launched during September, 2016 for providing a common IT platform for various stake holders involved in the Consumer Grievance Redressal Mechanism and for disseminating information to consumers.
- A short code 14404 to access the National Consumer Helpline and a Mobile App for registering and tracking complaints.
- Barcode Reader App "Smart Consumer" which is an application to know the product details and also to register grievances on packaged commodities.
- Micro Site for educating consumers on Internet and Digital Safety.
- Online Consumer Mediation Centre (OCMC) to provide an innovative online mediation tool for e-commerce complaints.
- Online Consumer communities on the digital platform "Local Circles" for presenting views, grievances and suggestions enabling the Department to know the pulse of the public that may help in policy intervention, if required.
- A Mobile Application for Networking of Consumer Fora was launched for complainants to track case status, judgments and retrieve other information.

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