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Lack of seller database hurt food safety fight

TEAM TOI

New Delhi: It seems Delhi is fighting a losing battle when it comes to food safety. According to the CAG report, the department concerned has a number of glaring lapses, starting with a lack of proper implementation of norms and a manpower crunch. As a result, it has failed to cover food business operators (FBOs) dealing in food items like midday meals in schools, packaged drinking water, alcoholic drinks and milk.

The audit, conducted for the period from August 2011 to March 2016, found lapses in the regulatory and administrative mechanism, inadequacy of infrastructure and shortcomings in the issue of licences and registration certificates.

The findings are certainly shocking. For instance, the audit found that the department had failed to prepare a database of all FBOs. "The projected figure of 2 lakh FBOs in Delhi could not be verified in audit," says the CAG report, adding

that the department had issued 49,796 licences and registration certificates (RCs) with a 75% shortfall in coverage of 1.5 lakh FBOs under the new Act up to March 2016.

More worryingly, the department hasn't covered FBOs engaged in supply of midday meals in schools, fair price shops and anganwadi centres in Delhi. The report has poin-

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ted out there are 33 institutions providing midday meal to about 1,000 government and 216 government-aided schools. The department, in its reply to CAG, said that a nodal officer was appointed in March 2016 for checking samples of mid-

day meals and anganwadis. Five samples were lifted for checking. "The reply is not tenable as lifting of only five samples from food supplied to 14,466 units cannot be deemed to be adequate coverage of FBOs," its report added.

In the area of packaged drinking water, the audit found the department didn't cover DJB, which sells it, due to lack of staff. Shockingly, the department also didn't have a database of all outlets of Mother Dairy and Amul Milk, though it is supposed to check samples of milk and submit such a list. Neither did the department check whether all FBOs dealing in alcoholic drinks and wine had the requisite licence.

Besides, the accreditation of the state food laboratory was not renewed beyond March 2014 as there had been no upgradation in the lab due to a shortage of technical staff and lack of equipment. The report also found there were long delays in issuance of licences and RCs, as well as in inspections.