

The National Food Security Ordinance – Highlights

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The National Food Security Ordinance is a historic initiative for ensuring food and nutritional security to the people. It gives right to the people to receive adequate quantity of foodgrains at affordable prices. The Food Security Bill has special focus on the needs of poorest of the poor, women and children. In case of non-supply of foodgrains now people will get Food Security Allowance. The bill provides for grievance redressal mechanism and penalty for non compliance by public servant or authority. Other features of the Ordinance are as follows.

Coverage of two thirds population to get highly subsidized foodgrains

Upto 75% of the rural population and upto 50% of the urban population will have uniform entitlement of 5 kg foodgrains per month at highly subsidized prices of **Rs. 3, Rs. 2, Rs. 1 per kg.** for rice, wheat, coarse grains respectively . It will entitle about two thirds of our 1.2 billion population to subsidised foodgrains under the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS).

Poorest of the poor continue to get 35 kg per household

The poorest of poor households would continue to receive 35 Kg foodgrains per household per month under Antyodaya Anna Yajna at subsidized prices of Rs 3, Rs 2 and Rs 1. It is also proposed to protect the existing allocation of foodgrains to the States/Uts, subject to it being restricted to average annual offtake during last three years.

Eligible households to be identified by the States

Corresponding to the coverage of 75% rural and 50 % of urban population at all India level, State wise coverage will be determined by the Central Government. The work of identification of eligible households is left to the States/UTs, which may frame their own criteria or use Social Economic and Caste Census data, if they so desire.

Special focus on nutritional support to women and children

There is a special focus on nutritional support to women and children. Pregnant women and lactating mothers, besides being entitled to nutritious meals as per the prescribed nutritional norms will also receive maternity benefit of at least of Rs. 6000/-. Children in the age group of 6 months to 14 years will be entitled to take home ration or hot cooked food as per prescribed nutritional norms.

Food Security Allowance in case of non supply of foodgrains

The Central Government will provide funds to States/UTs in case of short supply of food grains from Central pool, In case of non-supply of food grains or meals to entitled persons, the concerned State/UT Governments will be required to provide such food security allowance as may be prescribed by the Central Government to the beneficiaries.

States to get assistance for intra-State transportation and handling of foodgrains

In order to address the concern of the States regarding additional financial burden, Central Government will provide assistance to the States towards cost of intra-State transportation, handling of foodgrains and FPS dealers' margin, for which norms will be developed. This will ensure timely transportation and efficient handling of foodgrains.

Reforms for doorstep delivery of foodgrains

The Bill also contains provisions for reforms in PDS through doorstep delivery of foodgrains, application of information and communication technology (ICT) including end to end computerisation, leveraging 'Aadhaar' for unique identification of beneficiaries, diversification of commodities under TPDS etc for effective implementation of the Food Security Act. Some of these reforms are already underway.

Women Empowerment-- Eldest women will be Head of the household

Eldest woman of eighteen years of age or above will be head of the household for issue of ration card, and if not available, the eldest male member is to be the head of the household.

Grievance redressal mechanism at district level

There will be state and district level redressal mechanism with designated officers. The States will be allowed to use the existing machinery for District Grievance Redressal Officer (DGRO), State Food Commission, if they so desire, to save expenditure on establishment of new redressal set up. Redressal mechanism may also include call centers, helpline etc.

Social audits and vigilance committees to ensure transparency and accountability

Provisions have also been made for disclosure of records relating to PDS, social audits and setting up of Vigilance Committees in order to ensure transparency and accountability.

Penalty for non compliance

The Bill provides for penalty to be imposed on public servants or authority, if found guilty of failing to comply with the relief recommended by the District Grievance Redressal Officer (DGRO).

Expenditure

At the proposed coverage of entitlement, total estimated annual foodgrains requirement is 612.3 lakh tons and corresponding estimated food subsidy for 2013-14 costs is about Rs.1,24,724 crore.
