

## **Harmonization of the standards by PSQCA across the country**

### **Consumer Rights Organizations welcome the CCI's Decision on Food Regulations**

ISLAMABAD: TheNetwork for Consumer Protection has lauded the decision of the Council of Common Interest (CCI) to have uniform product standards for the whole of the country making Pakistan competitive in the growing global e-commerce.

TheNetwork was referring to an official statement released after the conclusion of the 44th meeting of the CCI which said: "In order to further improve ease of doing business and harmonization of quality and standards across the country, it was decided that provinces will notify harmonized standards set by Pakistan Standard & Quality Control Authority (PSQCA) by repealing their own standards. It was also agreed that harmonization of standards, standardized labelling and certification marks logo would remain exclusive domain of PSQCA."

The CCI meeting also decided to establish a permanent Secretariat of the Council of Common Interests as required under article 154(3) of the Constitution. This is for the first time that a permanent Secretariat of the CCI has been established to meet the long overdue Constitutional requirement.

Nadeem Iqbal, CEO of TheNetwork said that that this is a big step in the harmonization of federal and provincial standards thus ending regulatory confusion prevailing since the constitutional devolution in 2010.

However, Nadeem cautioned, the work hasn't ended here as now national standards also need to be upgraded to the international standards to make the country competitive in the fast-growing e-commerce world.

"This decision will have a huge positive impact on the food fortification regulation as all four provinces have made food regulations bodies many of whom have their standards. Now all provinces are required to amend their respective laws in the provincial assemblies as per CCI decision, a process it is hoped will be completed on urgent basis," Nadeem opined.

In the scheme of Pakistani federalism, the Council of Common Interests (CCI) was created in 1973 to harmonize federal-provincial relations and conform to the spirit of federalism. The 18th Amendment has introduced two major steps. One is expanding the scope of Federal Legislative List-II and the other is revitalizing the composition of the Council of Common Interests (CCI)

Since 2018, CCI had taken into consideration the issue of harmonizing the quality standards across the country. A committee was made to resolve constitutional and legal ambiguities, review Provincial Food Authorities Acts, and suggest a mechanism for enforcement of applicable Technical Regulations within one month.

The terms of reference of the committee included formulation and enforcement of standards, registration and licensing of manufacturers, and revamping of PSQCA.

The Committee under the chairmanship of the Secretary, Law and Justice Division held several meetings with stakeholders and submitted its Report to the Prime Minister's Office, and Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination (IPC) on 13th June 2019 for further deliberations in the CCI.

Likewise, in 2019, the 41st meeting of the Council of Common Interest was held on 23rd December 2019. There was consensus that there should be uniform standards at a national level and Provinces and local authorities will enforce the standards, but no decision was taken.

The Council of Common Interest (CCI) had raised objections to the food standards devised by the provinces, including Punjab. In a bid to regulate food standards, CCI had decided that the federal government will establish uniform food standards for the country, which will be implemented across all provinces

Provincial governments on the other hand maintained that food was a provincial issue and there was no consensus over the harmonization of the standards. Now, the decision has changed the outlook of standards and quality control rules and regulations, the Provincial Food Authorities will be following the given standards of PSQCA.

Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority (PSQCA) was established by the Government of Pakistan through Act-VI of 1996 to provide one window service and operations for Standardization and Conformity Assessment.

The important functions of the Authority are to foster and promote standards and conformity assessment as a means of advancing the national economy, promoting industrial efficiency and development, ensuring the health and safety of the public, protecting the consumers. Facilitating domestic and international trade and furthering international co-operation relation to Standards and conformity assessment in the interest of consumers.

Some of the other important roles of the PSQCA as per the official data of the government include Framing, publishing, amending, revising, or withdrawal of the Pakistan Standards concerning any article, product, process; and Certification of mandatory articles products and process under Certification Marks Scheme of PSQCA Pakistan Standards.

To stop manufacturing, storage, and sale of such products which do not conform to the Pakistan Standards; Inspection and testing of products for their quality specification and characteristics for manufacturing and import/export purpose; and Registration of inspection agencies.

Others include coordination and cooperation with other national, regional, and international organizations in the areas of standard development, technical regulations, conformity assessment procedure, information exchange, and technical assistance.

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