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CIRCULAR

SUBJECT: Revised Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and Compliance Mandates for 100% Dust Tea Auction

This circular mandate the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the 100% dust tea auction initiative, incorporating enhanced digital compliance measures to ensure strict adherence to Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) norms.

A. Applicability and Scope

1. This SOP is applicable to mandatory auction of all dust teas produced in manufacturing units across Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, Uttarakhand and West Bengal.
2. All dust teas with a Factory Gate pass date up to December 31, 2026 and as extended from time to time, fall strictly under this mandatory auction purview.
3. Sellers retain the right to withdraw two-times out lots and sell them through private channels.

B. Sampling, Testing and Dispatch

1. Mandatory quality testing for all dust teas must be facilitated by brokers through the Association of Tea Auctioneers (ATA) online platform with intimation to Tea Board.
2. Testing selections will be conducted "mark-wise" utilizing AI and algorithms to ensure random sampling, with every mark required to be tested at least once in every quarter. Retesting within a six-month window is permitted only after all other marks have undergone at least two tests.
3. Randomly assigned Independent NABL accredited laboratories must visit auction warehouses immediately upon assignment to draw two distinct sets of 500-gram samples per invoice. One set is analyzed for FSSAI parameters and banned pesticides, while a control set is sealed, signed and retained by warehouse keepers for potential seller appeals.
4. The ATA online platform is now equipped with an automated dispatch module; the moment a laboratory finalizes a test report, an automated email and system notification will be instantaneously routed to the Controller of Licensing, Deputy

Chairman Tea Board, Statistician, Executive Director Tea Board Guwahati and Deputy Director Tea Board Siliguri.

5. Key officials are provided with secure, role-based dashboards highlighting daily pass/fail ratios, specific pesticide breaches, and pending laboratory uploads.

C. Restrictions on Movement of failed teas from Warehouse

1. To prevent unauthorized circulation, an API linkage has been implemented between the auction testing platform and warehouse management systems.
2. Any invoice marked "Failed" will trigger an immediate digital locking/restriction on movement of failed teas.
3. While under this digital lock, the system completely disables the warehouse's ability to generate gate passes or any physical movement documentation for the contaminated lot.
4. Non-compliant teas cannot, under any circumstances, be covertly routed back into the marketing channel.

D. Handling of Non-Compliant Lots and System-Enforced Destruction

1. Teas failing to meet the prescribed FSSAI parameters shall be withdrawn from the auction before the sale date, and the brokers shall intimate Tea Board regarding such lots. Under no circumstances such teas shall be offered for sale or sold through any mode.
2. If a lot fails due to exceeding the Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) of approved chemicals which are allowed for use in tea by CIB&RC/FSSAI, the seller is permitted to return the tea to the factory for re-blending with other teas and no re-blended teas shall be sold through Auction without retesting. This facility shall apply strictly and exclusively to (i) fresh lots processed on or after the date of issuance of this SOP; and (ii) teas pertaining to the 2025 and 2026 dust tea cases that have been lying in warehouses.
3. Any detection of banned or off-label chemicals, pesticides, or residues mandates immediate destruction or denaturing of the lot, ideally within the warehouse premises.
4. As per Paragraph 28(1) of the Tea (Marketing) Control Order, 2003, no manufacturer shall manufacture tea which does not conform to the specifications laid down under the Food Safety and Standards Rules, 2011, as amended from time to time, or any other rules for the time being in force. Accordingly, teas failing to meet the parameters prescribed by FSSAI shall be withdrawn from the auction before the date of sale, under intimation to the Tea Board by the brokers.

In cases where banned pesticides are detected, such teas shall be destroyed by Tea Board as per the existing practice. In respect of teas failing to meet FSSAI specifications for reasons other than the presence of banned pesticides, the seller shall be permitted to undertake retesting within 15 days from the date of receipt of the test report. If the tea passes the retest, it may be permitted for sale through auction. If it fails the retest, the concerned tea shall be destroyed/denatured

within 30 days from the date of receipt of the report. Under no circumstances shall sellers or manufacturers be permitted to transport or carry such failed teas back to the factory for re-blending or for any other purpose.

Details of all denatured tea lots shall be incorporated in the monthly returns (Form-E) submitted by the concerned manufacturers.

5. Upon the system registering a "Failed" status, a 30-day countdown timer is automatically initiated for destruction.
6. The system will dispatch automated escalating reminders to the responsible seller, broker, and warehouse operator at Day 15 and Day 25.
7. Failed teas, on account of banned pesticides, must be destroyed/denatured within 30 days from the date of receipt of the report, failing which the system will trigger an immediate non-compliance escalation alert to the Tea Board. The system shall have an option to record/confirm whether the failed teas have been destroyed/denatured, so as to facilitate identification and escalation of non-compliance.)
8. Details of all denatured lots must be explicitly documented in the monthly returns (Form-E) submitted by manufacturers.
9. All failed teas shall be denatured exclusively at the respective warehouses where they are stored.

E. Financial Obligations and Penalties

1. All costs and expenses relating to testing shall be borne exclusively by the Sellers. The Sellers shall proactively and promptly pay the applicable testing charges directly to the respective party/laboratory, without fail. In the event of any delay or failure in payment attributable to the Seller, the Brokers shall be entitled to recover the testing costs, including any costs incurred towards destruction/denaturing, from the Seller's auction proceeds and remit the same to the concerned laboratory.
2. If any delay in destruction is attributable to the seller, Tea Board shall direct the broker to recover the destruction costs directly from the seller's auction proceeds.
3. All buyers must purchase dust category teas exclusively from the auctions.
4. Any violation of purchasing or selling mandates will result in strict penalties under the provisions of the Tea (Marketing) Control Order, 2003.
5. Laboratories failing to comply with Tea Board instructions regarding sample collection, testing or timely reporting will face suspension. The laboratories shall submit the testing report within 7 days from the date of receipt of the samples.

F. Continuous Improvement

1. Tea Board will comprehensively review the panel of all empanelled laboratories based on required accreditation and capabilities.

2. Focused awareness programmes on food safety compliance and the judicious use of pesticides shall be initiated by Tea Board across all tea-growing regions in India.


15/10/22

(Samaresh Mondal)
Controller of Licensing,

Distribution:

1.	All Tea Producer Associations	For information and circulation among their members
2.	All Buyer Associations	
3.	All Exporter Associations	
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5.	Association of Tea Auctioneer (ATA)	
6.	All Warehouse Associations	
7.	Committee Members	For information
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9.	DDTD, Siliguri	
10.	System Analyst	For uploading on Board's website