

National Food Security Act, 2013 - Indian Polity Notes

The **National Food Security Act (NFSA)** was introduced by the Government of India in 2013. It is responsible for the provision of subsidized food grains to the population. The enactment of the NFSA marks a watershed in the approach to food security from welfare to a rights-based approach.

The topic is of significance under the GS-II of the [UPSC](#) exam.

National Food Security Act - Introduction

The NFSA converts into legal entitlements the existing food security programmes of the Government of India. The annual allocation of foodgrain under the NFSA and other welfare schemes is about 610 Lakh Metric Tons. In 2006, the then Finance Minister announced the introduction of the National Food Security Act under which BPL families in rural and urban areas will be entitled by law to 25 kg of wheat or rice per month at Rs. 3 per kg.

Objective of the National Food Security Act

The Act provides for food and nutritional security in the human life cycle approach, by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices for people to live a life with dignity and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

National Food Security Act

- The Act was signed into law on 12th September 2013 retroactive to 5th July 2013.
- The Act is in line with Goal Two of the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) set by the United Nations General Assembly.
 - Goal 2 seeks sustainable solutions to end hunger in all its forms by 2030 and to achieve food security.
 - The aim is to ensure that everyone everywhere has enough good-quality food to lead a healthy life.
- Schemes such as the **Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDM)**, the **Public Distribution System (PDS)**, and the **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)** are included under the Act.
- The Act is being implemented by all the States and the Union Territories.

Salient Features of the NFSA

The major features of the Act are described below:

- **Coverage:** The state-wise coverage determined by the [NITI Aayog](#) on the basis of the 2011-12 Household Consumption Expenditure survey of NSSO.
- The Act legally entitled up to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population to receive subsidized foodgrains under the **Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)**.
- About two-thirds of the population, therefore, is covered under the Act to receive highly subsidized foodgrains.
- **Entitlements:**
 - The food grains would be provided at highly subsidized prices under the Public Distribution System.
 - The Act ensures nutritional support to women and children. Pregnant and lactating women

- would be entitled to nutritious meals, free of charge under the MDM and ICDS schemes.
- Children in the age group of 6-14 years would also be entitled to free nutritious meals under the MDM and ICDS schemes.
- Maternity benefit of not less than Rs.6000 is also provided to pregnant women and lactating mothers.
- The Act also empowers women by identifying the eldest woman of the household as the head of the household for the purpose of issuing ration cards.
- The **Central Government** will be aiding the States to meet the expenditure incurred by them on transportation of foodgrains within the State and will also handle the Fair Price Shop (FPS) dealers' margins according to the norms.
- There is a provision of a **food security allowance** to the beneficiaries in the event of non-supply of food grains.
- **Transparency:** Provisions have been made to disclose the records related to the PDS to ensure transparency.

Who are the beneficiaries of the National Food Security Act?

The Act covers two-thirds of the entire population under two categories of beneficiaries:

- Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) households
- Priority Households (PHH)
- AAY households encompass the households headed by widows or disabled persons or persons aged 60 years or more with no assured means of subsistence or societal support.
 - It usually takes into account the households of those below the poverty line too.
 - It also includes support for women and children.
- NFSA gives the right to receive food-grains at subsidized prices by people belonging to eligible households, i.e., the PHH. A major section of the ration card holders in the priority sector comes under this category. This is an effort to alleviate poverty.
- The work of identification of eligible households within the coverage under TPDS determined for each state is to be done by the states and the UTs.

Significance of Food Security

The concerns regarding food security in India can be traced back to the experience of the [Bengal Famine](#) in 1943 during the British Colonial Rule. Food security is of utmost importance to a nation as it will also have a positive influence on the other aspects determining the growth of a nation:

- It will boost the agricultural sector.
- It will also aid the government to regulate food prices.
- A boost in the agricultural sector would result in more job opportunities, as agriculture is a labor-intensive sector. This would enhance economic growth and result in the reduction of poverty.
- Access to nutritious food would enhance the overall health of the public.
- Food security is also important for global security and stability of the nation.

Significance of the National Food Security Act

The concept of food security at a global level indicates access to basic, nutritious food by all people, at all times. It is characterized by availability, access, utilization and stability of food.

- There is no explicit provision in the Indian Constitution for the right to food.
- Until the enactment of the NFSA, the fundamental right to life under [Article 21](#) was interpreted to include the right to live with human dignity, which may include the right to food and other basic

Obligations under NFSA

The NFSA states in detail the obligations of the Central government, the state government and the local authorities.

- **Obligations of the Central Government:**

- The Central Government shall allocate the required food grains from the central pool to the State Governments under the TPDS.
- The Government would have to allocate the resources keeping in mind the number of persons in the eligible households.
- The Central Government would also provide for the transportation of food grains as per the allocation to the State Governments.
- Provide assistance to the State Governments in meeting the expenditures incurred by the State Government towards intra-state movement, handling of the food grains and the FPS margins.
- Create and maintain storage facilities at various levels.

- **Obligations of the State Governments:**

- The State Government shall be responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the various schemes.
- Organize intra-state allocations to deliver the allocated food grains to the beneficiaries.
- Determine the eligible households and the beneficiaries and ensure that they can avail of the benefits of the schemes.
- Create and maintain scientific storage facilities at the district and block levels to store the allocated food grains.
- Establish institutionalized licensing arrangements for the FPS in accordance with the Public Distribution System (Control) Order, 2001.

- **Obligations of the local authorities:**

- They shall be responsible for the effective implementation of the Act.
- They may be assigned additional responsibilities by the State Government for the implementation of the TPDS.
- The local authorities would be responsible for discharging the responsibilities allotted to them by the State Governments.

Challenges to Food Security

There are a plethora of challenges to battle food security, a few of them are:

- **Climate Change:** the increase in the global temperatures and the capricious rainfall makes farming difficult. A change in the temperatures not only impacts the crops but the other species which are reared for food such as fisheries, livestock, etc.
- **Lack of Access:** there is a lack of access to remote areas. The tribals and other communities living in remote areas do not get the opportunity to avail of the benefits of the schemes implemented for food security due to lack of access.

- **Over-population:** A substantial increase in the population when not accompanied by an increase in agricultural production results in a shortage of food.
- **Non-food crops:** crops grown for commercial purposes such as biofuels and dyes have reduced the area under cultivation for agricultural crops.
- **Migration from Rural-Urban cities:** This causes a problem as it leads to a lot of confusion as to which PDS shop to buy the subsidies from.

NFSA Criticisms

The effective implementation of the NFSA remains with the states/UTs and as governance differs from state to state, the effectiveness of the implementation would also differ in each state.

- **Lack of Transparency:** According to a Comptroller and Auditor General ([CAG audit](#)) conducted in 2016, the wrong people were benefiting from the NFSA.
- It accuses many states of implementing the NFSA despite being in possession of the information that their beneficiaries list is spurious.
- **Leakages in PDS:** a leakage indicates that the food grains do not reach the intended beneficiaries. The leakages may be of three types:
 - pilferage during transportation of food grains
 - diversion at fair price shops to non-beneficiaries and,
 - exclusion of entitled beneficiaries from the list.
- **Storage:** According to the CAG audit, the available storage space was inadequate for the allocated quantity of food grains.
- **Quality of food grains:** people often complain that the quality of the food grains is not up to the mark and that the grains sometimes have to be mixed with other grains to be edible. Complaints stating that the grains also consist of non-food particles such as pebbles have also been registered.

Ways to increase the effectiveness of NFSA

The Government should provide strategies for better food storage, and adopt an integrated policy framework to facilitate agriculture productivity.

- The usage of **Information Technology** throughout the process from acquisition of the food grains till distribution will aid in enhancing the effectiveness of the process.
- Information regarding the entire process from the quality of food grains to the storage facilities where the grains were stored, should be available to the beneficiaries.
- A **one ration card system (for more on this, check [PIB dated Aug 9, 2019](#))** would be effective in eliminating the confusion, especially for the migrants, as this would provide the beneficiaries the freedom to choose from the PDS shop of their choice.
- Expand the coverage of **Integrated Management of PDS (IMPDS)** to all the states.

UPSC Questions related to National Food Security Act, 2013

What was the objective of the National Food Security Act, 2013?

The Act provides for food and nutritional security in the human life cycle approach, by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to people to live a life with dignity and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

What is the significance of Food Security in a Nation?

- It will boost the agricultural sector.
- A boost in the agricultural sector would result in more job opportunities, as agriculture is a labor-intensive sector. This would enhance economic growth and result in the reduction of poverty.
- Access to nutritious food would enhance the overall health of the public.
- Food security is also important for global security and stability of the Nation.

Who are the beneficiaries of the Act?

The Act covers two-thirds of the entire population under two categories of beneficiaries:

Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) households

Priority Households (PHH)

The AAY covers the poorest of the poor households.

There is no separate category for the Below Poverty Line (BPL) households.