

Scientists Interventions for Promotion of Millets Farming in India: IYoM-2023

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Introduction:

Millet farming is still an area with a lot of room for ecosystem-level interventions. Promoting millets not only raises awareness of these wonder crops, but also of women farmers and their farming knowledge. Raising awareness among farmers and the general public about the numerous benefits of millets can help to revitalise



millet production and consumption in India. As proposed by India to the Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring 2023 as the International Year of Millets. The main goal of this initiative is to raise public awareness of the health benefits of millets and their suitability for cultivation under challenging conditions brought on by climate change. The International Year of Millet provides an excellent chance to:

1. Improved millet's contribution to food security
2. Increase millet output globally
3. Making sure that the processing, transport, storage, and consumption are efficient
4. Sustainable millet production and quality with stakeholder participation

Nutritionally Superior:

- Millets are less expensive and nutritionally superior to wheat & rice owing to their high protein, fibre, vitamins and minerals like iron content.

- Millets are also rich in calcium and magnesium. For example, Ragi is known to have the highest calcium content among all the food grains.
- Millets can provide nutritional security and act as a shield against nutritional deficiency, especially among children and women.
- Its high iron content can fight high prevalence of anaemia in India women of reproductive age and infants.

Gluten-free a low Glycemic Index:

Millets can help tackle lifestyle problems and health challenges such as obesity and diabetes as they are gluten-free and have a low glycemic index (a relative ranking of carbohydrate in foods according to how they affect blood glucose levels).

Super Crop at Growing:

Millets are Photo-insensitive (do not require a specific photoperiod for flowering) & resilient to climate change. Millets can grow on poor soils with little or no external inputs. Millets are less water consuming and are capable of growing under drought conditions, under non-irrigated conditions even in very low rainfall regimes. Millets have low carbon and water footprint (rice plants need at least 3 times more water to grow in comparison to millets).

Initiative for Nutritional Security through Intensive Millet Promotion (INSIMP):

✚ **Increase in Minimum Support Price (MSP):** The government has hiked the Minimum Support Price of Millets, which came as a big price incentive for farmers. Further, to provide a steady market for the produce, the government has included millets in the public distribution system.

✚ **Input Support:** The government has introduced provision of seed kits and inputs to farmers, building value chains through Farmer Producer Organisations and supporting the marketability of millets. The United Nations General Assembly at its 75th session in March 2021 declared 2023 the International Year of Millets (IYM 2023). FAO is the lead agency for





celebrating the Year in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders. Millets can grow on arid lands with minimal inputs and are resilient to changes in climate. They are therefore an ideal solution for countries to increase self-sufficiency and reduce reliance on imported cereal grains. IYM2023 will be an opportunity to raise awareness of, and direct policy attention to the nutritional and health benefits of millets and their suitability for cultivation under adverse and changing climatic conditions. The Year will also promote the sustainable production of millets, while highlighting their potential to provide new sustainable market opportunities for producers and consumers.

Six reasons to bring millets to the market: Here are six key reasons why millets deserve our attention and a place on our tables:

1. **Millets are there when others are not:** There is an ever-growing global population that needs sufficient and healthy food amidst climate emergencies and depleting natural resources. Millets can be part of the solution. These grains can survive harsh climate conditions, offering solutions to food scarcity. Because they are often the only crops that can be harvested in dry seasons, millets can be a vital food source for populations vulnerable to food insecurity.
2. **Millets can contribute to a healthy diet:** Millets provide antioxidants, minerals and protein. As whole grains, each millet variety also offers different types and amounts of fibre, which play a role in regulating bowel function, blood sugar and lipids. Furthermore, millets are gluten-free with a low-glycaemic index making them a great food option for those with celiac disease or gluten intolerance, high-blood sugar or diabetes. They can also be a cost-effective source of iron. Incorporating millets in our diets can provide us with nutritious and healthy alternatives to the usual refined grains in the global market. Start exploring some millet recipes, such as this finger millet pancakes option, to revamp your diet.
3. **Millets are climate-resilient:** Millets are resistant to drought and tolerant to crop diseases and pests, allowing them to survive in adverse climatic conditions. Because millets can be grown with minimal inputs and maintenance and can adapt to climate shocks, expanding production of millets can transform local agri-food systems to be more efficient, resilient and inclusive. The ability of millets to grow in poor,

degraded soils can also provide land cover in arid areas, reducing soil degradation and supporting biodiversity.

4. **Millets offer promising livelihood opportunities for small-scale farmers:** As other cereals have become widespread, dietary preferences have shifted and led to a decline in the production and demand for millets. By encouraging the consumption and production of these underutilized crops, we can help millets regain market share and create additional opportunities for small-scale farmers.
5. **Millets' trade can improve the diversity of the global food system:** Currently, millets account for less than three percent of the global grains trade. When sudden shocks affect the food grain market, millets can provide a valuable alternative to typically traded grains. This added diversity can improve the resilience of the global trade markets and mitigate our reliance on other grains.
6. **Millets can be used in many innovative ways:** The genetic diversity of millets lends itself to many diverse and innovate applications of millets in areas such as therapeutics and pharmaceuticals. Used innovatively, millets offer even greater market opportunities for regional and international trade.