

International Year of Millets

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Introduction

The United Nations has designated 2023 as the ‘International Year of Millets’. This was suggested by the Indian Government. Millets are in the news these days because of their high nutritional value and other benefits. Due to their high nutritional value, millets are referred to as “nutri-cereals”. In addition to a plethora of health benefits, millets are also good for the environment with low water & input requirement. Despite being a staple food source for hundreds of millions of people worldwide, its production is declining now.

In light of this, the Indian government suggested that 2023 be designated as the International Year of Millets. It was endorsed by Members of FAO Governing Bodies and at the 75th Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA). More than 70 nations voted in favour of the resolution creating the International Year of Millets.

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.

International Year of Millets

The objectives of declaring 2023 as the International Year of Millets are as follows:

- Elevate awareness of the contribution of millets to food security and nutrition.
- Inspire stakeholders on improving sustainable production and quality of millets.
- Draw focus on enhanced investment in research and development and extension services to achieve the other two aims.

What are Millets?

- Millets are a group of cereal grains belonging to the Poaceae family, sometimes referred to as the grass family.

- Millets were among the earliest plants to be domesticated; they have been a traditional food source for hundreds of millions of people in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia for more than 7,000 years, and they are today grown all over the world.
- The most popular millet variety is pearl millet, an important crop in Africa and India. Other significant crop species include finger millet, proso millet, and foxtail millet.
- They are considered ancient grains and are consumed as food for humans, animals, and birds.
- India is the world's leading producer of millets.

Geographical Conditions for Millet Growth

- Millets are often cultivated in tropical and subtropical climates up to an altitude of 2,100 m.
- It is a heat-loving plant, and 8 to 10°C is the minimum temperature needed for germination.
- For optimum growth and good crop production, a mean temperature range of 26–29°C is ideal.
- It is cultivated in areas with 500–900mm of annual rainfall.
- Kodo Millet has a high-water requirement and thrives under conditions of 50–60 cm of rainfall.
- Soil: Millet can handle a certain level of alkalinity and adapts well to a variety of soils, from extremely poor to highly rich.
- Alluvial, loamy, and sandy soils with adequate drainage are the best types of soil.
- Kodo millet may be produced on rocky and gravelly soil, such as those found in hilly areas.

Significance of Millets

➤ 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).

➤ **Initiatives Taken by Government:**

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.

Conclusion

The timely need to educate consumers, producers, actors throughout the value chain, and decision-makers on the variety, nutritional value, and ecological benefits of millets can strengthen connections between the food, agriculture industries and conservation. Against this backdrop, the decision to declare 2023 the 'International Year of Millets' assumes great



significance and is bound to have a positive impact on the awareness, production, and consumption of millets throughout the world.

