



Millets: Superfood

This article is based on [“Healthy And Wise”](#) which was published in The Indian Express on 23/10/2020. It talks about the importance of millets in securing Food, Nutritional and Economic Security.

Millets are often referred to as Superfood and its production can be seen as an approach for [sustainable agriculture](#) and a healthy world. Multidimensional benefits associated with millets can address the issues related to nutrition security, food systems security, and farmers' welfare.

Further, many unique features linked with millets makes them a suitable crop which is resilient to India's varied agro-climatic conditions. Citing these factors, the year 2018 has already been declared as the National Year of Millets and India has called for declaring 2023 as the [“International Year of Millets”](#).

However, in spite of acknowledging their significance as a superfood, general perception is that the millets are increasingly seen as “poor person's food”. Therefore, it is necessary to re-brand coarse cereals/millets as nutri-cereals and promote their production and consumption.

Millets Production In India

- The three major millet crops currently growing in India are jowar (sorghum), bajra (pearl millet) and ragi (finger millet).
 - Along with that, India grows a rich array of bio-genetically diverse and indigenous varieties of “small millets” like kodo, kutki, chenna and sanwa.
- Major producers include Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Haryana.

Need For Promotion of Millets

- **Climate Resilient Crop :** As Millets are resistant to climatic stress, pests and diseases, this makes them a sustainable food source for combating hunger in changing world climate.
 - Further, millets are not water or input-intensive, making them a sustainable strategy for addressing climate change and building resilient agri-food systems.
- **Nutritional Security:** Millets are high in dietary fibre, nutri-cereals are a powerhouse of nutrients including iron, folate, calcium, zinc, magnesium, phosphorus, copper, vitamins and antioxidants.
 - They are not only important for the healthy growth and development of children but have also been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease and diabetes in adults.
 - Millets, being gluten free and low glycemic index food are good for diabetic persons and can help to combat cardiovascular diseases and nutritional deficiency.
- **Economic Security:** Millets can be grown on dry, low-fertile, mountainous, tribal and rain-fed areas.
 - Moreover, millets are good for the soil, have shorter cultivation cycles and require less cost-intensive cultivation.

- Given these features, low investment will be needed for production of millets and thus can prove to be a sustainable income source for farmers.

Subdued Use of Millets

- **Green Revolution:** With the Green Revolution, the focus was on food security and high-yielding varieties of wheat and rice.
 - An unintended consequence of this policy was the gradual decline in the production of millets.
 - Further, the cost incentives provided via MSPs to wheat and rice, discouraged production of millets.
- **Increased Demand For Processed Food:** In parallel, India saw a jump in consumer demand for ultra-processed and ready-to-eat products, which are high in sodium, sugar, trans-fats and even some carcinogens.
 - With the intense marketing of processed foods, even the rural population started perceiving mill-processed rice and wheat as more aspirational.
- **Double Burden:** This has led us to the double burden of mothers and children suffering from micronutrient deficiencies and the astounding prevalence of diabetes and obesity.

Steps Taken by the Government

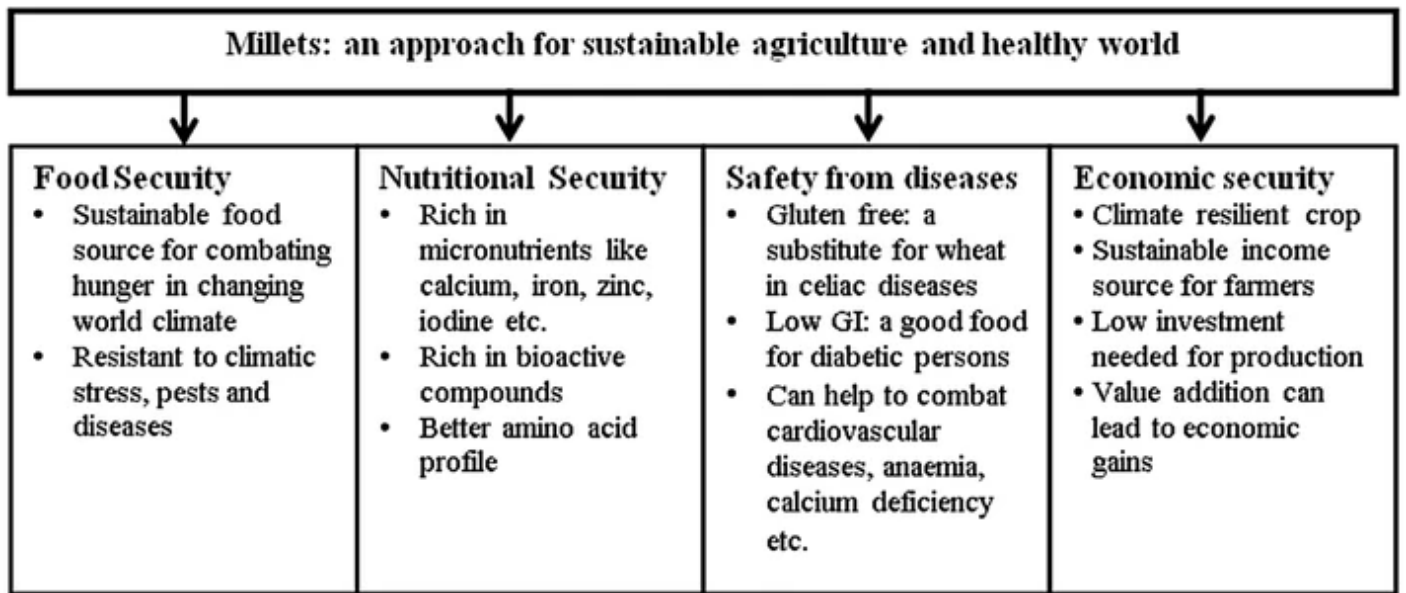
- **Increase in MSP:** The government has hiked the **MSP** of Millets, which came as a big price incentive for farmers.
 - Further, to provide a steady market for the produce, the government has included millets in the public distribution system.
- **Input Support:** The government has introduced provision of seed kits and inputs to farmers, building value chains through Farmer Producer Organisations and supporting the marketability of millets.
- **Integration Approach:** The Ministry of Women and Child Development has been working at the intersection of agriculture and nutrition by setting up nutri-gardens, promoting research on the interlinkages between crop diversity and dietary diversity and running a behaviour change campaign to generate consumer demand for nutri-cereals.

Way Forward

- **Changing the Narrative:** There is a need to change the general perception around consumption and trade point of view associated with millets and to re-brand coarse cereals/millets as nutri-cereals.
 - Further, civil society can begin the jan andolan by taking small steps towards choosing healthier foods, which are good for the environment and bring economic prosperity to our farmers.
- **MSP on Lines of Wheat and Rice:** Government can try on a pilot basis for providing MSP to millets on the lines of Wheat and rice (state guarantee of procurement at MSP.).
- **Mission Mode Initiative:** The government can encourage farmers to align their local cropping patterns to India's diverse 127 agro-climatic zones and promote cultivation of millets with local topography and natural resources.
- **Inter-Ministerial Approach:** There is a requirement of a multi-ministerial policy framework that is aimed towards building an Atma Nirbhar Bharat and resonates with the global call for self-sufficiency and sustainable development.

Conclusion

As the government sets to achieve its agenda of a malnutrition-free India and doubling of farmers' incomes, the promotion of the production and consumption of nutri-cereals seems to be a policy shift in the right direction.



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Drishti Mains Question

Given the multidimensional benefits associated with the millets, it is necessary to re-brand millets as nutri-cereals and promote their production and consumption. Comment.

This editorial is based on [“Plug into Taiwan”](#) which was published in The Times of India on October 22th, 2020. Now watch this on our Youtube channel.

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