



Millets as Superfood for Good Health

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Introduction:

The focus on healthy eating and good nutrition cannot be understated, especially in the post-pandemic era. Eating whole grains such as wheat, rice, lentils and pulses is a common practice that has been recommended by experts. Millet is also one such ancient superfood that has been garnering interest in the recent past. Popular in Africa and Southeast Asia, the millet has been grown in the Indian subcontinent for 5,000 years. Millet is a collective term referring to a number of small-seeded annual grasses that are cultivated as grain crops, mainly in dry land area in temperate, subtropical and tropical regions. The most important species are pearl millet, finger millet, proso millet and foxtail millet. Developing countries, mainly in Asia and Africa account for about 94% of global output, estimated at some 28 million tons (1992-94). Of this pearl millets accounts for 15 million tons and foxtail millet for 5 million tons that means pearl millets accounts for almost half of the global millet productions.

Millets are a climate resilient, highly nutritious grain. They are better adopted to

dry, infertile soils than most other crops, and are therefore often cultivated under extremely harsh conditions - for example, high temperatures, low and erratic precipitation, short growing seasons and acidic and infertile soils with poor water-holding capacity.

Millet Benefits:

There are many different kinds of millets, each with their own benefits and ways to include them in the diet. Here's some millets and their health benefits –

- 1. Pearl Millet aka Bajra:** It is a popular grain in North-West India, including Rajasthan and Haryana. The fulfilling millet helps keep a check on cholesterol and is also recommended for diabetics.
- 2. Finger Millet aka Ragi:** Whether you make Roti or Cheela, the finger millet will enrich you with multiple macronutrients and micronutrients such as Vitamin B3, folate and calcium.
- 3. Amaranth:** Also known as Ramdana, Amaranth is a protein-rich grain recommended by experts. It can be used in a number of recipes to boost immunity and decrease cholesterol.

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4. **Buckwheat Millet aka Kuttu:** A popular grain during Navratri, Kuttu is known to help manage blood pressure and aid weight loss too. From Puris to Cheelas, there is no end to the recipes you can make with Buckwheat.
5. **Barnyard Millet:** Locally known as Sanwa, this millet is a gluten-free source of both insoluble and soluble fibres. To include it in the diet, you can make porridge, Khichdi and even Pulao!

skin. It can be used in Dosas, cheelas and more.

7. **Kodo millet:** Rich in fibre and iron, the Kodo millet grain helps prevent constipation and control blood sugar. The humble grain can be used to make Chapatis, Idli etc.

Utilization - Current Scenario:

Although millet represents less than 2 percent of world cereal utilization, it is an important staple in a large number of countries in the



Fig. 1: Types of Millets Grown in India

6. **Foxtail Millet:** The Foxtail millet, also known as Kangni, is a grain well-known for promoting good cardiac health and maintaining good hair and

semi-arid tropics, where low precipitation and poor soils limit the cultivation of other major food crops.

1. **Food use** – Millet consumption per capita varies from country to country; it is highest

in Africa where it is key food staple in the dry regions. In Niger, millets accounts for 75% of the total food consumption in the country. It is also important food source in Namibia and Uganda as millet shares 25 % and 20% of their total cereal food consumption respectively.

❖ Apart from Africa, millets consumption is important in different parts of India, China and Myanmar.

2. Animal Feed – Utilization of millet grain as animal feed is not significant, it is estimated that less than 2 million tons is fed to animal which is about 7% of total production. However, millet fodder and stover are a valuable and critical resource in the crop/livestock systems where millet is grown.

3. Other Uses - There are few other uses of millet. Small quantities of finger millet are used in Zimbabwe for commercial brewing and opaque beer. Food technologists have experimented with the incorporation of pearl millet into composite flour, but the commercial application of this technology is limited.

Step Taken for Promoting Millets:

Millet marketing channels in many developing countries are not well developed. There are three main reasons: scattered and irregular supplies, large distances between producing areas and the main urban centres

and limited demand in urban areas. Only 15-20 percent of the pearl millet produced in India, and perhaps 5-10 percent in Africa, enters the commercial marketing system.

➔ India Millet Initiative is trying to bring efficiency to the entire millet supply chain for better millet production, processing, and distribution. As a result, India recorded 27 per cent growth in millet production in 2021-22 as compared to millet production in the previous year was 15.92 MMT.

Major Initiatives by the Government of India to promote Millets-

1. In view of the nutritional value of the millets, the Government has notified millets as Nutri-cereals in April 2018.
2. Under the Sub Mission on National Food Security Mission (NFSM) -Nutri-cereals, is creating awareness among farmers for Nutri Cereals (Millets).
3. Research & Development support is also given to start-ups and entrepreneurs for developing recipes & value-added products. Eight bio-fortified varieties/hybrids of Bajra have been released for cultivation from 2018 to February 2022.
4. For the promotion of Indian Millets and its value-added products, the Centre has developed 30 e-Catalogues on each of the targeted countries comprising information on various Indian Millets.

5. NITI Aayog signed a Statement of Intent (SoI) with United Nations World Food Program (WFP)., focuses on mainstreaming millets and supporting India in taking lead globally in knowledge exchange using the opportunity of 2023 as an International Year of Millets.
6. Union Budget 2022-23 highlighted that support would be provided for post-harvest value addition, enhancing domestic consumption, and for branding millet products nationally and internationally.
7. In a webinar, held on February 24, 2022, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called upon the corporate world to come forward in branding and promoting Indian millets.
8. Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare to promote millets in the country and the world by organizing a 'Special Millets Lunch' for MPs in the Parliament Courtyard on December 20, 2022.
9. Central Government has requested State Governments/Union Territory Administrations to explore the possibility of introducing millets under the PM POSHAN Scheme.

Conclusion:

In India, millets were traditionally consumed, but due to the push given to food security through Green Revolution in the 1960s, millets were rendered as 'orphan crops' – less consumed and almost forgotten. Before

the Green Revolution, millets made up around 40% of all cultivated grains, which has dropped to around 20% over the years.

The Government of India realized the importance of millets in building nutritional security in the country and made several efforts such as gazetting millets as Nutri-Cereals, the celebration of the National Year of Millets in 2018, several small-scale policies on millets and proposing the International Year of Millets to UNGA. As a result, the global millets market is expected to have a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4.5 % between 2021 and 2026.