

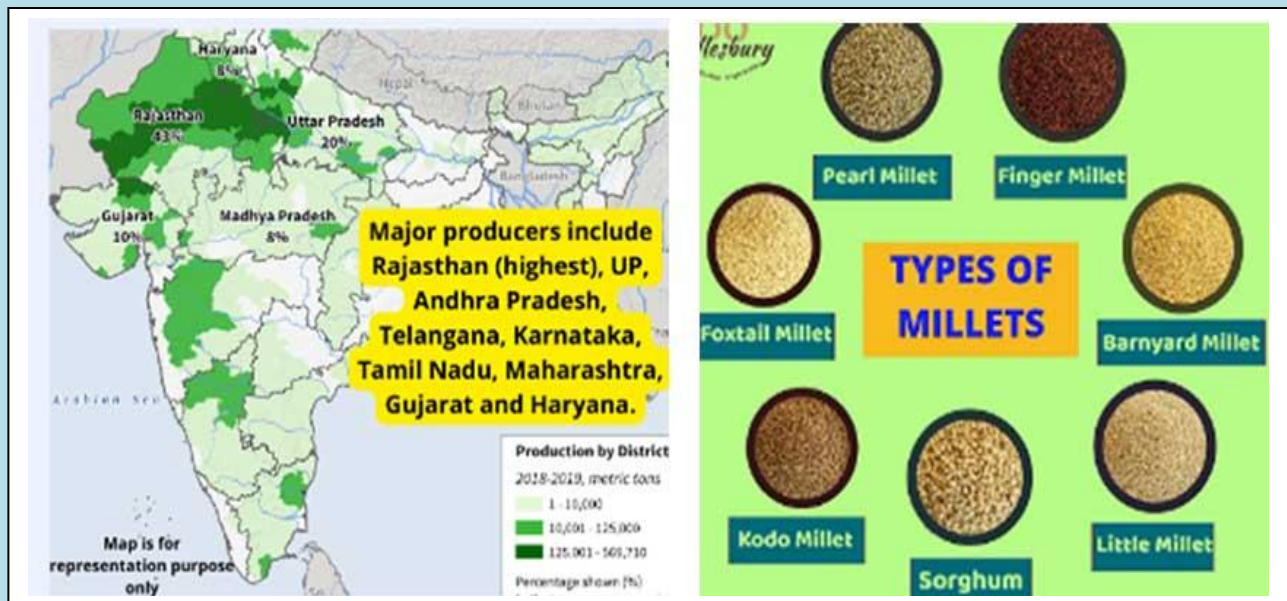
## Enhancing Millet Production and Procurement

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### Introduction

Millets are a highly varied group of small-seeded grasses, widely grown around the world as cereal crops or grains for fodder and human food. Millets are important crops in the semi-arid tropics of Asia and Africa (especially in South India, Mali, Nigeria, and Niger), with 97% of millet production in developing countries.

micronutrient deficiencies and ensuring nutritional security in India. However, the area dedicated to nutri-cereal cultivation has been steadily declining, posing a threat to food security. To reverse this trend, it is crucial for both central and state governments to prioritize and enhance millet production and procurement efforts.



This crop is favored due to its productivity and short growing season under dry, high-temperature conditions. The cultivation of millets, known as nutri-cereal crops, plays a vital role in addressing

Recognizing the significance of millets, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2023 as the International Year of Millets.

**Why are Millets Considered Important ‘Nutri-Cereals’?**

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- **Climate Resilient Staple Food Crops:** Millets are **drought-resistant, require less water and can grow in poor soil conditions.** This makes them a suitable food crop for areas with unpredictable weather patterns and water scarcity.
- **Rich in nutrients:** Millets are a good source of fiber, protein, vitamins, and minerals.
- **Gluten-free:** Millets are naturally gluten-free, making them suitable for people with celiac disease or gluten intolerance.
- **Adaptable:** Millets can be grown in a variety of soils and climates, making them a versatile crop option for farmers.
- **Sustainable:** Millets are **often grown using traditional farming methods,** which are more sustainable and environmentally friendly than modern, industrial farming practices.

### **The factor affecting the millet production and procurement Impact of the Green Revolution:**

The Green Revolution transformed Indian agriculture, significantly increasing crop productivity and overall production. While it successfully improved food security and reduced rural poverty, it also led to changes in cropping patterns. Water-intensive crops like paddy, sugarcane, and wheat expanded significantly, while the

cultivation of nutri-cereal crops diminished. This decline, from 44.34 million hectares in 1965-66 to 22.65 million hectares in 2021-22, poses a threat to nutritional security. **Low Profitability and its Causes:** The primary reason for the decline in nutri-cereal cultivation is low profitability. Long-term analysis of cost of cultivation data reveals that farmers growing crops like jowar, bajra, ragi, and maize have incurred heavy losses over the years. Despite the increased minimum support price (MSP) for nutri-cereals and other crops, profitability remains a challenge.

### **The Role of Procurement:**

Procurement of crops plays a pivotal role in incentivizing farmers to cultivate them. Successful examples can be seen in increased cultivation of paddy and wheat due to better procurement practices. However, there is a **lack of comprehensive procurement data** for nutri-cereal crops at the national level. While some states have made efforts to procure these crops, overall procurement levels remain insufficient. The percentage of crops sold under MSP is significantly lower for nutri-cereal crops compared to paddy and wheat.

### **The Need for Enhanced Procurement:**

To address the declining area under nutri-cereal crops and improve their profitability, both the central and state governments must significantly increase procurement to reach 15-20% of the crop

output under MSP. Such enhanced procurement will help align market prices with MSP, thereby benefiting farmers. India has lost a substantial 21.69 million hectares of nutri-cereal crop area between 1965-66 and 2021-22. Failing to make these crops profitable through improved procurement will not only impact the income of rainfed farmers but also exacerbate nutritional insecurity.

### **Some Factors Affecting the Consumption of Nutri-Cereals:**

- ❖ **Changing Dietary habits and preferences:** People's eating habits and preferences evolve over time. If there has been a significant shift in consumer preferences towards other types of breakfast foods or a growing preference for convenience foods, it could impact the demand for nutri-cereals.
- ❖ **Increased Competition in the Food Basket:** The cereal market is highly competitive, with numerous options available to consumers. There may be a proliferation of new breakfast products, including different types of cereals, granolas, breakfast bars, or yogurt-based breakfast options. This increased competition could result in a decline in market share for nutri-cereals.
- ❖ **Lack of Marketing and Innovation:** Nutri-cereals face challenges if there is a lack of effective marketing strategies or innovation in product development.

Consumers are often attracted to new and exciting products, so if nutri-cereals fail to capture their attention through marketing campaigns or fail to introduce new variations or flavors, it may lead to declining sales.

- ❖ **Changing Perception and Taste Preferences :** Taste preferences significantly impact the success of food products. If consumers perceive nutri-cereals as bland or unappealing in terms of taste, they may opt for other breakfast options that are perceived as more flavorful or enjoyable.

### **Benefits of Increasing Nutri-Cereal Cultivation:**

- ❖ **Climate Resilience:** Nutri-cereals are drought-tolerant, pest-resistant, and can grow in marginal lands with low inputs. They can adapt to changing climatic conditions and reduce the risk of crop failure.

**Sustainable Agriculture:** Nutri-cereals have low water and energy requirements and can improve soil health and biodiversity. They can also reduce greenhouse gas emissions and water pollution compared to rice and wheat.

- ❖ **Economic Empowerment:** Nutri-cereals offer income opportunities for small and marginal farmers, especially women and tribal communities, who are the main producers of these crops.

They can also create value addition and processing potential for rural entrepreneurs.

## What are the Constraints to Increased Millet Cultivation and Consumption?

### Decline in the Area Under Millet Cultivation:

Millets were earlier cultivated in an area of 35 million hectares of land. But it is now being grown in only 15 million hectares. The reasons for a shift in land use include low yields, time-consuming and laborious tasks in the processing of millets which are undertaken by women. Additionally, very little was marketed, and a tiny share of grain was processed into value-added products.

In 2019-20, the total offtake of cereals through the Public Distribution System (PDS) and the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and also school meals were around 54 million tonnes.

If about 20% of rice and wheat were to be replaced by millet, the state would have to procure 10.8 million tonnes of millet.

**Low Productivity of Millets:** Over the last decade, the production of sorghum (jowar) has fallen, the production of pearl millet (bajra) has stagnated, and the production of other millets, including finger millet (ragi), has stagnated or declined.

**Lack of Awareness:** Many people in India are not aware of the health benefits of millets, leading to low demand.

**High Cost:** Millets are often priced higher than traditional cereals, making them less accessible to low-income consumers.

**Limited Availability:** Millets are not widely available in traditional and modern (e-commerce) retail markets, making it difficult for consumers to purchase them.

**Perceived Taste:** Some people believe that millets have a bland or unpleasant taste, which discourages them from consuming them.

**Agricultural Challenges:** The cultivation of millets is often associated with low yields and low profitability, which can discourage farmers from growing them.

**Competition from Rice and Wheat:** Rice and wheat are staple foods in India and are widely available, making it difficult for millets to compete in the market.

conclusion

Enhancing millet production and procurement is a critical step towards agricultural growth, nutritional security, and sustainable development. While government initiatives are underway, comprehensive efforts are necessary to reverse the decline in nutri-cereal cultivation and leverage the numerous benefits they offer. Collaboration with stakeholders, innovative marketing

strategies, and consumer engagement will be key in achieving these goals.

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