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# The revival of ancient grains: Millets

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**Abstract**
UN has declared year 2023 as the international year of millet, India being the largest producer of millets has lots to gain by promoting millet as a main course of diet. Millets have proved their usefulness in dealing with malnutrition, management of diabetics, heart conditions and anemia; at the same time conserving water, sequestering carbon from atmosphere. Although millets were grown and used in Indian Subcontinent since ancient times, its use decreased significantly since green revolution came to India. To establish the millets as a mass consumed grain, its production must be increased and its processing must be made efficient, at the same time the logistic cost for transfer of millets from farm to fork must also be decreased.

**Keywords:** Millet, malnutrition, anemia, pandemic, climate change, sustainable, multigrain, hunger

## Introduction
There is a need for diversity on the land and on our tables. If agriculture becomes monoculture, it impacts our health and the health of our lands. Millets are a good way to increase agricultural and dietary diversity. India's effort has resulted into United Nation's declaration of year 2023 as international year of millets (IYM). India is on the way to become the global hub of millet production with more than 80% of Asia's share of production of millets.
A once-in-a-century pandemic followed by a conflict situation has shown that food security is still a concern for the planet. Climate change can also impact food availability. Millets are easy to grow, climate resilient, and drought resistant. They are good for the consumer, cultivator and climate. They are a rich source of balanced nutrition for consumers. They benefit cultivators and our environment since they need lesser water and are compatible with natural ways of farming.

## What are Millets?
They are a collective group of small-seeded annual grasses that are grown as grains crops, primarily on marginal land in dry areas of temperature, sub-tropical and tropical region. In India, millets can be clubbed into major, minor, and pseudo categories.

1. **Major Millets:** Sorghum (Jowar), Pearl Millet (Bajra), Finger Millet (Ragi/Mandua)
2. **Minor Millets:** Foxtail Millet (Kangani/Kakun), Proso Millet (Cheena), Kodo Millet, Barnyard Millet (Sawa/Sanwa/ Jhangora). Little Millet (Kutki)
3. **Pseudo Millets:** Buck-wheat (Kuttu) and Amaranth (Chaulai).

The top five state producing millets are Rajasthan, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana.
There is renewed interest among people for promotion of millets in day-to-day diet. A lot is being done to promote their uses; a lot is being said about their health benefits. It is equally important to note the right approach for their consumption.
The five main guidelines that must be kept in mind regarding millets consumptions-

**1. Eat millet as per season:** It will ensure not only availability of millets but also the nutritional requirement of human body
Bajara and Makai are for winter and must be eaten with ghee and jaggery.
Jowar must be for summer and eaten with chutney.
Ragi/Nachni can be eaten year-round.
The lesser-known millets' use must be linked to festivals.

**2. Eat millets with the right food combination:** The millets must be complemented with other food grains. This combination must balance the bodily requirements of protein, fibre, vitamins, calories etc.
For example, millets combined with pulses balance vitamins minerals with proteins and amino acids. Similarly, hard to digest millets must be taken with ghee or white butters.

**3. Eat millets in all forms:** Millets must be eaten in all forms like soaking, fermenting, roasting the whole grains, grinding them and taking them as sattu etc. This is to be done to avoid the taste fatigue while eating nutritious and healthy food.

**4. Don't eat multigrain:** Multigrain is not always good. There is a balance of nutrients, minerals, fibers, proteins in every millet. Hence mixing them would make this balance redundant.

**5. Don't replace all grains with millets:** The proper mixture of rice, wheat's with millets is way forward.

**Reintroducing Millets- International Year of Millet**
International Year of Millet 2023 aims to contribute to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good health and well-being), SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth), SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and production), SDG 13 (Climate action) and SDG 15 (Life on land).

1. The sustainable cultivation of millets can support climate-resilient agriculture Millets are hardy species, which can tolerate water stresses, at the same time they can help in carbon sequestering. Hence millets are suitable crops to fight with climate change (SDG 13) and to have a positive impact on life on land (SDG 15).
2. The sustainable production of millets can fight hunger and contribute to food security and nutrition Millets can be grown in water scarce dry regions; they are also nutrient rich compared to any other grains. Hence, they are better suited for the fight to end hunger (SDG 2).
3. Millets can be important part of a healthy diet; SDG 3 (Good health and well-Being) Millets are good sources of minerals, dietary fibre, antioxidants and protein. With a low glycaemic index, they are a good option for people with high-blood sugar. Millets are also gluten-free and an excellent and cost-effective source of iron for iron-deficient diets. As whole grains, each variety of millets provides different amounts and types of fibre. Dietary fibre has a role in regulating bowel function, blood sugar and lipids, and satiation.
4. Greater consumption of millets can offer opportunities to smallholder farmers to improve their livelihoods the consumption of millets would increase the market demand of millets, which is grown by some of the poorest regions and by some of the poorest farmers across world. Hence it would provide the decent works and economic growth (SDG 8) to some of the backward regions of the world.
5. Proper handling of millets is key to maintaining their high quality and nutritional benefits; SDG 2 (End Hunger) and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) - Innovative agro-processing, especially in the production of nutritious foods, could target both traditional and non-traditional markets such as youth, urban consumers, tourists, etc. This value addition could lead to market expansion, and increased food and nutrition security and incomes for smallholder farmers.
6. Greater trade in millets can improve the diversity of the global food system - Greater emphasis on millets production, which accounts less than 3% of global trade, would increase the resilience of food inflation in market. This not only improve the decent work and economic growth (SDG 8) but also the sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12) in the world.

**Conclusion**
IYM 2023 places the agenda of millet promotion on an international stage. In order to make this sustainable and truly manifest the spirit of the International Year of Millets, it needs to become a mass movement. Supporting farmers, creating an enabling environment for industry and startups, and increasing awareness among consumers are key to the future of millets. A number of steps have already been taken toward this through India's visionary leadership and the international agenda set for this year. Moving away from traditional foods reduces farming of traditional foods, which in turn has an adverse effect on soil health and ecology, putting not just our health but our entire future at risk.

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