



Revival of Millet Cultivation

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Why in News

An **International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)** supported initiative to **revive Kodo and Kutki Millets cultivation**, started in the year 2013-14 in Dindori district of Madhya Pradesh, has given new life to the forgotten crops.

- IFAD is a specialized agency of the **United Nations** and was one of the major outcomes of the **1974 World Food Conference**.
- Founded in 1977, IFAD **focuses on rural poverty reduction**, working with poor rural populations in developing countries to **eliminate poverty, hunger, and malnutrition**.

Key Points

- **About the Project:**
 - **Beginning:**

The project was started with **1,497 women-farmers from 40 villages** – mostly from the **Gonda and Baiga tribes** – growing these two minor millets (Kodo and Kutki) on 749 acres.
 - **Seed and Training:**

The identified farmers were **supplied good-quality seeds and trained by scientists from the Jawaharlal Nehru Agricultural University** in Jabalpur and the local Krishi Vigyan Kendra – on field preparation, line-sowing (as opposed to conventional broadcasting by hand) and application of compost, zinc, bavistin fungicide and other specific plant protection chemicals.
 - **Self Help Groups:**

A federation of the **farmers' self-help groups** undertook procurement of the produce and also its mechanical de-hulling (the traditional manual pounding process to remove husk from the grain was time-consuming).

- **Impact:**

- Helped in increasing the **number of farmers growing kodo-kutki** in the project area **to 14,301 in 2019-20**.
- Helped in increasing the acreage to 14,876 acres.
- Helped in **meeting nutritional goals** (fighting malnourishment among children).
- Helped in **reviving millet cultivation** (crop yields are 1.5-2 times higher than before).

Millets

- **About:**

Millets are often referred to as **Superfood** and its production can be seen as an approach for **sustainable agriculture** and a healthy world.

- **Millets in India:**

- The three major millet crops currently grown 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 Reviving Millet Cultivation:**

- **Nutritional Security:**

- 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.

- Its **high iron content can fight high prevalence of anaemia** in Indian women of reproductive age and infants.

- **Climate Resilient:**

- They are also harder and **drought-resistant crops**, which has to do with their **short growing season** (70-100 days, as against 120-150 days for paddy/wheat) and **lower water requirement** (350-500 mm versus 600-1,200 mm).

- **Economic Security:**

- As low investment is needed for production of millets, these can prove to be a sustainable income source for farmers.

- **Can Tackle Health Issues:**

- 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 carbohydrates in foods according to how they affect blood glucose levels).

- Millets are rich in **antioxidants**.

- **Challenges:**

- **Preference for Wheat:**

- Wheat has gluten proteins that swell and form networks on adding water to the flour, making the dough more cohesive and elastic.

- The resultant chapattis come out soft, which isn't possible with millets that are gluten-free.

- **Increased Demand for Processed Food:**

- India has seen 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.

- **National Food Security Act Promoting Other Grains:**

- In rural India, the **National Food Security Act of 2013** entitles three-fourths of all households to **5 kg of wheat or rice** per person per month at Rs 2 and Rs 3 per kg, respectively, thus **reducing the demand for millets.**

- **Indian Initiatives:**

- **Promoting Millets:**

- The Union Agriculture Ministry, in April 2018, **declared millets as “Nutri-Cereals”**, considering their “high nutritive value” and also “anti-diabetic properties”.
 - 2018 was also observed as ‘**National Year of Millets**’.

- **Increase in MSP:**

- The government has hiked the **Minimum Support Price (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.

- **International Initiative:**

The **United Nation General Assembly** adopted an India-sponsored resolution to mark 2023 as the **International Year of Millets**.

Way Forward

- Farming of millets **deserves encouragement** especially in view of their climate resilience, short cropping duration and ability to grow on poor soils, hilly terrains and with little rain.
- Because of their accessibility to the poor, they **can play an essential role in providing nourishment to people across all income categories** and supporting climate adaptation of rainfed farming systems.

Source:IE