



2023 is the International Year of Millets- FAO

India's proposal to observe an **International Year of Millets in 2023** has been approved at the by the **Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)**.

- India is celebrating **2018 as the national year of millets**.
- Millet is a collective term referring to a number of small-seeded annual grasses that are cultivated as grain crops, primarily on marginal lands in dry areas in temperate, subtropical and tropical regions.
- Some of the common millets available in India are Ragi (Finger millet), Jowar (Sorghum), Sama (Little millet), Bajra (Pearl millet), and Variga (Proso millet).

Millets as Smart Food

- 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.
- Millets can provide **nutritional security** and act as a shield against nutritional deficiency, especially among **children** and **women**. Its high iron content can fight high prevalence of **anaemia** in India women of reproductive age and infants.
- Millets are rich in **antioxidants**.
- 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 carbohydrate in foods according to how they affect blood glucose levels).

Millets as Smart Crop

- Millets are **Photo-insensitive** (do not require a specific photoperiod for flowering) & **resilient to climate change**.
- Millets **can grow on poor soils** with little or no external inputs.
- Millets are less water consuming and are **capable of growing under drought conditions**, under non-irrigated conditions even in very low rainfall regimes
- Millets have **low carbon and water footprint** (rice plant needs at least 3 times more water to grow in comparison to millets).
- Millets can **withstand high temperature**. In times of climate change Millets are often the last crop standing and, thus, are a good risk management strategy for resource-poor marginal farmers.

Way Forward

- Since India, which supports more than 15% of the world's population, but only has 4% of its water resources, promotion of millets could be helpful.
- To efficiently feed the growing population, increase in the production of and demand for millets is need of the hour.

- Policy changes need to address infrastructure development in regions growing millets.
- Cultivation of several varieties of millets should be encouraged and practised.
- The government should include millets in Public Distribution System (PDS) and nutrition programmes.
 - For example, Odisha has planned to introduce millets in PDS, mid-day meal scheme (MDM) and the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS).
- The government should incentivise farmers growing millets and practising mixed cropping, besides providing financial support for their processing, storage and marketing.
- Specific value addition practices, like grading, sorting, cleaning, processing and packaging should also be supported.

Additional Information

- FAO (specialized agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger) Council approved **India's membership** to the Executive Board of the United Nations **World Food Program (WFP)** for 2020 and 2021.
- World Food Programme is the **UN agency focused on hunger alleviation and food security**.
- Globally, it responds to emergencies making sure food reaches where it is needed, especially in times of civil strife and natural disasters.
- In India, WFP has moved from providing direct food aid to providing technical assistance and capacity building services to the Government of India.

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