

THE RETURN OF THE ANCIENT CROPS

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The modern-day agricultural ecosystem, exacerbated by extreme climates has become vulnerable to heatwaves, drought, floods and plagues of all sorts of pests, leading to potential widespread scarcities. With 1.4 billion people to feed, the Indian farming community is now standing at the crossroads, looking back at age-old traditions as a solution which are proving to be more beneficial than today's hybrid alterations.

RECLAIMING THE PAST - MITIGATING CLIMATE CHANGE

Indian farmers are tracing their steps back before the green revolution, re-adapting ancient crops like Millets, Foxnuts and Flaxseeds and switching from cultivating only cash crops to cultivating more diverse, resilient species leading to more sustainable agriculture.

Other than benefitting the end consumers, these ancient crops are making life easier for our farmers. The cost of harvesting millets or foxnuts or flaxseeds are comparatively lower than the staples like rice and wheat.



Even among the sand dunes of Rajasthan, where other cereals are likely to fail, millets grow well. They can also be stored for up to 3 years after harvesting and have a shorter growth cycle, alleviating all the issues faced by farmers such as low income and frequent destruction of crops.

Millets and flaxseeds are climate resilient crops, thriving in any weather conditions and soil quality, are usually rain-fed crops, are resilient to pests and do not need irrigation or chemical fertilisers or pesticides

Their selling price is providing farmers with a huge profit margin. A kilogram of fox nut costs anywhere between ₹500 and ₹1500.

Effectively saving water and soil quality, they are also more efficient in capturing carbon and release way less methane than rice fields.

All in all, the comeback of these ancient crops like millets, foxnuts and flaxseeds are a blessing. They are providing food, nutrition, and livelihood security to our farmers, while beating the adverse effects of climate change.

CROPS OF THE PAST "SUPERFOOD" OF THE FUTURE

Not so long ago, the market demand for cheap food was not only forcing farmers to grow cash crops all through the year, but was also putting an inequitable pressure on the available water resources and depleting unused soil of its crucial nutrients. The consequences of which were starkly visible to the consumers with the rise of cases of anaemia, stunted growth, and other disorders caused by the lack of proper nutrition, especially in children. Ailments such as diabetes and high blood pressure were on the rise, due to the lack of fibre content in Indian meals.

With reality biting hard, the trend however, seems to have taken a sharp U-turn. The Indian consumer is now laying more importance to enhancing their modern-day food and nutritional needs and has evolved from a bowl of rice, towards use of ancient crop food components like millets with amazing health benefits.



The snacking industry is innovating with millet-based snacks such as Millet mixtures, delectable millet bars, low-calorie millet cakes, millet muesli, bajra flakes, Jowar flakes, Ragi and Jowar Dosa Mix, Desert mix with Ragi as some examples. Thousands of years old ancient crops are now seeing a heroic comeback in the Indian household as healthy alternatives.

PROMOTION OF MILLET CULTIVATION AND CONSUMPTION HAS BECOME A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTOR TO MEETING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 2 OF THE UN – TO END HUNGER, ACHIEVE FOOD SECURITY AND IMPROVE NUTRITION AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE. THEY ALSO HELP ATTAIN UN'S SDG GOAL 3 OF, 'ENSURING HEALTHY LIVES AND PROMOTE WELL-BEING FOR ALL AT ALL AGES'.

Being rich in minerals such as calcium, phosphorous, iron, zinc, dietary fibre, polyphenols, vitamins, minerals, essential amino acids and protein they offer several health benefits by providing antioxidant, anticancer, anti-inflammatory, antifungal and blood clot inhibition properties. Finger millet has the richest source of calcium in its seeds compared with all other cereals and is highly recommended for strengthening bones and teeth, especially for children and aged people. Barnyard millet has a high source of iron and fibre. Other millets like foxtail millet provide rich minerals and vitamins; little millet is a good source of iron and fibre; pearl millet has a high source of proteins. India has always boasted of a strong agricultural legacy and the prerogative to bring back alternate ancient crops into the consumer's hand lies with the farmers and the government through policies and subsidies because there is not a better time than NOW to tap into this "superfood" to make life and living more sustainable.



AREA UNDER MILLET CULTIVATION IN INDIA 121.4 LAKH HECTARES



MAJOR MILLET GROWING STATES: KARNATAKA, ANDHRA PRADESH, TELANGANA, TAMIL NADU, UTTAR PRADESH, PUNJAB, RAJATHAN