

**Indian Farmer**

Volume 10, Issue 11, 2023, Pp. 455-456
 Available online at: www.indianfarmer.net
 ISSN: 2394-1227 (Online)

Popular Article**Benefits of millets**

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Received: 14/10/2023

Published: 03/11/2023

Millets are ancient grains that have been consumed by humans for thousands of years. These small-seeded grasses are native to many parts of the world and are becoming increasingly popular due to their numerous health and environmental benefits. Millets offer nutritional security and there is a need for promoting millets as they are highly nutritious. These have been important food staples in human history, particularly in Asia and Africa. Sorghum and other millets consumption usage as direct food has significantly declined over the past three decades. The decline in demand has led to the decline in millets production considerably in India. Production of sorghum in India has come down from 7 million tonnes during 2010-11 to 4.2 million tonnes during 2015-16; bajra production was reduced from 10.4 million tonnes to 8.1 million tonnes, production of ragi reduced to 2.2 million tonnes to 1.8 million tonnes and small millets production came down to 0.39 million tonnes from 0.44 million tonnes during the same period. According to the FAO statistics, 2017 millets production in the world was Sorghum is the fifth major cereal of the world after maize, paddy, wheat and barley as per FAO production data of 2014.

Millets have been cultivated and consumed in India for thousands of years. Traditional Indian diets in many regions, especially in the arid and semi-arid parts of the country, included millets as a staple. India cultivates a variety of millets, including finger millet (ragi), pearl millet (bajra), foxtail millet, little millet, barnyard millet, kodo millet, and proso millet, among others. In recent years, there has been resurgence in the interest and consumption of millets due to growing awareness about their health benefits, especially in urban areas. There has been a push from both the government and NGOs to promote millet cultivation and consumption.

The Government of India has undertaken multiple initiatives to promote millets. Various state governments, with the support of the central government, have launched missions or schemes to promote millet farming and consumption. Year 2018 was declared the "National Year of Millets" by the Government of India to emphasize their importance. The government has provided MSP for certain millets to encourage farmers to cultivate the. Institutions like the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and its affiliate bodies have been researching ways to increase millet yields, improve their nutritional quality, and find better farming practice. Recognizing the global demand for millets due to the health and wellness trend, India has been trying to tap into the export potential for millets.

The United Nations General Assembly declared 2023 as the International Year of Millets. This decision was made in recognition of the importance of millets to both food security and nutritional needs, especially in regions prone to drought and facing the challenges of climate change. India played a significant role in advocating for the International Year of Millets, given the country's long-standing relationship with the grain, both in terms of cultivation and consumption.

Here are some of the benefits of including millets in our daily life:

Nutritional Benefits

Rich in Nutrients: Millets are a good source of essential nutrients like vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. For instance, they are rich in magnesium, phosphorus, iron, calcium, zinc, and B-vitamins. **High in Fiber:** Millets have a high fiber content, which aids in digestion, prevents constipation, and promotes a feeling of fullness. **Protein Content:** They are a good source of protein, especially when combined with legumes, making it an excellent dietary option for vegetarians and vegans.

Low Glycemic Index: Some millet has a low glycemic index, which can be beneficial for people with diabetes as they release sugar slowly into the bloodstream.

Gluten-Free: For those with gluten intolerance or celiac disease, millets provide an excellent gluten-free grain alternative.

Digestive Health: The high fiber content in millets can aid in digestion, help in preventing constipation, and maintain a healthy gut flora.

Heart Health: Millets can help reduce cholesterol levels, thanks to their high fiber content and essential fats. This, in turn, promotes cardiovascular health.

Antioxidant Properties: Millets contain antioxidants like quercetin, curcumin, ellagic acid, and other beneficial compounds that help combat oxidative stress in the body.

Bone Health: Certain millets are rich in calcium, which can be beneficial for bone health and prevent osteoporosis.

Weight Management: Their high fiber content and lower calorie density can help in weight management by promoting a feeling of fullness and curbing overeating.

Environmental Benefits:

Water Efficiency: Millets require less water compared to many other staple crops, making them a more sustainable choice in water-scarce regions.

Pest Resistance: Many types of millet are naturally pest-resistant, reducing the need for chemical pesticides.

Soil Health: Growing millets can enhance soil health as they often require less fertilizer and can be grown in less fertile soils.

Diverse Culinary Use: Millets can be used in a variety of dishes, both savory and sweet, and can be incorporated into bread, porridge, salads, and more.

Economic Benefits: For regions where millets are native, promoting their cultivation can provide an economic boost to local farmers and promote crop diversity.

To leverage these benefits, it's essential to include millets as part of a balanced diet and combine them with a variety of other foods. Like all foods, they should be consumed in moderation, especially by those who might have specific health conditions or concerns.

Millets are a group of highly variable small-seeded grasses, and there are different types of millets, each with its unique nutritional profile. Below is a general overview of the nutritional content of some of the more common types of millets. These values are approximate and can vary based on variety, growing conditions, and processing. The quantities provided are for 100 grams of raw millet:

S. No	Common Name	Calories (kcal)	Protein (g)	Fat (g)	Carbohydrates (g)	Dietary fiber (g)	Calcium (mg)	Iron (mg)	Magnesium (mg)
1.	Pearl Millet	378	10.6	4.2	67.5	11.2	42	11.6	137
2.	Finger Millet	328	7.3	1.3	72	3.6	344	3.9	-
3.	Foxtail Millet	351	11.2	4	63.2	6.7	-	2.8	114
4.	Little Millet	341	7.7	3.6	67	7.6	-	130	9.3
5.	Barnyard Millet	342	11.2	3.6	65.9	10.1	-	95	15.2
6.	Kodo Millet	309	8.3	3.6	65.9	9	-	137	0.5
7.	Proso Millet	341	12.5	2.9	70.4	1.2	-	114	0.8

(Source: Indian Food Composition Tables, NIN – 2017 and Nutritive value of Indian foods, NIN – 2007)