

## Millets and World Food Day

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### *Abstract*

As the world World Food Day, celebrated annually on October 16, is important because it raises global awareness about hunger, malnutrition, and food insecurity, promoting sustainable agriculture and collective action to ensure access to safe, nutritious, and affordable food for everyone. It serves as a critical reminder of the ongoing work needed to achieve the sustainable development goal of Zero Hunger, highlighting the interconnected of food systems with poverty, climate change, and economic stability.

### **1. Importance of World Food Day**

- **Raises Awareness:** It educates the public and policymakers about the persistent challenges of hunger, malnutrition, and food wastage, which affect billions globally.
- **Promotes Food Security:** The day focuses on ensuring everyone has consistent access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food, stressing the importance of healthy diets and the right to food.
- **Drives Sustainable Agriculture:** World Food Day encourages investment in and promotion of sustainable farming methods and agrifood systems that are resilient and inclusive.
- **Fosters International Cooperation:** It unites governments, communities, schools, and individuals in a collective effort to combat hunger by addressing root causes like poverty and climate change.
- **Highlights Global Responsibility:** By marking the FAO's anniversary, it underscores the shared responsibility to take action against food-related challenges and achieve Zero Hunger by 2030.

- Celebrates Progress and Calls to Action: It acknowledges progress made in reducing hunger while also serving as a powerful call for increased commitment to achieving lasting solutions and better food futures for all.

Millets were highlighted at World Food Day in October 2024, as a sustainable and climate-smart food solution, particularly during the International Year of Millets (IYM-2023). The International Year of Millets, spearheaded by India and supported by 72 countries, promoted millets as a way to combat food and nutritional crises, with their resilience, nutritional density, and adaptability making them vital for food security and climate change adaptation. Millets, a group of small-seeded grasses, are widely grown around the world as cereal crops or grains for fodder and human food. They are ancient grains that have been a staple in various cultures for centuries. Recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in millets due to their nutritional benefits and suitability for sustainable agriculture. Millets offer a nutritious, gluten-free food, rich in fiber, protein, and essential micronutrients like calcium and iron, which promote digestive health, help manage blood sugar levels, and contribute to weight management, sustainable food source, thriving in arid conditions with minimal water and soil depletion, thus directly supporting World Food Day's focus on access to affordable, nutritious, sustainable agriculture and a healthier food for all.

## 2. Millets and World Food Day

- World Food Day (October 16): Celebrates the founding of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), United Nations in 1945, and highlights the fundamental right to food.
- International Year of Millets (IYM-2023): India proposed this UN declaration, which was adopted in March 2021, to increase awareness and demand for millets globally.
- Synergy: During the International Year of Millets, there was a significant focus on *millets* in relation to World Food Day, which promoted millet for sustainable food systems.

## 3. Why Millets are Important?

- Climate Resilience: Millets are drought-tolerant crops well-suited to dryland regions, playing a crucial role in climate change adaptation.

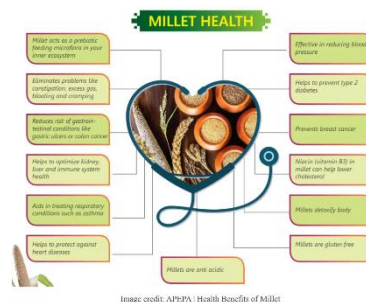


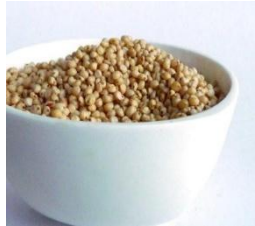






Image credit: APISPA / Health Benefits of Millet

- **Nutritional Value:** They are rich in protein, fiber, iron, calcium, and other essential minerals, with a low glycemic index and antioxidants beneficial for preventing chronic diseases like diabetes and hypertension.
- **Food Security:** As a hardy and adaptable grain, millets contribute significantly to food and nutritional security.
- **Sustainable Agriculture:** Promoting millets supports sustainable food systems, especially in dryland regions, and encourages diversified food production.

#### 4. Nutritional Value and Health Benefits of Millets

Millets encompass a diverse group of cereals and include Sorghum (Jowar), Pearl Millet (Bajra), Finger Millet (Ragi), Little Millet (Kutki), Foxtail Millet (Kakun), Proso Millet (Cheena), Barnyard Millet (Sawa) and Kodo Millet (Kodon). They are an important source of nourishment for millions of people in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. Though, all kinds of food provide nutrition at various levels, millets are the most underrated of them all. However, recent studies on nutritional value of millets have compelled the decision makers and business community to promote millets as a mainstream food item. Termed as Smart Food and Super Food, millets have multiple benefits and can largely contribute to nutrition security of people. The nutritional value and health benefits of few millets are:

<p><b>Ragi</b> – Also known as Finger millet, is considered as a good replacement for rice and wheat.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is a storehouse of proteins and amino acids while also being rich source of calcium and other minerals.</li> <li>• Including ragi in diet can be beneficial for controlling diabetes.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Bajra</b> – Also known as Pearl millet, Bajra is referred to as a miracle millet.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is not only rich in protein, fiber, calcium, and magnesium, but its iron content is eight times higher than that of rice.</li> <li>• Making bajra a part of your meal will constipation and digestion issues at bay.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Jowar</b> – Also known as Sorghum.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jowar is rich in calcium and also is a good source of protein, iron, and fiber.</li> <li>• Adding jowar to your diet will reduce cholesterol levels and can potentially promote weight loss too.</li> </ul>	

<p><b>Foxtail millet</b> – This millet is rich in dietary fiber and essential minerals like iron and copper.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interestingly, it contains smart carbohydrates that hinders sudden rise in blood sugar level.</li> <li>• It also promotes immunity and reduces levels of bad cholesterol.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Barnyard millet (Sawa)</b>– The nutritional content of this millet makes it one of the must items in our diet.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is a rich source of antioxidants and essential minerals like calcium and phosphorus contributing to body building.</li> <li>• It is high in fiber and contains six times more fibre than wheat that helps to maintain satiety thereby making it an ideal millet for weight loss.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Kodo millet</b> –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is an easy to digest millet rich in antioxidants and phytochemicals that help fight lifestyle-related health issues.</li> <li>• It has been found helpful in reducing joint pains and regularizing menstrual cycle in women.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Little millet (Kutki)</b> –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contrary to its name, this millet is a rich source of B- vitamins and essential minerals such as iron, calcium, zinc, potassium and the like.</li> <li>• It has fiber content and also provides essential fat to the body, the kind that helps to maintain body weight.</li> </ul>	

### Nutritional facts

Each 100 gram (g) of cooked millet contains the following:

- Protein : 3.51g
- Carbohydrate : 23.7g
- Dietary fiber : 1.3g
- Magnesium : 44mg
- Copper : 0.161mg

- Phosphorus : 100mg
- Manganese : 0.272mg

## 5. India's Role in Promoting of Millets

India is leading the global promotion of millets and implementing policies to boost production, consumption, and exports while preserving cultural heritage. The government has increased support for millet farming, organized awareness campaigns, promoted value addition through self-help groups and farmer-producer organizations, and invested in research to develop climate-resilient varieties and new products. These initiatives aim to improve nutritional outcomes, ensure food security, and support the economic well-being of farmers, establishing India as a global example for millet integration.

### Initiatives and Strategies

- International Year of Millets (IYM-2023): India successfully lobbied the United Nations to declare 2023 as the International Year of Millets, organizing a global conference to highlight millets' health benefits, climate resilience, and potential for food security.
- Policy and Financial Support: The government provide policy support through initiatives like the National Food Security Mission (NFSM) and the Promotion Linked Incentive Scheme PLIS) for the food processing industry to encourage millet cultivation and the development of value-added products.
- Research and Development: The Indian Institute of Millet Research (IIMR), along with other research institutions, focuses on developing high-yield, climate-resilient millet varieties and provides training to farmers and entrepreneurs on value-added products.
- Promotion and Awareness: India conducts extensive campaigns to raise awareness about millets' health benefits and cultural significance, aiming to make them a staple in Indian diets and a part of the global food culture.
- Value Addition and Entrepreneurship: Initiatives like the PLI scheme and support for Self Help Groups (SHGs) and Farmer-Producer Organizations (FPOs) promote value addition to millets, creating new products and boosting income opportunities for farmers.
- Global Outreach: India's Agricultural and Processed Food Products Exprot Development Authority (APEDA) has developed a strategy to promote Indian millets and millet-based products in the international market.

## 6. What Can We Do on World Food Day 2025?

World Food Day is not just a reminder of global issues but also an invitation for collective action. Each of us can contribute in small yet meaningful ways that bring us closer to a food-secure future. There are few ways to take part this year:

- Support local farmers and producers: Buy from local markets or cooperatives to strengthen community food systems and reduce environmental impact.
- Cut down on food waste at home: Plan meals, store food properly, use leftovers creatively, and be mindful of portions.
- Organize or join community events: Take part in food drives, awareness campaigns, or community meals to spread awareness and support those in need.
- Spread awareness about healthy eating: Share knowledge on balanced diets and nutrition through social media, schools, or community platforms.
- Donate to food banks or relief programmes: Contribute to organizations that provide meals and essential supplies to vulnerable families.
- Advocate for change: Raise your voice on policies and initiatives that promote sustainable farming, fair trade, and better access to nutritious food.

## 7. How Can We Ensure a Food-Secure Future?

Building a food-secure future requires action on multiple fronts. It is not only about producing more food but also about making it accessible, affordable, and nutritious for everyone. There are some ways forward:

- a. Promoting Sustainable Farming Practices: Farmers are at the heart of food security. Encouraging methods like crop rotation, organic farming, efficient irrigation, and reduced pesticide use help protect soil and water resources. These practices increase yields without harming the environment, ensuring that future generations can continue to grow food.
- b. Reducing Food Waste: A large share of food never reaches people's plates because it gets lost during harvesting, storage, transport, or is thrown away by consumers. By improving storage facilities, creating better supply chains, and raising awareness about mindful consumption, we can save millions of tons of food every year.
- c. Strengthening Local Food Systems: When communities rely heavily on imported food, they become vulnerable to global price shocks and supply disruptions. Supporting local farmers, food markets, and small-scale producers creates stronger, more resilient food systems that benefit both farmers and consumers.

- d. Making Nutritious Food Affordable for All: Food security is not just about calories but also about quality. Many families struggle to afford fresh fruits, vegetables, and protein rich foods. Policies that improve distribution, subsidies for essential items, and nutrition-focused programmes can help make healthy food more accessible.
- e. Using Innovation and Technology Wisely: From drought-resistant seeds to smart irrigation systems, technology can play a big role in meeting future food needs. However, innovation should be used wisely, keeping sustainability and affordability in mind so that farmers everywhere can benefit.
- f. Building Resilience Against Climate Change: Extreme weather events like floods, droughts, and heatwaves disrupt food production worldwide. Investing in climate-resilient crops, early warning systems, and disaster preparedness can reduce these risks and secure food supplies even during environmental crises.
- g. Encouraging Global and Community Partnerships: Food security cannot be achieved by one country alone. International cooperation, fair trade policies, and community-driven initiatives are essential. When governments, organizations, and individuals work together, the chances of building a food-secure future become much stronger.

## 8. Conclusion:

On World Food Day 2025, it is time to think about the real impact of our daily choices on nutrition and food waste. We can take action by planning balanced meals, reducing what we throw away, and supporting local food producers. Millets proving their potential as a future-proof food source by improving nutrition, supporting farmers, and promoting sustainable, climate-friendly agriculture.