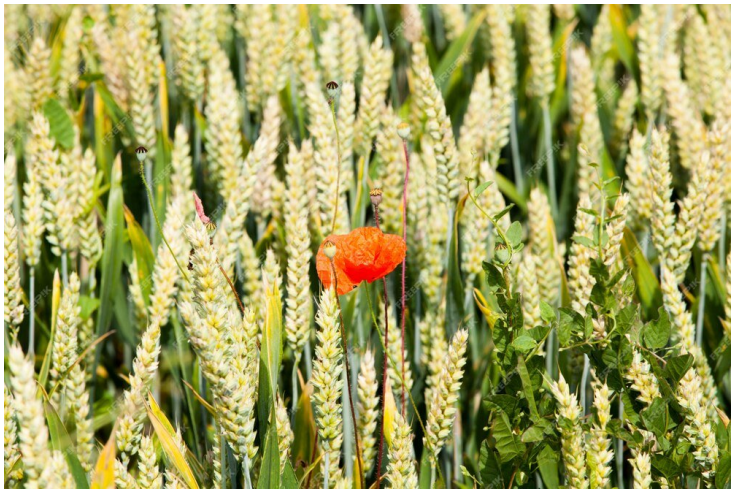
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International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) reveals transformative approach to Asian food security via millet supply chain expansion

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A sustainable food security solution for Asia lies in millet



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Asia, home to over 55% of the world's hungry, is facing ongoing threats to food security exacerbated by recent global crises. In a recent article by the IFPRI, co-authored by **Suresh Babu, Nandita Srivastava, Valeria PiÃ±eiro, and Brian McNamara**, the spotlight is on Asia's opportunity to enhance nutrition, sustainability, and resilience through the expanded cultivation of underutilized crops, particularly millets. Seizing this opportunity requires a supportive policy ecosystem, consistent interventions, and a conscious effort by stakeholders to improve production and consumption patterns at the local, national, regional, and global levels, the authors underlined.

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) sheds light on a transformative solution for sustaining food security in Asia in its recent article, co-authored by experts in the field. As the specter of hunger looms over more than 400 million people in Asia, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war, and climate-related shocks have further strained food supply chains. Rising temperatures and unpredictable weather patterns now threaten the production of rice and wheat, staples deeply ingrained in the region's agriculture.

IFPRI's call to action revolves around the cultivation and consumption of underutilized crops, with a spotlight on millets. This diverse group of small-grained dryland cereals, including **pearl, proso, foxtail, barnyard, little, kodo, browntop, finger, guinea millets, sorghum, and teff**, presents a promising alternative to the dominating rice and wheat farming systems.

The economic potential of millets is underscored by the stark statistics: as of 2022, Asian millet production stands at 15.6 million tons, a fraction compared to 699 mt for rice and 343 mt for wheat. IFPRI emphasizes that broad, sustained efforts, including evidence-based policies and investments, could significantly expand millet production, meeting the growing food demand sustainably. â??*Millets offer a range of advantages to farmers... staple crops of the semiarid tropics, they can provide farmers with multiple and diverse income streams,"* the article points out.

Sustainability in the Face of Climate Challenges

While major staples like rice face increasing threats due to climate change, millets emerge as resilient heroes. The authors highlights the efficient root systems and high tolerance of millets to high temperatures, droughts, and floods. A 2019 study suggests that expanding the production of coarse cereals, similar to millets, could result in lower greenhouse gas emissions and increased resilience.

Micronutrient malnutrition is a pressing issue in developing countries, and millets, especially pearl millet, emerge as nutritional powerhouses. Millets are rich in energy, carbohydrates, fiber, proteins, antioxidants, and vitamins. They are gluten-free, making them an excellent option for those with specific dietary needs. The article notes the success of biofortified pearl millets in reducing rates of anemia and stunting.

The authors *emphasizes that, in addition to their nutritional benefits, millets hold cultural value in Asia, serving as traditional staples for farmers and continuing to be consumed in various forms.*

Policy Roadmap For Millet Revolution In Asia

Despite the advantages, millets are often termed "forgotten" or underutilized crops. Governments' lack of support for millet production and limited public knowledge about their nutritional benefits pose significant obstacles. IFPRI urges governments to provide incentives comparable to other cereal crops and invest in infrastructure to overcome processing and storage challenges.

The article presents several policy recommendations:

Governments should;

- Promote millets to farmers and the public.
- Provide incentives comparable to other cereal crops.
- Focus research on improving millet productivity and nutrition content.
- Strengthen extension systems for millet cultivation practices.
- Improve market connectivity for farmers.

To encourage millet consumption, stakeholders should;

- Promote the health and climate benefits of millets.
- Share millet-based cooking recipes.
- Support local awareness campaigns.
- Provide marketing and branding support on international platforms.

*â??To encourage millet consumption, governments, NGOs, civil society, the private sector, and development partners should publicly promote the cropsâ?? health and climate benefits and share millet-based cooking recipes,'*Â advises the article.