

## **Millet farming can help fight falling water table**

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*Millet, the poor man's food might soon flood the rich man's palate. Dispelling myths about millets, the Millet Network of India (MINI) is working on a series of measures to increase the consumption of the commodity and to popularize its cultivation among farmers. Explaining the roadmap PV Satheesh, Convenor, MINI, in an exclusive interview with **B V Mahalakshmi** of FE said the group has created a seed bank across 70 villages in Andhra Pradesh and is working towards forming a national movement for adoption of millets into the farming system. Excerpts:*

### **What kinds of efforts are put in place for shifting farmers towards millets in the light of depleting water table?**

Steps have to be drawn for new sign posts for food and farming. There has to be a definite shift from total dependence on irrigation-based farming systems to a renewal of the non-irrigated rainfed indigenous farming systems. Moreover, millet farming liberates the farm from water-intensive crops such as rice and wheat which need around six million litres of water for one acre. Millet farms which include sorghum, bajra, barnyard millet, little millet, etc along with pulses. They do not require irrigation and are adapted to a wide range of ecological conditions. In fact, a vast dryland area is a boon as it does not demand rich soils.

### **What are the incentives you seeking for millet farmers?**

Millet farmers must need bonus as they protect from climate change, biodiversity and ecological. This system of farming has been incentivised and a new policy should emerge by putting millets into the public distribution system and other government food programmes such as ICDS, food for work and school mid-day meals. There is an urgent need for Indian policy makers to focus on millet farming and enact policies and create an enabling environment for millet farmers.

In the first phase, we have requested the Andhra Pradesh government to put millets into the PDS in phases. This will help create a huge market for millet farmers. In the pilot phase, we have also asked the Andhra Pradesh government to convert cultivable fallow lands into millet farms. The state has nearly 33 million hectares of land under cultivable wastes and current fallows. If these are converted for millet farming, the state can produce 25 million tonnes of millets and three million tonnes of pulses and fodder.

### **What is the importance of millets to fight climate change?**

To cater to the larger population, we are persuading the government to provide millets high priority in the National Food Security Act. In the context of climate change, rice and wheat cultivation is an expensive affair and they need standing water for its cultivation. In the wake of higher heat, drought, lower rainfall, water crisis and high malnutrition, these crops are biodiverse and can fix carbon into the soils becoming agents of carbon.

### **What are the awareness campaigns for promotion of millets? And what are insurance schemes available for millet growers?**

Post-Green revolution, there has been a systematic decline in the production of millets thereby reducing the cultivation area too. Meanwhile, we are talking to the insurance companies. There is discrimination among the insurers against millet farmers as there is neither insurance nor crop loan for this poor man's crop. For instance, a jowar farmer gets Rs 1,600 per acre as crop loan, while a grape grower gets Rs 1.2 lakh as crop loans. By this, the market demand is bound to increase for millets or 'Miracle Grain' and there is a hope for the millet farmers in the years to come with minimum support prices for the poor man's crop too....