

Humble millet viewed as hope of future food security

The Hindu, 13th September 2009

<http://www.thehindu.com/2009/09/13/stories/2009091354330500.htm>

BANGALORE: At a time when issues related to food security and malnutrition have come into sharp focus in the light of the drought situation, the Millet Network of India (MINI) has urged the State Government to add millet in the public distribution system (PDS) in Karnataka. Millet, that is drought resistant and withstands heat regimes, also has high nutritious value, the network said.

Karnataka, as a leading agrarian State in the country, must take urgent steps to draw up plans for the future of food and farming in the country, and rain-fed, millet-based farming systems have multiple advantages in relation to the climate change crisis, MINI convener P.V. Satheesh told presspersons here on Friday.

Minor millets such as sorghum (*jonna*), pearl millet (*sajja*), foxtail millet (*korra*), finger millet (*ragi*) and little millet (*saama*), besides providing security to the rural economy, are three to five times more nutritious than rice, he added.

He said: "Millet should be introduced in PDS in phases, starting with five kg out of the present quota of the 25 kg a month during 2010. It should be scaled up to at least 50 per cent by 2020."

This can be introduced in millet-growing districts in the first phase and later across the State.

Useful

Similarly, millet could be introduced in the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), school midday meals, welfare hostels and other government schemes, he suggested.

Mr. Satheesh urged the Government to implement a millet-based National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and fund farming operations, which would help poor small and marginal farmers.

"Karnataka can bring under millet cultivation nearly 4.2 lakh hectares under cultivable wastes and current fallows," he added.

Accord priority

The State should persuade the Union Government to accord high priority to millet in the National Food Security Act since it could play a critical role in tackling food and farming crises, especially when availability of water for agriculture was expected to plummet in future.

It should also convince the Centre to allocate at least 40 per cent of its food security budget in millet-based farming systems and food systems that would use millets as their major components.