

Encouragement for Millets in the recent Budget 2011-12

The collective efforts of MINI as an alliance of more than 140 individuals/ organisations, Farmers unions, Civil society groups, Scientists, Doctors, Nutritionists, Dieticians, Academicians, and Consumer. Over the last 2 years have been intensively making representation to the Government of India, Concerned Ministries of Rural Development, Finance, Food and Civil Supplies and Agriculture; the National Advisory Council and Empowered group of Ministers on the proposed National Food Security Bill, and hundreds of Member of Parliament and Members of Legislative Assembly. In a major development, during the Budget 2011-2012 presentation by Shri Pranab Mukherjee's, Union minister for Finance on 28th February 2011, it does appear that our efforts to bring key issues concerning millets to the forefront are budding now. Especially about government making specific financial provisions to support millet farmers, and more importantly to give a new profile and promotional strategies.

All the key issues concerning millets and the recommendations emerged through 2 major National Consultations on Millets, which have been regularly used in the policy advocacy work with the government and policy makers through representations and campaigning.

It is interesting that these points are being discussed at the government level and taken on board. Especially some of the key points that emerged from the First National Consultation on Millets, held on 5th-6th June 2008, co-organised by Millet Network of India (MINI), National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD) and Deccan Development Society (DDS) at Hyderabad. This Hyderabad Declaration on Millets, from which the 'I Endorse Millets' Campaign letter was drafted, stated specifically that:

"...we have also discussed the various facets of millet based farming systems, and have come to the conclusion that with their capacity of multiple securities such as Food Security, Fodder Security, Health and Nutritional Security, Livelihood Security and Ecological Security, millets are the food and farming future of India. This leads us to suggest the renaming of millets as Nutri-cereals."

In this regard, we are happy to share with you that in the recent 28th February 2011, Budget presented by Union Minister of Finance Shri Pranab Mukherjee's in specific: along with having provided budgetary allocations of about Rs 300 crore (though not sufficient, but good enough as a beginning) to encourage millet farmers, have been sensitivity and used the suggested term Nutri-cereals for millets, rather than the often used term Coarse cereal/ Grains...

"Nutri-cereals, (56) While we ensure food for all, we must also promote balanced nutrition. Bajra, jowar, ragi and other millets are highly nutritious and are known to possess several medicinal properties. The availability and consumption of these Nutri-cereals is, however, low and has been steadily declining over recent years. A provision of Rs 300 crore is being made to promote higher production of these cereals, upgrade their processing technologies and create awareness regarding their health benefits. This initiative would provide market linked production support to ten lakh millet farmers in the arid and semi-arid regions of the country. The programme would be taken up in 1000 compact blocks covering about 25,000 villages. This will help improve nutritional security and increase feed and fodder supply for livestock." (Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee's Union Budget speech for 2011-12, Speech of Pranab Mukherjee, Minister of Finance)

It is in this context, that I appeal to all our MINI partners, to take note of this and start thinking about how best we can further our policy advocacy work at your respective states, so that what

ever small budget of Rs 300 crore allocation has been made is not spent away by the government to support industrial processing of millets or, support monocropping chemical farming of millets, but bring to their attention the multiples securities the millet based biodiverse farming system provides,

If and only if we bring to notice the ecological aspects of these farming systems we will succeed, and we need to argue that: "Millets can be cultivated without using groundwater or any irrigated water. Their energy requirement from source as chemical fertilizers, pesticides, water and power be near zero. Therefore this production system must be honored through offering socio-ecological bonus to millets growing farmers. Appropriate institutional mechanisms must be developed to assess this."

We request for your open discussion on this and please send in your suggestions comments and any further ideas and developments that are taking shape in your respective states.