

Nutritional Importance of Millets and Scenario of Millets in India

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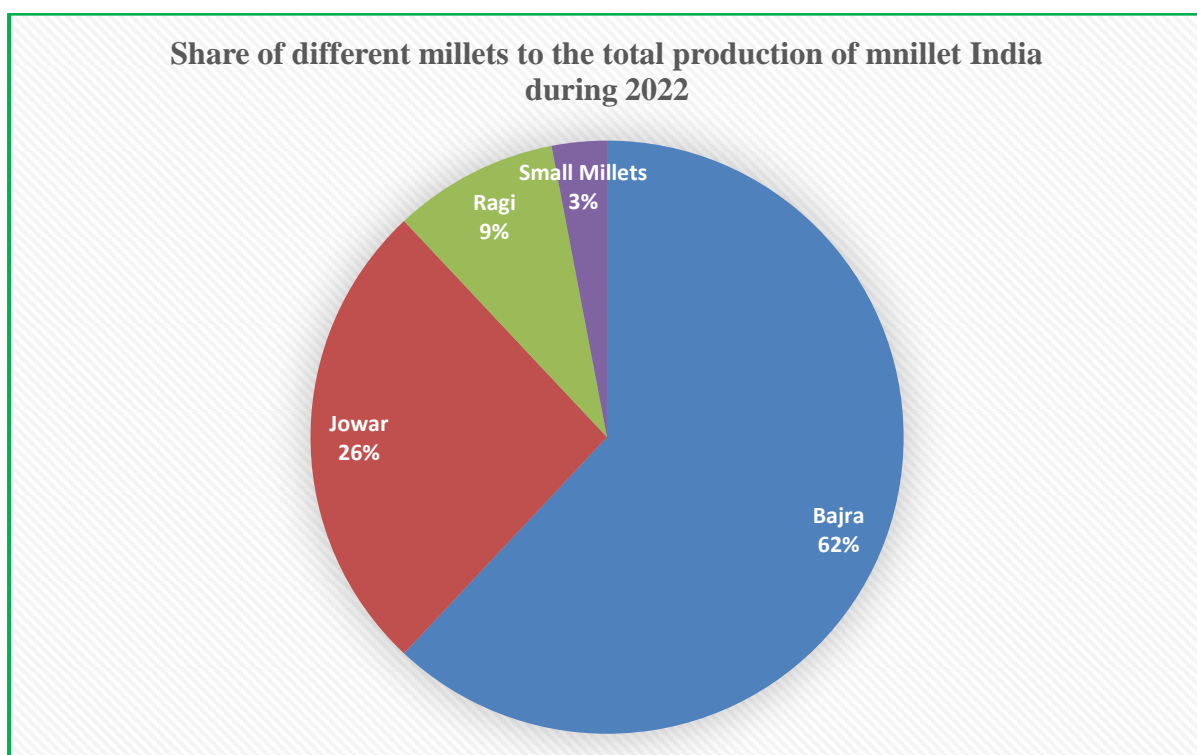
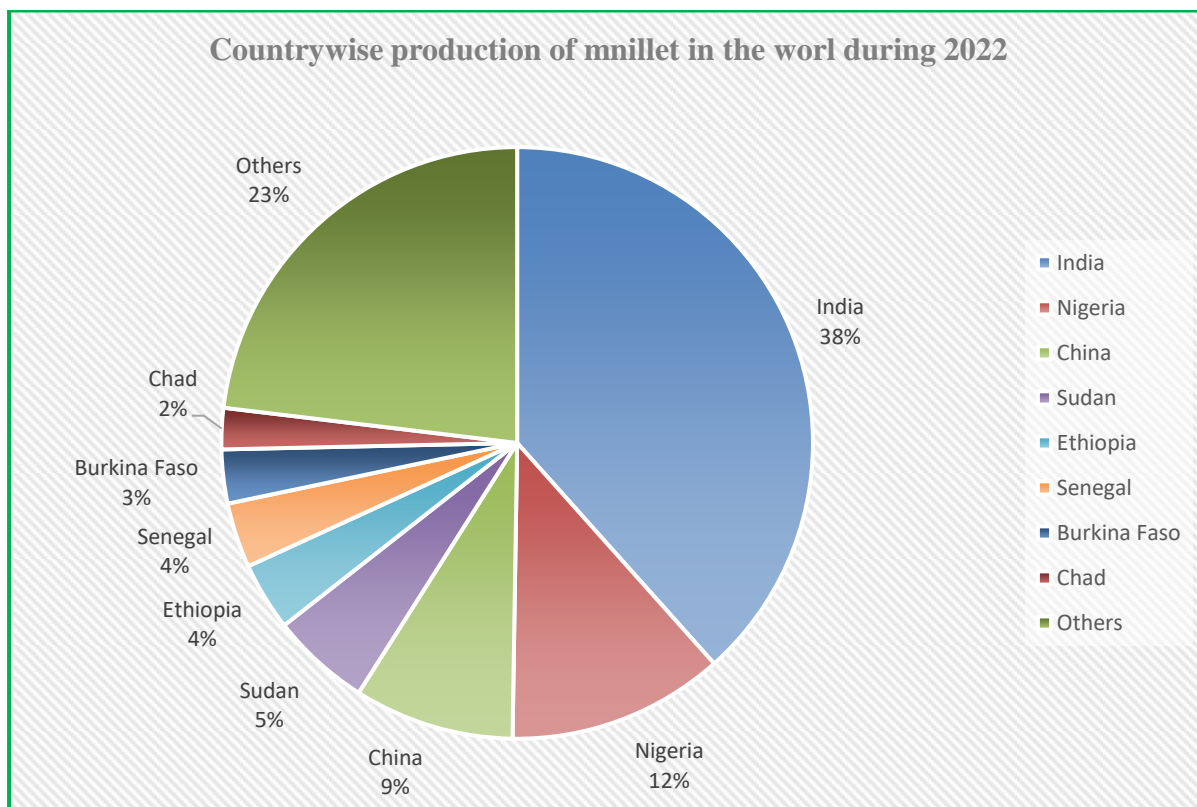
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Millet is one of the oldest cultivated grains in the world and has been grown throughout Africa and Southeast Asia for thousands of years. Today, it's one of the most important cereals around and is a staple crop for humans and animals. The small round grains are so important because they're hardy and easy to store for years without insect damage. Millets include three major Sorghum (Jowar), Pearl millet (Bajra), Finger millet (Ragi) and six minor crops (Barnyard (Sanwa), Proso (Chenna/Barri), Foxtail (Kakum), Kodo, Brown Top and Little (Kutki/Shavan). Millets are the excellent source of essential nutrients they are also called as 'nutritious cereals'. The Indian Millets are nutritionally superior to wheat and rice as they are rich in protein, vitamins, and minerals. They are also gluten-free and have a low glycemic index, making them ideal for people with celiac disease or diabetes. India is the world's largest producer of millets with a share of 38.4% of world's production (FAO, 2023). Millet is rich in niacin, which is important for healthy skin and organ function. It also has beta-carotene, especially the dark-colored grains, which converts to vitamin A, helps your body fight free radicals, and supports your immune system. Millets are cereals, similar to rice and wheat, but are more nutritious in terms of proteins, minerals and vitamins. Being excellent source of essential nutrients, they are also called as 'nutritious cereals'. Millets are the excellent source of essential nutrients; they are also called as 'nutritious cereals'.



Among all the states, Rajasthan has covered largest area under millets cultivation followed by, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Millet cultivation and production is found to be higher in the western part of India. In 2021-22, Rajasthan contributed to ~36% (~4300K hectares) of the total area for millet cultivation in India. It is also the largest producer of millet in India. ~26% (more than 4000K tonnes) of Indian millet production is from Rajasthan. Being hardy crops, they can withstand extreme temperatures, floods and droughts. Being a C4 group of cereals, millets convert more carbon dioxide to oxygen, contributing in mitigating climate change through their low carbon footprint



Millets need very little water for their production. Compared to irrigated commodity crops currently promoted by policy measures, millets require just around 25% of the rainfall regime demanded by crops such as sugarcane and banana. The United Nations General Assembly declared- 2023 the International Year of Millets (IYM 2023).GOI has declared millets as- ‘Powerhouses of nutrition’/ Nutri cereals/Climate resilient crops/next super food. Millets are also known as Famine reserves. Government of India (GOI) in Budget 2023-24 conferred research institute as ‘Centre of Excellence’ for sharing best practices, research and technologies at the international level.

Conclusion

Millets bridge the gap between tradition and health-conscious diets with their ancient appeal. With more people becoming aware of millets’ nutritional benefits and versatility, their status in Indian households is slowly returning. One way to double farm incomes and encourage farm diversification is to make millet production attractive by introducing millet cultivation in areas where farmers’ distress is visible. Millets are known for their climate-resilient features including adaptation to a wide range of ecological conditions, less irrigational requirements, better growth and productivity in low nutrient input conditions, less reliance on synthetic fertilizers, and minimum vulnerability to environmental stresses. Millets can counter many of the adverse effects of climate change better than most other food crops. They grow in almost any type of soil – sandy or with varying levels of acidity. They hardly need any fertilisers or irrigation. The inter-cropping of millets with other crops is especially beneficial because the fibrous roots of millet plants help in improving soil quality, keep water run-off in check and aid soil conservation in erosion-prone areas, thereby restoring natural ecosystems.