



RESEARCH ARTICLE

MILLETS: TRADITIONAL REMEDY FOR GOOD HEALTH

¹Dr. Anupriya Jha and ²Dr. Ashwini Katole

¹Senior Resident, Department of Community and Family Medicine, All India Institute of Medical sciences (AIIMS), Raipur; ²Assistant Professor, Department of Community and Family Medicine, All India Institute of Medical sciences (AIIMS), Raipur

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*Corresponding author: *Ashwini Katole*

ABSTRACT

The resurgence of millets represents a harmonious blend of tradition and innovation, offering a nutritious, sustainable, and versatile food option for the modern consumer. Millets, known for their historical significance and nutritional superiority, are making a comeback in contemporary diets due to their health benefits and environmental sustainability. These ancient grains, with their rich cultural heritage, have been reintroduced in modern times, supported by initiatives to promote their cultivation and consumption. Despite facing challenges such as lack of awareness, infrastructure, market competition, production costs, and skilled labourers, efforts are underway to overcome these obstacles through public awareness campaigns, technological advancements, and policy incentives. The future outlook for millets is promising as they stand poised to meet the increasing demand for affordable yet healthy foods amidst climate change challenges. Embracing millets not only promotes health but also supports environmentally conscious food choices, making them a valuable addition to the global food landscape.

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INTRODUCTION

Millets have been a staple food for centuries, known for their nutritional value and versatility.(1) The phrase " Traditional remedy for good health " suggests a blend of tradition and innovation. Millets fit into this phrase as it represents a fascinating fusion between tradition and modernity. Before becoming less popular during the Green Revolution, which prioritised high-yield crops like rice and wheat, these ancient grains were staples in many cultures.(2) However, over time, people began to realize the inherent benefits of millets - both in terms of nutrition and ecological impact - which led to their gradual resurrection. (3) In this article, we will review how millets the traditional grains, are being reintroduced in modern times and we will explore the reasons behind this revival, its implications, and what the future holds for millets.

Historical Context: Millets have deep roots in human history, being cultivated for thousands of years. For millennia, millet played a significant role in human dietary habits across Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America.(4)They thrived under adverse weather conditions, making them ideal candidates for regions prone to drought or extreme temperatures.

Moreover, they contained higher levels of essential amino acids than most cereal grains available at that time. Millets are incredibly versatile in the kitchen, suitable for various dishes ranging from porridge to baked goods. Their mild flavour profile allows them to be incorporated into diverse recipes, catering to different culinary preferences Traditional societies have valued millets for their health benefits and sustainable cultivation practices. Despite their advantages, however, the advent of industrialized farming methods saw a decline in their usage.(2)

Nutritional Value: In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in millets due to their health benefits and environmental sustainability. The modern consumer is increasingly seeking nutritious and eco-friendly food options, leading to a renewed focus on these ancient grains. Recently, scientists have discovered that millets contain several vital nutrients including iron, calcium, potassium, magnesium, phosphorus, zinc, copper, manganese, selenium, and vitamin E. Additionally, they provide a good source of dietary fibre, proteins, and antioxidants. (5)Furthermore, some studies suggest that consuming millet may help reduce cholesterol levels and improve blood sugar control.

They improve digestion thereby helping in weight management, and reduce the risk of chronic diseases like diabetes and heart conditions. Thus, incorporating millet into one's daily routine could lead to better overall health outcomes.(6)

Ecological Advantages: Apart from providing excellent nutrition, millets also boast impressive ecological credentials. For instance, they require significantly less water than other major crops like rice and wheat. Also, since they grow well even when soil moisture is low, they don't need irrigation systems, reducing the strain on natural resources. Finally, because they do not require large amounts of fertilisers or pesticides, they minimise pollution caused by chemical runoff. This makes millets an environmentally friendly choice, contributing to sustainable agriculture practices and biodiversity conservation (7).

Revitalization Process: Over the past few decades, governments around the world have begun investing heavily in initiatives aimed at bringing back millets. One example is India, where the government launched Operation Flood II (OFII) in 2006 to encourage milk producers to switch to millet instead of using expensive feedstuffs. Another initiative was the National Food Security Mission (NFSM), introduced in 2007, which focused on improving crop productivity through scientific interventions. Both programs proved successful, resulting in increased demand for millets.(8)

Market Potential: Aside from the positive effects on health and the environment, millets hold great promise commercially too. The reintroduction of millet into the market has also brought about economic benefits. By promoting the cultivation and consumption of millets, there is potential for economic growth in rural areas where these grains are traditionally grown. (9)This resurgence can create new market opportunities for farmers and contribute to the diversification of agricultural practices. According to estimates, global sales of millets reached USD 4 billion in 2018 alone. And while this figure might seem small relative to other commodities, experts believe that it could double within five years if current trends persist. This means that businesses looking to capitalize on emerging markets should consider adding millets to their product lines.(8)

Challenges Faced: Despite all the progress made so far, millets still face certain hurdles. Firstly, many people remain unaware of their existence and benefits. Secondly, there isn't enough infrastructure dedicated solely to producing and distributing millets. Thirdly, competing products like corn and sorghum make it difficult for millets to establish themselves in the marketplace. Fourthly, the cost of production remains relatively high compared to cheaper alternatives. Lastly, there aren't enough skilled labourers trained specifically to work with millets (10).

Overcoming Obstacles: To address these issues, stakeholders must invest in raising public awareness regarding millets' merits. Governments could fund educational campaigns targeting schools, colleges, and community centres. Companies manufacturing millet-based products could sponsor promotional events showcasing their wares. Meanwhile, researchers should develop efficient techniques for harvesting, storage, transportation, and marketing millet.

Finally, policymakers ought to incentivise farmers to shift towards millet cultivation via subsidies and tax breaks.(4)(3)(11)

Future Outlook: Looking ahead, the prospects for millets appear bright. As climate change continues to affect our planet, the ability of millets to survive harsh conditions becomes ever more important. Plus, as populations expand, the demand for affordable yet healthy foods increase exponentially. Therefore, it seems likely that millet will play a central role in meeting these demands.(9) Ultimately, then, the future belongs to those who embrace millets wholeheartedly

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the resurgence of millets represents a harmonious blend of tradition and innovation. As old wine in a new bottle, millets offer a nutritious, sustainable, and versatile food option for the modern consumer. Embracing millets not only promotes health but also supports environmentally conscious food choices. By combining tradition with modern needs, millets stand out as a valuable addition to contemporary diets. In other words millets represent a unique combination of historical significance, nutritional superiority, environmental friendliness, commercial viability, and cultural resonance. While they currently face several challenges, ongoing efforts to raise awareness, enhance technology, and stimulate investment indicate that millets will soon regain their rightful place amongst humanity's favourite foods. The journey of millet from being an ancient grain to a modern superfood is a testament to their enduring appeal and relevance.

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