



Wednesday, November 23, 2011

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Top News

Millets body launches Take Voices campaign seeking inclusion in food bill

Wednesday, November 23, 2011 08:00 IST
Nandita Vijay, Bangalore

Millets Network of India (MNI) is aggressively working to ensure that millets are included in food grains in the National Food Security Bill (FSB).

In this regard, it has initiated a national campaign - Take Voices to MPs - wherein the public has been asked to send postcards and emails to them highlighting the benefits of millets in daily diets and their indispensability to the public distribution system (PDS).

"During the winter session of Parliament, the crucial Food Security Bill is due to be discussed and we wish to emphasise upon them, the importance of the provision that talks of including millets in food grains. The other effort is to underscore the significance of the provision on decentralised PDS, as envisaged in Chapter VII of FSB," explains Sandeep K, programme coordinator, Deccan Development Society, Hyderabad, and national coordinator, Millet Network of India.

"The campaign aims to urge the MPs to take cognisance of the significance of these provisions in the FSB, and ensure that the debate for the passage of this Bill encompasses these issues, strengthens them, and ensure that they are present in the Act that emerges from such debates," he adds.

In this regard, MNI has highlighted the benefits of millets, which are known to have high level of nutrition content than rice. The network has called upon public to send 'en-masse' postcards to respective Members of Parliament (MPs) underscoring the two points on the need for their inclusion in PDS and better nutritive value compared to rice. "This envisages involvement of members of communities on a massive scale, and the mailing of thousands of postcards to the MPs, a number large enough to draw their attention to the issues on hand," Sandeep said.

According to MNI, for millet-activists the draft FSB makes an important mention in relation to millets in PDS. Since its inception, PDS has been based entirely on rice and wheat, to the exclusion of millets. While it has served the nation well by providing the poor with the much-needed food grains, it has suffered from two serious flaws, the effects of which are being felt only now. One is the growing incidence of malnutrition and the other, the diabetes cases in India, owing to the PDS rice scheme.

It has been scientifically proven that millets are miles ahead of rice and wheat in terms of nutritional content. For instance, millets contain 10.6 gm of protein per kilogram, as against rice which contains only 6.8 gm. Similarly, millets are also richer in fibre (1.3 gm to 10.1 gm), minerals (1.9 gm to 4.4 gm) and calcium (31 mg to 344 mg), in comparison to rice and wheat. All these characteristics make millets the ideal solution for the climate crisis that is looming ahead of India.

Meanwhile, the ability of rice and wheat to survive climate crisis is suspect. Studies indicate that a change of 2 degree Celsius in the temperature of earth would render wheat incapable of growing, as wheat is a highly thermal-sensitive crop. Rice, which



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requires stagnant water to grow (a kilogram of rice needs 4,000 litres of water), would also be unsuitable in the face of global warming as rice fields emanate methane, a greenhouse gas.

Furthermore, millets are crops that can survive the harshest and the most vagarious of climatic conditions. It has been shown that millets can grow in conditions of low rainfall—requiring as little as 300 to 350 mm of rainfall, depending on the type of millet—and in poor and heavily degraded soils; which are the characteristic traits of the arid and semi-arid regions, and of the hilly regions of India. While wheat and rice only provide food security, millets provide multiple securities: food, fodder, health, nutrition, livelihood and ecological benefits to rural households; making them the crops of agricultural security, according to MNI.

