

Hyderabad | Posted on Dec 01, 2011 at 11:17am IST

Add millets in government meal schemes



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HYDERABAD: "We need to move beyond Public Distribution Systems to Public Food Systems.

The absence of a clear local procurement policy will take the soul away from the new Food Security Act", cautioned PV Satheesh, National Convenor, Millet Network of India (MINI) and Director, Deccan Development Society (DDS), at a press conference held in the city on Wednesday.

The meeting sought to bring to the government's notice the urgent need to look beyond just a Public Distribution System (PDS) to a Public Food System (PFS) by introducing millets in all PFSs, such as the Aanganwadis, Midday Meals and Social Welfare hostel programmes, so as to shape a nutritious India. Satheesh also demanded a stronger local procurement provision in the Food Security Bill by opening up procurement centres within a radius of 10 kilometres wherever feasible and providing on-spot payment to farmers. This move, according to Satheesh was required to ensure that the introduction of millets in PDS would continue to be pro-poor and benefit all farmers in the rainfed regions of India.

He also took the opportunity to thank the government on behalf of the Millet Network of India (MINI), an all India network of farmers, scientists, nutritionists, environmentalists and other civil society activists, for the introduction of millets in the PDS and other public food systems. "A local procurement clause will retain the advantage of this move, not just from an economic point of view but also from the ecological angle since local procurement will avoid food miles, save on climate change impacting use of petrol based fuel and make available locally grown fresh foods", he added.

Salome Yesudas, nutritionist and member of DDS also gave a broad description of the nutritional value (high proteins, fat and iron) of various millets such as bajra, ragi, korra, aargulu etc over rice and wheat, with regards data provided by the National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) and called for their induction into public food systems for shaping a more nutritional population.

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