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Govt presents humble millet in a different way; declares as nutri-cereals

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The ministry of agriculture and farmers welfare has declared millets like jowar, bajra, ragi, and kutki as nutri-cereals, as per a recent notification.

This has been done since millets are considered to hold great potential in substantially contributing to food and nutritional security of the country and thus they are not only a powerhouse of nutrients, but are also climate-resilient crops and possess unique nutritional characteristics.

In view of these strong points, millets such as Sorghum (Jowar), Pearl Millet (Bajra), Finger Millet (Ragi/Mandua), Minor Millets i.e., Foxtail Millet (Kangani/Kakun), Proso Millet (Cheena), Kodo Millet (Kodo), Barnyard Millet (Sawa/Sanwa/ Jhangora), Little Millet (Kutki) and two Pseudo Millets (Black-wheat (Kuttu) and Amaranthus (Chaulai) which have high nutritive value as nutri-cereals with focus on production, consumption and trade.

Taking a positive note, Purna Gupta, assistant professor, food technology & nutrition, Lovely Professional University, and a partner with Food Safety Knowledge Assimilation Network (FSKAN), a body under FSSAI, said, "The decision of the Indian government to give special consideration to millets is highly appreciated and welcomed. Millets are generally categorised as under-utilised crops, having great nutritional significance."

She added, "They possess high nutrient content which includes protein, essential fatty acids, dietary fibre, B-vitamins, minerals such as calcium, iron, zinc, potassium and magnesium. They help in rendering health benefits like reduction in blood sugar level (diabetes), blood pressure regulation, thyroid, cardiovascular and celiac diseases. Pseudocereal like buckwheat has beneficial nutraceutical properties and its gluten-free nature can play an important role in preventing celiac problem and the flour is also rich in lysine, iron, magnesium and copper as compared to wheat flour."

Gupta mentioned, "Its starch content has an important role in the preparation of low glycemic index foods. Thus can be used as functional food in many food preparations. Most of the consumers are not aware of the great advantages that these cereals can provide and hence not using them. Now as the government has

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ranked and given special place to these crops, everyone will become more aware of their proper utility, especially the agricultural farmers as most of these crops are being used as animal food only.”

The notification highlighted that according to a recent research findings, it is showed that millets contain anti-diabetic properties and millet-based food has low Glycemic Index (GI) and reduces the postprandial blood glucose level and glycosylated haemoglobin. To publicise the consumption of these cereals, the government has already decided to include millets in the Public Distribution System (PDS) with the objective of improving nutritional support of the country.

Food technologists have already understood the importance of these crops and has taken many initiatives to utilise these crops for food product development so that maximum benefits and advantages can be availed by the consumers. Some examples are pearl millet in bread and bun preparation, buckwheat biscuits and so on.

Gupta informed, “The reason behind this move is to make food available to the growing population and at the same time provide maximum health benefits to the consumers. Because of the changing environmental conditions, our body is exposed to various types of diseases at very early stage and food is one of the natural way for curing many diseases.”