

Editorial

The United Nations General Assembly at its 75th session in March 2021 declared 2023 the International Year of Millets (IYM 2023). FAO is the lead agency for celebrating the Year in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders. Millets can grow on arid lands with minimal inputs and are resilient to changes in climate. They are therefore an ideal solution for countries to increase self-sufficiency and reduce reliance on imported cereal grains. Millet, a grain mainly grown and consumed in developing countries until recently and once considered a poor man's staple, is quickly becoming a favourite globally among those affected by climate change because of its ability to thrive in harsh and arid environments. Millet refers to several varieties of small-seeded grasses that are cultivated as grain crops. Amongst these, pearl millet (*bajra*), finger millet (*ragi*) and sorghum (*jowar*) are the most popular. Pearl millet accounts for close to half the global millet output. Minor millets include foxtail, barnyard, proso and others. These crops are grown in marginal and dry lands in several countries in Asia and Africa, with India being the world's largest millet producer. Its drought-resistant quality makes it attractive as many parts of the world begin to experience a water supply shortage. Organizations like the International Crop Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), are investing in and developing a strand of pearl millet with greater resistance to drought and disease to address climate change and the myriad of new challenges it is presenting. Funding for this project is ensured until 2020 in partnership with The Crop Wild Relative Project, a global organization that collects and conserves the wild relatives of 29 cultivated crops to ensure future crop diversity, and Crop Trust, an international organization dedicated solely to conserving crop diversity. In addition to millet's attractive growth characteristics, it is one of the most nutritious and anti-allergenic grains available. Millet is gluten-free, making it an excellent choice for the millions of people around the world who suffer from Celiac disease or have a gluten sensitivity. It is high in B vitamins, calcium, iron, potassium, zinc, magnesium, and fats. And it is an excellent source of protein and dietary fiber. Millet production is projected to sharply increase due to its many health benefits and ability to grow in a variety of climates. Now that 97 percent of actively publishing climate scientists agree climate change is real, countries and organizations are beginning to take more meaningful steps to ensure their food supply can withstand the changing environment. Millets can play a key role in achieving that objective, and it is hoped that by declaring 2023 as the International Year of Millets, more attention will be paid to this important grain.

Editor-in-Chief



Debashis Sarkar