

Press Release

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Millet roadmap for Maharashtra discussed at MSSRF–State consultation

A roadmap for strengthening millets and other opportunity crops in Maharashtra was discussed at a stakeholder consultation organised by the Government of Maharashtra and the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) in Mumbai recently. The consultation brought together policymakers, researchers, farmers' representatives, civil society organisations, and market actors to examine ways for scaling up climate-resilient, nutrition-rich crops across the state.

Vikas Rastogi, Additional Chief Secretary, Agriculture Department, Government of Maharashtra, who chaired the consultation held on January 23, said that the need of setting up a task force to continue discussions on millet-based interventions for Maharashtra was felt.

Millets and other opportunity crops boast high nutritional value, climate resilience, and the potential to improve incomes of small and marginal farmers in states like Maharashtra, which has diverse agro-climatic zones, increasing climate variability, and a large rainfed and tribal farming base. Maharashtra is a major producer of millets such as pearl millet (bajra), sorghum (jowar), finger millet (nachni), and foxtail millet (kangni), among others. However, challenges across the value chain, access to quality seeds, weak market linkages, and low consumer awareness and demand persist.

A participant at the consultation narrated how millet products tend to be dark in colour and are often rejected by young children in schools. Another participant highlighted that while there is significant focus on production, more thought needs to be given to taste, colour, and presentation to expand demand for these nutri-cereals, especially among the younger generation.

“Millets and other opportunity crops are not just sustainable for the climate, but they also offer a wide range of nutritional diversity that a majority of Indians are deficient in,” said Dr Soumya Swaminathan, Chairperson, MSSRF. “As we battle malnutrition and obesity, the dietary diversity offered by millets and other opportunity crops must be leveraged,” she said.

The consultation saw women farmers sharing ground-level realities related to millet farming, markets, and access to resources. MSSRF's biodiversity director Dr. E.D. Israel Oliver King highlighted key challenges and opportunities related to millets and opportunity crops and their immense potential to address climate vulnerability, nutrition insecurity and livelihood resilience.

Dr. Tara Satyavathi, Director, Indian Institute of Millets Research (IIMR), Hyderabad, and pearl millet breeder Dr. P. Sanjana Reddy highlighted advances in millet research, improved varieties, and supportive policy interventions. Dr. Vetriventhan Mani, Senior Scientist at the Gene Bank, International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), Hyderabad, emphasised the critical importance of biodiversity conservation, landraces, and genetic resources for long-term resilience. Dinesh Balam, former Odisha Millet Mission official, shared practical insights from Odisha's millet movement, including institutional innovations and community-driven approaches.

Research and field-level perspectives were shared by Dr. Sunil Karad, Associate Research Director, NARP Kolhapur under Mahatma Phule Krushi Vidyapeeth; Dr. S.G. Pawar, Associate Research Director, NARP Parbhani under Vasant Rao Naik Marathwada Agricultural University; and Dr. R.S. Ingole, Associate Dean, Mumbai Veterinary College. They shared experiences related to research, seed development, adaptive trials, and on-ground implementation, highlighting the importance of location-specific varieties and strong research–extension–farmer linkages.

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