



Press Release

Small and marginal farmers from India, including women, at the centre of co-research and co-innovation to bring back nutritious crops and food that have been “forgotten”

Ahmedabad, 3 May 2023

Rather than mere recipients and beneficiaries of agricultural innovation and knowledge “transferred” by scientists, small and marginal Indian farmers, including women, must be perceived and acknowledged as key actors and partners in research and knowledge creation. Women especially are the backbone of marginal farmer households in India.

As we celebrate International Year of Millets, a new pilot ‘Collective Action’ stresses the role of these small farmers in agriculture, farming, and contribution to strengthened agri-food systems. Supported by various national and international partners in India, the initiative is based on leadership, ownership and empowerment of small and marginal farmers, including women, as custodians of forgotten food and biodiversity. It provides them with two types of benefits.

Firstly, it contributes to greater food and nutrition security, resilience and climate adaptation. Secondly, it makes them equal partners in research along with research institutes. Moreover, when they share common interests and concerns, such as for their traditional foods that have fallen out of the mainstream, the recognition and respect for their values can bring transformational changes beyond their communities – to all societies.

Quote

The Collective Action on Forgotten Foods and Crops is based on strong principles of collaboration, partnership and knowledge exchange that combines farmers’ custodianship, insights, perspectives and experiences with innovative research practices.

The initiative is led by the Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Innovation (GFAR), in collaboration with the Asian Farmers Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA), Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI), MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) and the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA).

An innovative process of collaboration was introduced to unleash the potential of forgotten foods, which includes cultivated, semidomesticated and wild species, and traditional varieties. These crops have been produced and consumed for centuries as a valuable source

of fiber, oil, and medicinal properties, as well as fodder. Yet, their roles have been undervalued and their importance neglected by markets, research and policies.

Quote

The Partners' Meeting for a Joint Project Design: Fostering Collective Action on Forgotten Food is taking place from 3-5 May 2023 in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. It brought together representatives of farmers' organizations, national agricultural research and extension institutions (NARES), government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), regional associations, and international development agencies to initiate partnership and develop a full programme design on forgotten foods.

Earlier this year, local consultations with farmers took place in Gujarat, Meghalaya, Odisha and Tamil Nadu. In these farmer-led workshops, farmers themselves identified forgotten crops, solutions for seed selection, conservation and multiplication, value addition, marketing and various culinary applications. They also sought support of key government agencies and international development for this Collective Action.

The outcomes of these consultations are a basis for this international workshop, which will demonstrate evidence, raise awareness and build commitment to initiate a multi-stakeholder platform on forgotten food and crops. The event also considers existing initiatives, such as the United Nations Decade of Family Farming, Farmers' Forum, and National Committees of Family Farming, as well the International Year of Millets initiated by the Government of India.

Quote

The event, as well as the local consultations conducted earlier this year, were preceded by a very inclusive consultative process with farmers and other innovation actors, which led to the development of the [Manifesto on Forgotten Foods](#). The Manifesto guides the global forgotten foods agenda. It situates smallholder farmers as central actors in designing and implementing research programmes on forgotten food to ensure food and nutrition security, support transformation of agri-food systems and adaptation to climate change.

Quote

This national-level initiative in India is a significant step to demonstrate evidence on India's wealth in agrobiodiversity, culture and cuisines. It is envisioned to attract other countries and societies to embrace forgotten food that is healthy and highly nutritious, and contributes to more functional, diversified and sustainable agri-food systems.