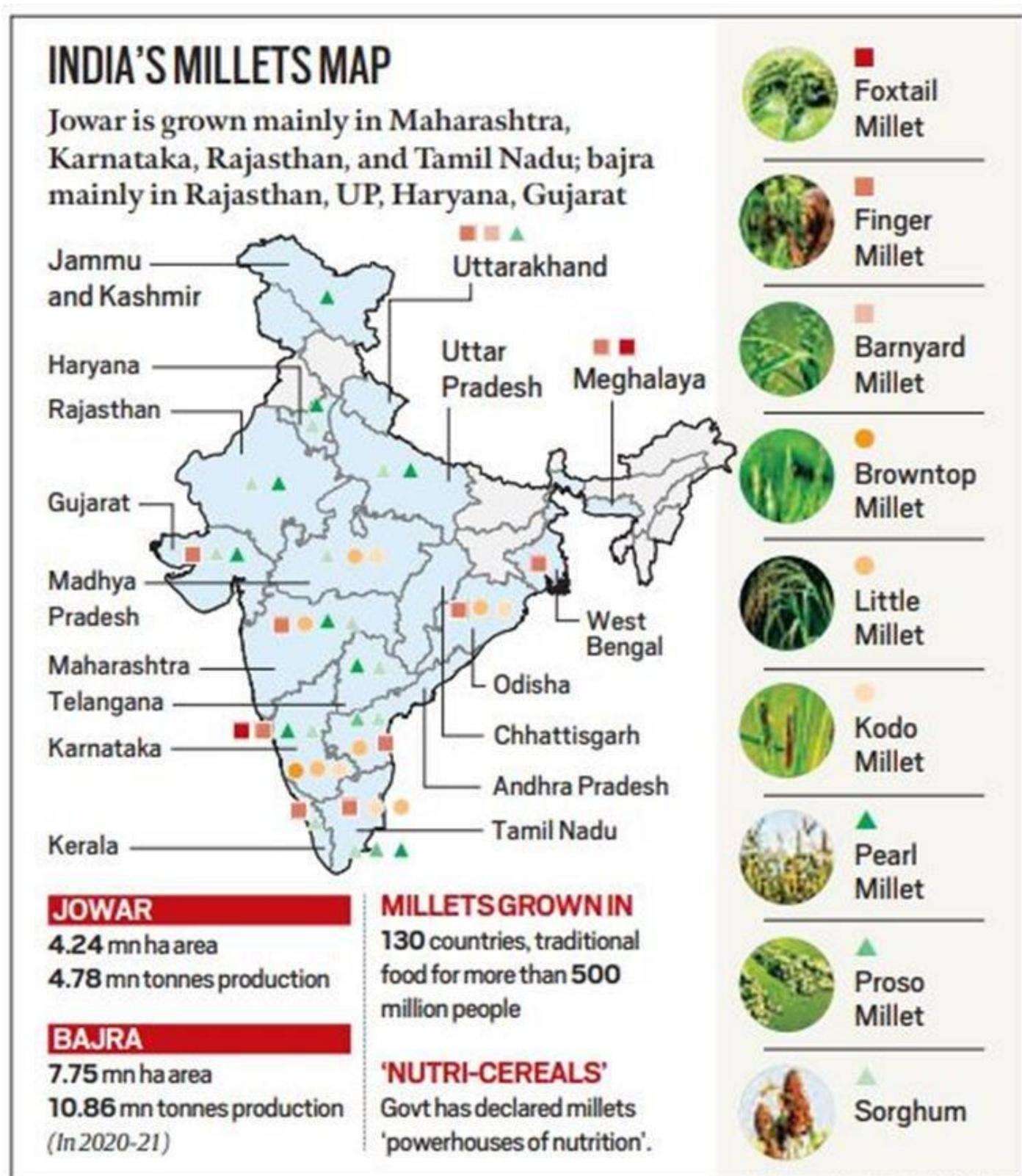


The International Year of Millets

January 2, 2023 • vajiramandravi.com



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Why in News?

- Recently, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) declared 2023 as the International Year of Millets (IYM), a proposal sponsored by the Government of India to promote these “nutri-cereals.”
- The declaration will be helpful to the Government of India in articulating its goal of making IYM 2023 a “People’s Movement” as well as presenting India as the “Global Hub for Millets,” as India produces one-fifth of the world’s millets.

What are Millets?

- Millets are a highly varied group of **small-seeded grasses**, widely grown around the world as cereal crops or grains for **fodder and human food**.
- This crop is favoured due to its **productivity and short growing season under dry, high-temperature conditions** (hardy and drought-resistant crops).
- **Millets are a powerhouse of nutrients**, which score over rice and wheat in terms of minerals, vitamins, and dietary fibre content, as well as amino acid profile.
- Though rich in both iron and zinc, wheat’s protein content comprises **glutens**, known to trigger gastrointestinal and autoimmune disorders in many people.
- **Bajra (pearl millet)**, on the other hand, has iron, zinc, and protein levels comparable to that of wheat, but it’s **gluten-free** and has more fibre and which significantly addresses the problem of “**hidden hunger**.”

Status of millets in India

Image Caption: Production of Millets in India

- They were among the first crops to be domesticated in India with several evidence of its consumption during the **Indus valley civilization**.
- In India, millets are primarily a **kharif** crop, **requiring less water and agricultural inputs** than other similar staples.
- The main millet-growing states in India are **Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Karnataka**, Andhra Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh

Where do millets lag?

- **Rice and wheat no longer remain aspirational foods.** Thanks to the Green Revolution and the National Food Security Act of 2013.
- **Millets are not the first choice either of consumers or of farmers.**
 - For farmers, **low per-hectare yields** (1 tonne for jowar, 1.5 for bajra and 1.7 for ragi, as against 3.5 tonnes for wheat and 4 tonnes for paddy) are a disincentive.
 - Also, **access to assured irrigation**, made farmers switch to rice, wheat, sugarcane, or cotton.
 - For consumers, the gluten proteins make the **wheat dough more cohesive and elastic** and the resultant breads come out light and fluffy, which isn't the case with bajra or jowar.

Steps taken in India to promote millets

- **Pusa-1201:** A hybrid bajra that gives an average grain yield of over 2.8 tonnes and potential of 4.5 tonnes per hectare.
 - It matures in 78-80 days and is resistant to downy mildew and blast, both deadly fungal diseases.
- Recognising the enormous potential of Millets, which also aligns with several UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Government of India (in 2018),
 - Rebranded Millets as “**Nutri Cereals**”
 - Declared 2018 as the National Year of Millets, aiming at larger promotion and demand generation

Way ahead for India

- **Millets could be made a staple part of children's diets:**
 - Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman and Saksham Anganwadi and **Poshan 2.0** can be better leveraged by making them more millet-focused.
 - **Besides midday meals**, millets could be served in the form of ready-to-eat foods such as cookies, laddu, etc.
- **Minimum support price (MSP) procurement of millets** should be part of a decentralised nutritional programme specifically targeting tomorrow's citizens.
- The push to distribute coarse grains under the **public distribution system (PDS)** has to gain momentum.

- **Best practice: Odisha** already has a **dedicated millet mission** that undertook procurement of 32,302 tonnes worth Rs 109.08 crore, mainly of ragi, in 2021-22.

Conclusion

- A combination of government finance and decentralised procurement connected to nutrition goals, specifically the eradication of hidden hunger among school-age children, has the potential to do for millets what the Food Corporation of India has done for rice and wheat.

Source: [The International Year of Millets: How India's govt can promote the cereals in 2023](#) | [PIB](#)

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/the-international-year-of-millets/>

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