Govt. of Karnataka initiates programme to popularise millets pan-India

The government of Karnataka has initiated a programme to popularise millets across India. For the purpose, the southern state's agriculture minister Krishna Byre Gowda was in New Delhi for the promotion of the Organics and Millets 2018 – International Trade Fair, scheduled to take place in Bengaluru between January 19 and 21.

He urged the stakeholders to reintroduce the original Indian super food to the country, which had somewhat been forgotten over the years, while the Green Revolution brought rice and wheat to the forefront. Gowda said, “Karnataka has initiated several of the programmes implemented through the farmer producers’ organisations (FPOs), and recently, the Central and state government sent a proposal to the United Nations (UN) to declare the year 2018 as the Year of Millets.”

“The aim is the create awareness among consumers, policy-makers, industry and the research and development (R&D) sector,” he added at a function in New Delhi, where the new website and logo of the international organics and millets fair were unveiled. Talking about the initiative, Gowda said, “The fair is a platform to bring farmers, markets and consumers under one roof. Karnataka is the first state to take the message of organics and millets to the world. This is a first-of-its-kind initiative by the government to create awareness the organics and millets in the country.”

The minister added that people would have to reacquaint themselves with millets. Incorporating this crop in the diet is one of the panaceas for most of the health problems. He said, “Karnataka has an early mover’s advantage, because it became the first state in India to formulate an organic policy in 2004 that sought to cater to the entire organic value chain and signal the shift in emphasis from conventional agriculture, which is increasingly becoming unsustainable.”

“This policy was further evolved, given that the momentum of land under certified organic cultivation grew from 2500 Ha (in 2004) to 93,963, paving the way for the Karnataka Organic Policy 2017,” Gowda added. “The policy is a multi-level engagement that is designed to shift from traditional farming in view of recurring droughts and erosion of soil quality. In that sense, it is a forward-looking policy and provides the farmer with much-needed market linkages. The state is the first in the country do so,” he said.

Currently India only exports close to millets worth $15 million. Meanwhile, S K Pattanaik, secretary, department of agriculture and cooperation, government of India, said, “The Central government is working on the new nomenclature for millets.” “They should be called nutri-cereals for the sheer amount of nutritional values intact in them,” he added.

Pattanaik stated that the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) was working on the high-yielding varieties of millets and increasing its shelf life. He added that new protocols were being devised with the help of the Quality Council of India (QCI) and the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) for the quality and control of millets across value chain.

The fair

The Organics and Millets 2018 - International Trade Fair will showcase the growing awareness about an alternative lifestyle and farming that respects nature. Nutritionally superior to wheat and rice owing to their higher levels of protein with a more balanced amino acid profile, crude fibre and minerals such as iron, zinc and phosphorous, millets can provide nutritional security and act as a shield against nutritional deficiency, especially among children and women.

Anaemia (iron deficiency), B-complex vitamin deficiency and pellagra (niacin deficiency) can be effectively tackled with the intake of less expensive but nutritionally-rich food grains like millets. Millets can also help tackle health challenges, such as obesity, diabetes and lifestyle problems, as they are gluten-free, have a low glycaemic index (GI) and are high in dietary fibre and antioxidants. Read more..