The union government proposes to include coarse grains such as *jawar* (sorghum), *bajra* (pearl millet) and *ragi* (finger millet) in the mid-day meal programme in schools and also distribute it through the government subsidised food programme, the public distribution system (PDS), agriculture secretary SK Patnaik said recently.

This announcement comes five years after the introduction of the National Food Security Act, which provided for the distribution of millets, once a staple in the Indian diet. PDS beneficiaries, 813 million of India’s poorest people and roughly 75% of its rural population and 25% of its urban population, will get millets at Rs 1 per kg.

So far, only a few states such as Karnataka and Tamil Nadu had made available millets and that too only in certain pockets. However, the government will give millets a makeover before making them available through the PDS. “Instead of distributing millets as a coarse grain, the government proposes to bracket it in a new ‘nutricereals’ category,” Vilas A Tonapi, director, Indian Institute of Millets Research, told *IndiaSpend*.

There is now growing awareness of the superior nutritional profile of millets compared to wheat and rice—the staples thus far distributed through the PDS and the food preference of consumers at large. Millets, because of their higher iron, calcium and overall mineral content to wheat and rice, hold the potential to help address India’s malnutrition problem, a fact *IndiaSpend* reported in August 2016.

More than half of India’s women and children, and one in five men are anaemic. Their loss of productivity shaved $22.64 billion (Rs 1.5 lakh crore) off India’s gross domestic product in 2016, more than three times the health budget for 2017-18, *IndiaSpend* reported in November 2017. Read more