

Millets: Traditional “Poor Man’s” Crop or Future Smart Nutri-Cereals?

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Abstract

Millets represent a diverse group of cereal crops of significance to sub-Saharan Africa and globally. However, they remain a set of crops with limited attention and priority paid to them with paucity of information on their genetic diversity and sustainable use. Existing knowledge on millets with respect to cultivation, health, and nutritional benefits, and contribution to sustainable environmental management, and use is mainly attributed to traditional indigenous knowledge held by rural folks in different regions of the continent. The emergence of other cereal staples, however, led to millets losing their place as an important crop limiting their use to a “famine” crop with production occurring on smallholdings among the marginalized poor. This threatens interest, patronage, conservation and use to sustainably and fully exploit the potential of millets for the benefit of society. Intertwined with tradition and culture, millets in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere nonetheless hold great promise to contribute to food security, revitalize and diversify diets, improve farmer livelihoods, resilience, and adaptation to climate change. This chapter discusses the importance of millets, challenges to production, contribution to nutrition and health, traditional knowledge and products, novel and non-traditional products, contribution to resilience and climate change, and diversity of available genetic resources.

Keywords

Millets, small grains, cereals, nutrition, health, climate resilience, value-addition, utilization, finger millet, pearl millet, sub-Saharan Africa