International Year of Millets 2023

Focus: GS III: Indian Economy

Why in News?

A series of pre-launch events and initiatives have been organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare as a run-up to the International Year of Millets 2023 to create awareness and a sense of participation in the country around the ancient and forgotten golden grains.

- Many events were launched such as ‘India’s Wealth, Millets for Health’, Millet Startup Innovation Challenge, Mighty Millets Quiz, Logo and slogan contest etc.

About International Year of Millets:

- India’s proposal to observe an International Year of Millets in 2023 was approved by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in 2018 and the United Nations General Assembly has declared the year 2023 as the International Year of Millets.
- This was adopted by a United Nations Resolution for which India took the lead and was supported by over 70 nations.

Objectives:

- Awareness of the contribution of millet to Food Security and nutrition.
- Inspire stakeholders to improve sustainable production and quality of millets.
- Focus on enhanced investment in research and development and extension services to achieve the other two aims.
- About Millets in India
  - Jowar (sorghum), bajra (pearl millet) and ragi (finger millet) are the three major millet crops currently grown in India.
  - Kodo, kutki, chenna and sanwa are bio-genetically diverse and indigenous varieties of “small millets”.
  - Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Haryana are the major producers of Millets.

Advantages of promoting millets
Millets are less expensive and nutritionally superior to wheat & rice owing to their high protein, fibre, vitamins and minerals like iron content.

- Millets are also rich in calcium and magnesium.
- Its high iron content can fight high prevalence of anaemia in Indian women of reproductive age and infants.
- They are also harder and drought-resistant crops, which has to do with their short growing season (70-100 days, as against 120-150 days for paddy/wheat) and lower water requirement (350-500 mm versus 600-1,200 mm).
- As low investment is needed for production of millets, these can prove to be a sustainable income source for farmers.
- Millets can help tackle lifestyle problems and health challenges such as obesity and diabetes as they are gluten-free and have a low glycemic index (a relative ranking of carbohydrates in foods according to how they affect blood glucose levels).

### Need for reviving the production and consumption of millets

- India has seen a jump in consumer demand for ultra-processed and ready-to-eat products, which are high in sodium, sugar, trans-fats and even some carcinogens.
- In rural India, the National Food Security Act of 2013 entitles three-fourths of all households to 5 kg of wheat or rice per person per month at Rs 2 and Rs 3 per kg, respectively, thus reducing the demand for millets.
- With the intense marketing of processed foods, even the rural population started perceiving mill-processed rice and wheat as more aspirational.

### Steps taken to promote millets

- The government has increased the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of Millets and also included millets in the public distribution system.
- The Union Agriculture Ministry, in April 2018, declared millets as “Nutri-Cereals”, considering their “high nutritive value” and also “anti-diabetic properties”.
- The government has introduced provision of seed kits and inputs to farmers, building value chains through Farmer Producer Organizations and supporting the marketability of millets.
- The United Nation General Assembly adopted an India-sponsored resolution to mark 2023 as the International Year of Millets. 2018 was also observed as “National Year of Millets”.