



MILLET MANIFESTO

KARNATAKA ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS 2023
Recommendations to the Election Manifesto

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'Millet Manifesto' for upcoming Karnataka Assembly Elections

Though Karnataka is one of the first states in India to distribute millets through PDS, there are still a lot of issues that need to be addressed and effectively.

By Rohin Kumar, 29 Mar 2023 · mojostory.com

THE RECENTLY ANNOUNCED Union Budget 2023¹ showed a commitment towards promotion of millets, highlighting that India is the largest producer and second largest exporter of millets in the world. We grow several types of millets, such as jowar, ragi, bajra, kuttu, ramdana, kangni, kutki, kodo, cheena, and sama. They carry a number of important health benefits and have been an integral part of our food systems for centuries².

Millets are a rich source of fibre, minerals, calcium and Vitamin B complex. Millets are also rich in phytochemicals, which act as antioxidants and detoxifying agents. Given that millets are naturally nutrient-dense cereals, making them available through the Public Distribution System (PDS)³ and open markets can help address the issue of micronutrient deficiency or hidden hunger among the Indian population.



Millets promotion can be a potential strategic driver for bringing greater value to uplands and upland-paddy lands. Our country's traditional millet cropping systems are highly diverse and productive. Since millets are drought-resistant, heat-tolerant and are short duration crops, food systems that include millets are more resilient⁴ to the impacts of climate change.

Moreover, millets can be cultivated with minimum water use and don't require centralized seed systems. Experiences from the Odisha Millet Mission suggest that locally-adapted landraces of millets, or selections made from among them, are best suited for achieving higher productivity under natural farming. Hence, millet seed systems are best established by the local communities themselves, making them a win-win solution for farmers, consumers and the state, while also carrying positive benefits for the ecology.

Marking the International Year of Millets, many initiatives are being introduced by multiple government agencies. However, a lot more work is needed to tackle the larger challenges of production, distribution and adaptability among communities and consumers. Though Karnataka is one of India's first states to distribute millets through the PDS, there are many issues that need to be addressed and effectively. Hence, we request the political parties to take a note of the following points in their manifesto:

FOR FARMERS

Karnataka's millet-growing farmers must be incentivized for their ecosystem services as they nurture less fertile lands and reduce agricultural emissions while ensuring the population's food and nutritional security. This entitlement should be enhanced from existing INR 10,000 per hectare to INR 25,000 per hectare for millet farmers for each millet crop on their land.



¹pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1895320

²millets.res.in/technologies/Bulletin-Millets_chapke.pdf

³pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1783716

⁴static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2022/dec/doc20221226147401.pdf



Further, to introduce millets in each cluster, demonstration plots should be set up through the support of government programmes. In each plot, all varieties of millets should be cultivated and farmers, consumers and markets can then choose which millets they wish to procure. A diversity of millets brings nutritional diversity.

FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Women and children are among the most vulnerable sections of society due to multiple factors. On the health front, nutritional deficiency, anemia, stunting and chronic morbidity are widely prevalent among women and children in India. The inclusion of millet-based foods in Midday Meals (in *anganwadis* and schools) on a regular basis has great potential of addressing this long term crisis.

Women Self Help Groups (SHGs) can be supported with local millet processing units and encouraged to establish supply chains with hotels, bakeries etc. within the cluster and outside, in small towns and in the district. Further, millet food festivals can be organized with women SHGs where recipe competitions introduce both, traditional and new recipes.



FOR THE POOR AND MARGINALIZED

There is an urgent need to move beyond 'calories fundamentalism' towards a more comprehensive approach in addressing food and nutritional security. The inclusion of millets and other coarse grains and pulses in the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) has the potential to dramatically improve the food and nutritional security of food insecure and vulnerable communities across Karnataka.



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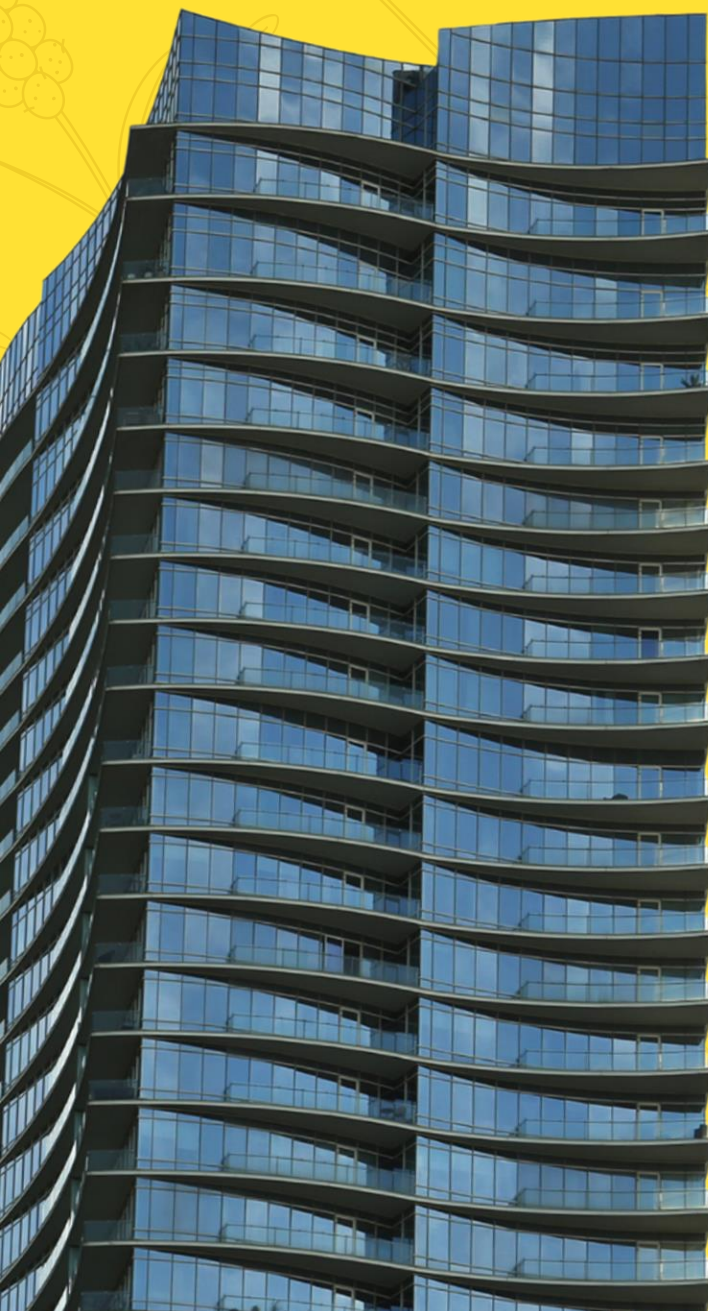
FOR URBAN CONSUMERS

The government should respond to the consumer demand by directly procuring millets from farmers.

In recent years, the consumption of millets has become increasingly popular among urban consumers. Hence, there are opportunities to include millets within local food systems by reviving and promoting millets through food festivals, restaurants, etc. by ensuring a supply of quality processed millets. Simultaneously, the government should establish processing and storage facilities, provide financial assistance and conduct programmes to boost productivity within blocks/clusters.

The consumers, aware of the benefits of millets, are presumably also concerned about chemical-based farming and toxified food that dominates markets. Hence, the government should respond to the consumer demand by directly procuring millets from farmers, which will significantly contribute towards promoting ecologically-sensitive and socially-aware consumption habits among citizens.

However, both the government and urban consumers must restrain from hybrid and biofortified varieties of millets and opt for diverse indigenous varieties of millets. Opting for local millet varieties empowers farmers and enhances their incomes. Furthermore, indigenous millets cultivation has positive impacts on the environment and contributes to a climate resilient food system.





ORGANIC/NATURAL/TRADITIONAL MUST BE THE WAY FORWARD

The state must create the necessary infrastructure and introduce a mandatory minimum price for millets, government procurement of millets at a fair Minimum Support Price (MSP), and an assured market for five years or longer. This will create the required stability for private actors to step in with their own investments and market segments.

Thus, with the right support, farmers can be enabled to switch from chemical-based farming to organic, natural and traditional farming methods. It is crucial that we enable such a switch, as we need to drastically reduce the chemical pollution in our soil, groundwater and air. Thereby, promoting organic, natural and traditional farming will contribute to improving the quality of life of common citizens.





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