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Q4

Explain the role of millets for ensuring health and nutritional security in India.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · GS III · 10 marks · Indian Economy

Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Core demand of the question

- Explain how millets serve health security in India
- Explain how they serve nutritional security, including climate and farm income
- Keep **Shree Anna** as food policy, not a slogan

Revision summary

Millets such as jowar, bajra and **ragi** offer fibre, iron and calcium that polished rice does not.

They help dietary defence against diabetes and micronutrient gaps.

They grow on rainfed land with less water than paddy, which supports food security in a hotter climate.

India used 2023, the **International Year of Millets**, to brand **Shree Anna** and to widen recipes and some procurement.

Without mills, MSP and a place in meals, farmers will not keep the crop and the health case stays on a poster.

Introduction

Millets - **jowar, bajra, ragi, kodo, kutki, kangni** and their kin - were India's older grain before irrigation made **rice and wheat** the public plate. They are back because **health, drought and a protein-iron gap** have all become national problems. The Union now brands them **Shree Anna**. The case is not nostalgia. It is **nutrition per drop of water**.

Body

Health security

Health security here means fewer diet-linked diseases and a plate that a poor household can actually cook. Millets are typically **high in fibre**, which steadies blood sugar and helps against the **diabetes and obesity** wave in urban India. **Finger millet (ragi)** is valued for **calcium**. Pearl millet and several small millets carry **iron** and B-vitamins that polished rice does not. They are usually **gluten-free**, which matters for a minority of patients and, more broadly, for a less refined staple. A millet roti does not replace a hospital. It **lowers the dietary load** that public health is otherwise left to treat.

- **Peg:** **Ragi's** calcium and bajra's iron are the usual clinical reasons dieticians put millets back on the plate.

- **Peg:** Fibre and a lower glycaemic load are the link to India's rising non-communicable disease burden.

Nutritional and food-system security

Nutritional security is **calories plus micronutrients**, stable through climate shocks. Millets grow on **thin soils and thin rain**. They need less irrigation than paddy, which is why they fit **rainfed Deccan, Rajasthan and tribal central India**. A crop that survives a failed monsoon is a **household food reserve**. India is among the world's **largest millet producers**; 2023 as the **International Year of Millets** was used to push recipes, MSP procurement of some nutri-cereals, and inclusion in parts of **ICDS and midday meals**. Farmers need a **buyer and a mill**, or they will return to paddy. Health and nutrition security therefore meet **procurement, processing and a PDS that does not only speak in rice and wheat**.

- **Peg:** Nutri-cereals under MSP and some State PDS millet kits are the policy bridge from farm to plate.
- **Peg:** Climate resilience is the national-security face of the same grain: less water, more dietary diversity.

Flow diagram

Millets -> Fibre iron calcium
Millets -> Rainfed low water
Fibre iron calcium -> Health security
Rainfed low water -> Food and farm security
MSP PDS processing -> Millets

Conclusion

Millets thicken the plate with fibre, iron and calcium, and they grow where paddy would drink the aquifer. They serve health and nutrition security only if procurement and processing make them as easy as rice.

Facts & figures

Shree Anna

The Union's branding of millets as a nutri-cereal mission crop, not only a coarse leftover grain.

International Year of Millets

2023, proposed by India at the UN, used to push domestic demand and export visibility.

Ragi

Finger millet, widely cited for calcium density among common Indian cereals.

Rainfed fit

Sorghum and pearl millet remain staples of dryland Deccan and western India where canal paddy is not the default.

Meal schemes

Some States have begun putting millets into ICDS or school meals so demand is not only urban-retail.

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