

Farmers Ask States to Back Millet Farming

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Experts and farmers have urged state governments in the eastern India to promote millet farming to ensure food security to the marginalised section of people.

They underscored the importance of millet in containing diabetes and sought pro-active intervention by the respective state governments to popularise millet cultivation. Speaking at the Eastern India Convention on Reimagining Agriculture on Thursday, they demanded a paradigm shift in the agriculture policy to ensure a cropping system that could restore independence, food sovereignty and dignity as farmers.

Demanding a level playing field for farmers, they urged state governments to extend all institutional finance support such as crop loans, insurance and other support

to farmers who grow rice, wheat, sugarcane, cotton and other commercial crops to millet growers. Millet Network of India (MINI) National Convener PV Satheesh said problems faced by millet cultivators in eastern India were discussed in the two-day national convention of millet farmers that concluded on Thursday.

MINI was one of the five co-organisers. "We have discussed the millet landscape, the challenges facing them and the probable solution to these challenges. We have come out with the Bhubaneswar Declaration on millets in eastern India, which is intended at addressing the millet communities of India in general and eastern India in particular," Satheesh said.

He added that millet cultivation helps in the food sovereignty and self-reliance.

"As farmers we are gratefully aware that millets helped us re-

main strong and work through the day.

For our working bodies Kodo and Manua are very essential. Many of us never knew what a doctor was and never went to a hospital through our lives. But now our rice-based diets, instead of keeping us healthy, have become prescriptions for illness," the Declaration said.

The Declaration welcomed introduction of millets into the public distribution system (PDS).

"But it is time to bring millets into all the public food systems. This will not only ensure food security of our children but also their health and nutritional security," it added.

Interestingly, instead of demanding subsidies for millet cultivation, the meet sought bonus for biodiversity, water conservation, nutritional value and climate change compliance to millet farmers.

Referring to the Odisha situation, the Declaration said: "Cash crops have dominated the Odisha Agriculture Policy where oilseeds, sugarcane, rice are given importance.

The policy does not care for millet, unlike Chhattisgarh, where the government has sensibly recognised millets as an integral part of state food and farming system. We demand the same kind of millets promoting policies from the government of Odisha."

"In Odisha, out of 30 districts, millets are grown in 24 and some of these districts have high national productivity average.

"With 23% of our population being adivasi, and over 60% being poor, we must do serious research on the possible contribution of millet farming systems to alleviate the poverty and cater to the well-being of the adivasis," the declaration added.