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[Home](#) ■ [About Us](#) ■ [Contact Us](#) ■ [Feedback](#) ■ [Search](#) ■ [Subscribe](#) ■ [Advertise](#) ■ [Ratecard](#)

News

[Policy & Regulations](#)

[Food Processing](#)

[Beverages](#)

[Dairy Products](#)

[Agriculture](#)

[Snacks & Confectionery](#)

[Fruit & Vegetable](#)

[Meat & Seafood](#)

[Sugar](#)

[Oils & Fats](#)

[Ingredients/Flavours](#)

[Spices](#)

[Retail](#)

[Bakery / Biscuits](#)

[Poultry](#)

[International](#)

[Company Report](#)

[New launches](#)

[Nutrition](#)

[Hotels & Hospitality](#)

Features

[Edit](#)

[Column](#)

[Special Reports](#)

[Interview](#)

[Issues](#)

[In Focus](#)

[Analysis](#)

[Budget](#)

[Festival](#)

[F&B Projects](#)

Marketing

[Brand news](#)

[Marketing](#)

[People](#)

[Books](#)

[Events](#)

Allied Sector

[Technology](#)

[Equipment](#)

[Packaging](#)

[Education](#)

[Food Safety](#)

[WideView](#)

[Increase font](#)

[Decrease font](#)

Top News

Hyd-based DDS seeks to aggressively promote millets cultivation pan-India

Saturday, October 29, 2011 08:00 IST
Nandita Vijay, Bangalore

Hyderabad-based Deccan Development Society (DDS), which initiated the Millet Network of India (MINI), is now looking at aggressively promoting the cultivation of millets across the country.

“We have been working to revive traditional millet-based mixed cropping systems that were for long the bulwark of rural livelihoods, in dry lands and hilly regions. We have further been trying to establish an alternative system of public distribution, which emphasises on local procurement, local storage and local distribution,” Sandeep K, programme coordinator, Deccan Development Society, and national coordinator, Millet Network of India, told FnB News in an email interaction.

Millets have been an important component of diet in rural areas, especially in the dry lands and hilly tracts of India. India is the largest producer and consumer of millets; consuming nearly 42% of the world production of millets. However, in the period between 1961- 66 and 2001- 05, more than two million hectares have been lost to various reasons—a decline of over 50%.

A more detailed analysis reveals that the rate of decline accelerated since '80s onwards; the period between 1991-96 and 2001-05 witnessed a decline of 22% in the area under millets. The decline has been across the board in all the millets; more so in the case of small millets (75%) - foxtail millets, kodo millets, barnyard millets and so on, which are an important source of nutrition for the rural communities, according to Sandeep.

The future of millets is confronted by various threats. These include the diversion of lands where food was grown towards cash crops like Bt.cotton; hybrid maize—which is less for food purpose and more to cater to industrial uses like starch, bio-fuels, chicken feed and so on. Besides, extensive agricultural land acquisitions for non-agricultural lands are expected to witness a fall in the cultivation of crops including millets.

This is where the DDS is now insisting that to ensure food sovereignty, state governments should now extend institutional support in the form of credit and insurance to millet farmers, and some form of cash bonus to them. “At the same time, introduction of millets into the PDS—locally procured and distributed will ensure that the poor and the marginalised have access to affordable nutrition according to the local food culture,” he said.

The Hyderabad-based non-governmental organisation has been working for over 25 years with women’s sanghams of 75 villages in four mandals of Medak district, Andhra Pradesh. The Society has been engaging with over 5,000 economically-backward women to support them in their struggle for sovereignty over food, seeds, natural resources and markets.

The Society has been instrumental in formulating the Dharwad Declaration which emerged out of the efforts of a number of civil society agencies, including Siririkrisi.

FoodBeverageNews e-paper



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“MINI has around 120 members from across the country, who are working to revive bio-diverse farming systems across the country,” he added.

