



June 22, 2011

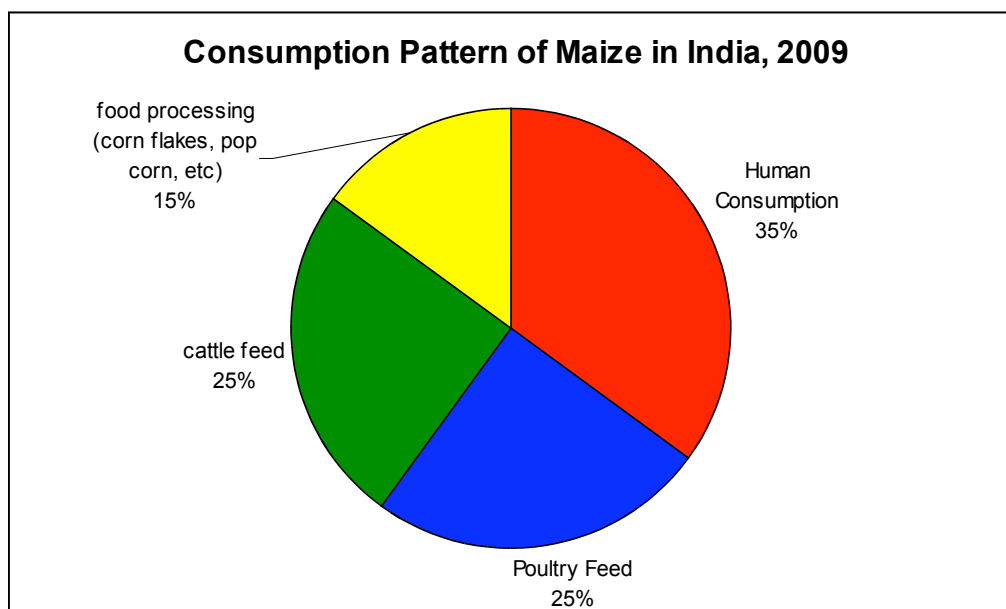
PRESS RELEASE

Dear *Shri Kiran Kumar Reddygaru*,

Last week your government took a decision to provide an input subsidy for maize farmers to a tune of Rs.5000 per acre. While this might appear good news for farming sector in general, we have serious concerns about how it will affect food security for AP in general and millet cultivation in the state in particular. As food sovereignty activists of the Millet Network of India we view this development with a sense of foreboding. Let me bring to your kind notice some important points which might have missed your attention.

1 Maize is an industrial crop not a food crop

The use of maize in India has been more as an industrial crop than as a food crop. [pl see the graph below]. Of all the maize grown in India, just about 35% is used for human consumption while the rest goes to feed industry, cereal industry, production of starch, dextrose, corn syrup, corn oil and in recent times ethanol production. **We suspect that this potential of maize to produce biofuel is what is attracting the state to declare such supportive policies.**



Cattle and poultry feed are two major uses of maize. In a country where hunger is still a predominant presence this is an extremely flawed use. As the world knows conversion rate of grains into meat is 1:3. That is, to make one kg of meat we need to feed three kgs of grains to the animal. This is clearly a bad use of land. The meat which is ultimately produced sells at 10 times the price of the original grain. Either way this kind of land use can only be termed reckless.

2 Maize is the fastest growing cultivation and hence there is no logic for its input subsidy

In the last decade, between 2000 and 2010, maize cultivation area has doubled from 4,52,000 Ha to 8,56,000 Ha. And its production exploded nearly four times from 14,72,000 tonnes to 42,20,000 tonnes. In the face of this exponential growth, one cannot comprehend why maize needs more incentives. A subsidy is normally given to save a crop when it is in distress. But the policy attention and promotion for maize, a highly successful and exponentially growing crop, makes it suspect from the food security point of view. Why is a crop that is not staple food in any part of AP is being encouraged so aggressively?

3 Maize kills millets

This tolls an alarming bell for the food security of the poor since a number of small and marginal farmers, lured by the aggressive support of the state are likely to switch more and more to maize cultivation abandoning their traditional millet based biodiverse farming systems. The mixed farming which they follow composes of millets, pulses and oilseeds. This had given them not only food security but also multiple securities such as health and nutritional security, fodder, fuel and livelihood security.

Already between 2000 and 2010 the millet fields in AP have seen a 100% shrinkage. Jowar has dwindled from 7,36,000 Ha to 2,89,000 Ha, an alarming 2.5 times fall. Sajja [Bajra, Pearl millet] has shrunk from 1,17,000 Ha to 58,000 Ha a 50% shrinkage. Minor Millets such as Korra [foxtail millet], Saama [Little millet] etc., with their cultivation area shrinking from 64,000 Ha to 30,000 Ha, have already been suffocated and are now gasping for their last breath.

Our serious apprehension is that the extraordinary millet farming system will now give way to maize which at best can help them earn some cash but little else. This will be a huge tragedy not only for food security but also for the nutritional security of AP. It may be worth remembering here that India occupies a very sorry 128th position among the malnourished nations of the world. Whatever nutrition that the poor receive from cultivating and consuming millets such as jowar [sorghum], bajra [Pearl millet], ragi [Finger millet], korra [Foxtail millet] and such other millets will go into oblivion.

A government that cares for the food, nutritional and health security of their people has the duty to concentrate on the recovery of these amazing crops rather than incentivising maize cultivation.

Already half the millet fields in AP have been under irrecoverable attack from cotton. Now if maize joins force with cotton, the genocide of millets will be complete. With that the food and nutritional impoverishment of the poor in millet growing areas of AP will reach unprecedented proportions. Any government committed to civilisational concerns of the well being of its people must be enormously worried about this situation. But unfortunately the state policies are only exacerbating this situation instead of solving the problem.

4 Maize cannot withstand climate change; millets can. Don't ignore millets in favour of maize

As you are very well aware, Mr Chief Minister, the next few decades will see apocalyptic changes in the behaviour of climate. The major manifestations will be an unprecedented global warming causing an increase of at least 2 degree Celsius in temperature. And low and erratic rainfall. A dangerous increase in malnutrition. **Maize has no capacity to withstand any of these consequences.** It responds negatively to both low rainfall and high rainfall. It cannot sustain high temperatures and offers hardly any nutritious food. Millets on the other hand need very little water for their cultivation, can withstand high temperatures and offer extraordinary nutrition, almost ten times the nutrition offered by rice. Therefore they are a boon for small farmers who cultivate and consume them. ***If climate change is a New Age crisis, millets will be the New Age answer to it.*** If we forget this truth and show no alarm towards declining millet cultivation, we will be pushing our food and farming systems into a self-destruct mode.

The second most important aspect of millet cultivation is that it is a biodiverse farming system with legumes [pulses] as their inalienable part. **These crops FIX ORGANIC CARBON into soil and therefore contribute significantly to the lowering of carbon in the atmosphere and thereby lowering of global warming.** Maize is simply incapable of doing any of this.

5 By encouraging maize, are we paving way for an ecological nightmare?

It is common knowledge that maize is in the forefront of the list of crops engineered by the Genetic Engineering industry for India. Globally maize is the *largest* food crop under GMOs next only to Soybean occupying more than 25% of all biotech crops in the world.

This spread of GE maize has always been preceded by the aggressive promotion of maize itself so that farmers once trapped by maize cultivation can be easily moved to farming of GE maize. This is exactly what happened with cotton. Once the cotton dream clouded farmers' vision, it did not take much time for Bt Cotton nightmare to take over. We are witnessing the same strategy is being employed for maize now. Monsanto distributed maize seeds free of cost in over 25000 Ha in the Bharuch area of Gujarat three years ago. In Rajasthan it entered into a contract to supply maize seeds to farmers. In Orissa maize

has suddenly exploded on the farmscape. All these developments are harbingers for the GE maize which will occupy millions of hectares of food farms of India, particularly owned by small and marginal farmers belonging to dalits and adivasis of the country.

6 Will maize biofuel the exploding auto industry in India?

An obvious collusion between maize promotion, ethanol industry and auto industry cannot escape attention. The burgeoning autos on Indian roads need a cheap fuel and agrofuels appear a very important solution. Hence maize becomes an **automatic** choice. It is a God send for the industry. But we have to remind ourselves that much of the food shortage in global markets was fuelled by the use of maize for ethanol in the USA. And the poor suffered unprecedented hunger.

Will the same fate haunt us in AP in the near future?

7 Will AP be the next state to be drawn into the new Monsanto trap of Maize states in India?

The expansion of maize landscape in India was manipulated by the assertive moves of Monsanto in state after Indian state. Starting with Gujarat where Monsanto distributed free hybrid maize seeds as far back as 2008 has been followed up in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and now AP appears to be the next target of the maize industry champions. In Orissa, government orders have been issued to allow 30000 Ha to be planted with hybrid maize seeds lead by Monsanto and Pioneer seed companies. Thus State has become an agent of Monsanto in facilitating the propaganda, identification of farms and making farmers plant the seeds with a variety of lures and incentives. This has already seen the death of millet fields in thousands of hectares.

Dear Mr Chief Minister, let us not allow AP to become the next victim of this massive attack on millets.

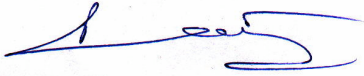
Considering all these complex aspects associated with Maize, on behalf of the Millet Network of India and Deccan Development Society, we demand the following:

- Please rethink your maize policy and try not to encourage the further spread of maize cultivation in Andhra Pradesh.
- Carefully consider the crisis millet crops are in and take serious steps for revitalization and retrieval of millet cultivation and consumption.
- Provide an input subsidy of Rs.10000 per hectare of all millet lands
- Make millet based biodiverse farming as the most important element in all your Community Managed Sustainable Agriculture [CMSA] programmes in AP
- Please use NREGA to revitalize all the lands owned by dalits, adivasis and other vulnerable sections of farming populations and cover those lands with millet based farming

- Provide NREGA support to all the agricultural operations on small and marginal lands to help farmers to grow millets, pulses and oilseeds in a mixed cropping system. This will enrich their lands and enrich the food systems in AP by providing extra nutrition, extra fodder, extra health and livelihoods to the people of AP.

We sincerely hope your government will start serious rethink on dryland farming policies and make millets as the mainstay of any future initiatives.

Sincerely



p v sathesh
National Convenor, Millet Network of India

To : ***Shri Kiran Kumar Reddy, Chief Minister, Government of Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad***

Shri Damodar Rajanarsimha, Dy Chief Minister & Minister for Agriculture, Government of Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad