



# MILLET NETWORK OF INDIA

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## Press Release

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The Millet Network of India [MINI] has expressed its deep concern about the non inclusion of the local procurement provision in the latest version of the National Food Security Bill. In a letter addressed to Ms Sonia Gandhi, UPA Chairperson and the Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, which was released to the Press today, MINI, a network of over 140 groups of farmers, food activists, scientists and consumers, has demanded an immediate reinclusion of the Local Procurement clause in the draft bill.

“The first version of the bill had made two major recommendations that had the potential of creating history in the lives of millions of dryland millet growing farmers in the country who occupy nearly 65% of the agrarian landscape of India. They also form the poorest rural segments of the country, mostly belonging adivasi, dalit and other marginal populations. That the millets which they grow on their very harsh lands without use of irrigation using only rainwater, had found a place now on the national food security map was not only a breath of fresh air in their lives but also a great boost to their farming and economy” said Mr P V Satheesh, the National Convenor of MINI, in his letter to Ms Gandhi and the Prime Minister.

While offering its deepest gratitude to the UPA Chairperson for making space for introduction of millets in PDS in historic National Food Security Bill steered by her in the National Advisory Council the MINI said “That millets grown on the rainfed adivasi and dalit lands are also India’s response to the climate crisis [by being drought prone and highly nutritious] and nutritional security is a lesson that we are slowly learning. The bold and out of the box solution offered through the recognition of the enormous of millets for India’s secure food and nutrition future by the NAC is a great bold step forward in this direction”

“The logical next step to adding millets in the food basket of the PDS”, the MINI said “ is the **Local Procurement of the grains**. This was also envisaged in a visionary manner by the framers of the Draft Food Security Bill in the NAC who had prescribed that all procurement for PDS must be done within a radius of ten kilometers. **The appropriate government will**

**open procurement centres within a radius of 10 kilometres wherever feasible and provide on spot payment to farmers,"** the earlier version of the Draft Bill had said.

“But to our amazement and horror we find that the final draft appearing on the GOI website does not contain this provision” said Mr Satheesh. “The current version of the Bill placed on the website of the Ministry of Food on November 23<sup>rd</sup> ambiguously states: **incentivizing decentralised procurement, including procurement of coarse grains**”. This provision lacks teeth and purpose since in the absence of the Local Procurement provision, the Food Security Bill loses its radicalism and pro poor character which the National Advisory Council had strived so hard to make the central part of the “millet in PDS” policy said Mr Satheesh.

“Therefore we would like to urge you very strongly to address and fill this serious lacunae and bring back **“procurement with a 10 kms radius”** and make this otherwise landmark piece of legislation truly historic”.

In a note called titled **Why Millets** which was circulated to over 500 MPs, the Millet Network of India has argued that the most serious flaw with the current rice-wheat based PDS has been the enormous malnutrition faced by the poor. India in spite of being an economic tiger occupying a place among the top five emerging economies, it was also true that **India is in a lowly position of 128 among the most malnourished nations**. This is even lower than many sub-Saharan countries who, though far below India in their economic index are millet eaters and hence have marched ahead of us in their nutritional status.

These countries are major millet consumers in their daily food. In contrast, a recent study has even reported that **20% of all diabetes in India is caused by the PDS rice**. All these facts must cause serious concern to us said MINI in its note to the Parliamentarians.

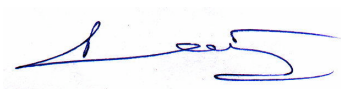
The National Food Security Bill, in Chapter VII, very wisely mentions about the need for procuring food grains from within radius of 10 kilometers where it is produced, thus laying the foundations for a truly decentralized PDS points MINI and argues that **“this is the most critical aspect of the New PDS. Unless tlhe PDS is totally decentralized, all the farmers from all parts of the country cannot benefit from this extremely pro people action of the successive governments”**.

MINI also points to the dangers of this pro poor policy being exploited by the corporate houses for their private profits. “Already a number of corporate houses both Indian and transnational are eagerly eyeing the possibility of capturing Indian food markets. With the universalisation of PDS and increased allocation to poor families there will be an enormous market which these corporates will rush in to grab. If this is not avoided, a disaster will await this country. Once corporate houses become the providers of food to the Indian masses, we will have to accept whatever they provide, whether it is genetically engineered or produced in the most toxic fashion, we will not be able to say no to them.

Concluding its argument MINI says “If we want to avoid this situation, the only way we could proceed is the make **local production and local procurement** as the basic tenet of the new PDS. Farmers all over the country will greatly benefit from this policy and there will be a great fillip to food production from all corners of the country.

“The millet farmers will be the greatest beneficiaries of such a policy. Most of them are small holder farmers, a majority belonging to adivasis, dalits and such marginalized communities. Their agriculture and food production will bloom if the government pursues this policy”.

Therefore the Millet Network of India has pleaded with the Parliamentarians to kindly take both these major points on your brief when the Parliament discusses the Food Security Bill and **help India move beyond food security and become truly food sovereign.**



[p v satheesh]  
**National Convenor, Millet Network of India**  
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