

Nutri – Cereals Conclave 2019 November 29 – 30, 2019 Hyderabad, India



Dr. Sagar Deshmukh and Dr. Saravanan Raj from the National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE) participated in the Nutri-Cereals Conclave 2019. Their experiences are shared here.

CONTEXT

Coarse cereals and millets were traditionally a part of daily food consumption in India. Coarse cereals mainly included sorghum (jowar) and pearl millet (bajra). Farmers used to cultivate these primarily for their consumption. Surplus, if any, used to be sent to the market. However, owing to increasing population and demand for food, agricultural scientists put in efforts to enhance productivity of rice and wheat by developing high yielding varieties (HYVs). Green revolution was the outcome of those efforts. With it, almost all farmers shifted from traditional grains to HYVs of wheat and rice. Before Green Revolution, millets made up around 40% of all cultivated grains (contributing more than wheat and rice). Since the Green Revolution, the production and consumption of millets declined drastically.

Continuous consumption of one staple food such as rice or wheat has resulted in adverse effects on health of Indian population. Nutritional imbalances, dietary deficiency diseases and malnutrition are some of the results of our faulty food habits. With increasing awareness about these, people have started to look for alternate nutritious foods. It was no wonder then that all nutrients we sought was found in millets. Government and the scientific fraternity are currently creating awareness and promotion of millets and related value added products. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research - Indian Institute of Millets Research (ICAR-IIMR) has taken several initiatives to create awareness about health benefits of millets. The Indian government came up with a Millets Mission in 2018.

The Nutricereals Conclave was an initiative for promotion of production and consumption of millets nationally. The first conclave was held in March 2019 in Hyderabad. The Nutricereals conclave held in November 2019 again in Hyderabad was the second in this series.



Conclave has received good response from the stakeholders

The aim of this conclave was:

- to promote startups in food, agri, nutri-tech ecosystem,
- enhance opportunities in millets value chain,
- webbing network among investors and entrepreneurs and
- spreading awareness about millets.

With the increased awareness on health and nutrition, traditional millets crops are resurfacing in urban as well as rural areas to ward off lifestyle diseases such as diabetes and obesity. With unique advantages in their nutritional profile coupled with low input requirements, millets have become raw materials for innovation in food processing, nutritious food formulations and health planning.

THE CONCLAVE

The major theme of the conclave was – Invest in Millets for Future Nutritional Security

The two-day conclave had two sub themes, namely:

- Building business in Agri Tech & Food Tech and
- Building Businesses in Millets Ecosystem.

Indian Institute of Millets Research (IIMR) organised the conclave in collaboration with Centre for Innovation Incubation & Entrepreneurship - Indian Institute of Management (CIIE-IIM), ISBA - Indian STEP and Business Incubator Association (ISBA) and Research and Innovation Circle of Hyderabad (RICH). ICAR-National Academy of Agricultural Research Management (ICAR-NAARM) and National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE) were the knowledge partners.

Day I: Theme - Building business in Agri Tech & Food Tech

Inaugural Program – I

All speakers gave a brief introduction about the activities and initiatives taken up by their respective institute/organization in promoting and supporting technologies, inventions and innovations in agriculture, food and allied sectors. Followed by the inaugural program, the sessions and panel discussions were held on the following topics of immense importance.

Challenges in supporting agri-startups & emerging opportunities

The heads of agribusiness incubation centres, Association for Innovation Development of Entrepreneurship in Agriculture (a-IDEA)–ICAR-NAARM, ICAR-Indian Institute of Horticultural Research, CIIE-IIM, etc. discussed different challenges they faced like identifying right candidates and startups, supporting them in various areas, financial assistance at different stages of business development, getting them involved into solving the key issues in agriculture, etc.

Establishment of agri incubators in India and Opportunities ahead

The initiative of Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers welfare (MoA&FW), Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY)-Remunerative Approach for Agriculture and Allied sector Rejuvenation (RAFTAAR) was explained to the audience. Government has set up 29 agribusiness incubation centres that include five knowledge partners, Viz. MANAGE, Hyderabad, Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), New Delhi, National Institute of Agricultural Marketing (NIAM), Jaipur, University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS), Dharwad and Assam Agriculture University (AAU), Jorhat. Through this program, nearly 700 startups are incubated at different incubators and out of them 300 startups are recommended for funding by MoA&FW.

Startup Journey: Experience sharing sessions

Key persons associated with startups that have excelled in their businesses shared their journey and learning experiences while setting up the startups. Startups in millets, agri-tech, dairy, etc. are now getting recognised for their efforts and contributions. The message they gave was to keep following the dream and be innovative, persistent and vigilant to overcome hurdles.

Funding for public funded incubators, accelerators and startups

Venture capital and angel investments are major sources of funding for startups to scale up. Representatives from VC firms shared their insights. Government of India through National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog, Department of Science and Technology (DST), Department of Biotechnology (DBT), MoA&FW, Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), etc. have created provisions to establish business incubation centres across India. The financial assistance for infrastructure development and furnishing existing spaces has been extended to host institutions.

Day II: Theme - Building Businesses in Millets Ecosystem

Inaugural Program – II

The guests suggested strengthening of millets production system and resolving industrial challenges. In addition, farmers should be directly connected to consumers, they said.

Emphasising the health benefits of millets, they also conveyed that we should include millets as a part of our regular diet. Even millets should be a part of Midday Meal Scheme, Public distribution System, etc. This will improve our lifestyle and safeguard against diseases.

The efforts of governments in promoting millets for cultivation and consumption have created awareness among masses. However, it has resulted in higher demand in urban areas and supply is not adequate. Owing to this, prices have gone up steeply and millets have now become affordable only for specific segments of the society. Efforts need to be taken in improving production.

Followed by the inaugural program, the sessions and panel discussions were held on the following topics.

Latest innovations and research Initiatives in millets

Recent developments and research done in improving seed varieties, processing technologies, value addition to products, etc. were shared. ICAR-IIHR and many other institutes have been continuously working to strengthen all areas of millets production, processing and distribution.

Initiatives of government on millets promotions in various states

Several state governments have come forward to start Millets Missions. Institutes and universities are giving importance to the promotion of millets.

Initiatives of technology-agri food tech initiatives in technology commercialization in millets

Technologies developed by institutes are an outcome of extensive research work done by scientists. These technologies need to be commercialized. Entrepreneurs can be benefited by adopting a technology and building a business on it.

Insights from the regional ecosystem – support for startups from Government of Telangana

In Telangana, MANAGE, ICAR-NAARM, International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-arid Tropics (ICRISAT), University of Hyderabad, Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, IKP Knowledge Park and Indian Institute of Millets Research (IIMR) have in-house facilities to support startups working in agriculture, food and allied areas. Mentoring, networking, marketing and funding are a few areas of support extended to startups. Telangana State Innovation Cell has also been set up to coordinate a monthly meet of business incubators to brainstorm on various issues of startups and ecosystem mechanisms to address them.



Dr. Saravanan Raj, Director (Agril. Extn.), MANAGE addressing the audience during the conclave

Explaining about government initiatives, Dr. Saravanan Raj, Director (Agril Extn.), indicated that there are several schemes and programs available for startups to nurture their business. Agri clinics and Agri Business Centre (AC&ABC) scheme is one of the oldest entrepreneurship development scheme implemented by MANAGE for the last 17 years. As an outcome, 69,169 people were trained and 28,512 have established their business ventures.



Startups received the appreciation certificate during the graduation ceremony

Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana – Remunerative Approaches for Agriculture and Allied Sector Rejuvenation (RKVY-RAFTAAR) is another addition to government initiatives wherein startups at

ideation stage and scale-up stage are provided with grant-in-aid besides complete agribusiness incubation support. Further, he expressed his concern that despite the many government initiatives, there are only a small number of startups coming up with the right solutions for agrarian issues.

The technical session was followed by pitch presentations by startups to get incubated at Nutrihub (agribusiness incubation facility) at IIMR, Hyderabad. It was further followed by the graduation ceremony of existing startups that have attained business maturity and have become sustainable.

Exhibition

Exhibition was one of the key attractions of the conclave. The healthy, nutritious and tasty products were displayed and made available for visitors and participants. Stalls were exhibited by startups working on millets based products. Millet Basket, Go Bharti, 24 Mantra, Health Sutra, Britannia, Nutrisnax (MeGo), Inner Being Wellness, etc. were among the startups who are onto millets, ready to cook and ready to eat products. Harvest Plus, IGKV, Raipur Odisha Millets Mission were a few institutes/organizations who also exhibited their achievement and initiatives in millets. IIMR also exhibited a wide range of value added products under the brand 'EatRite', which was developed by the institute.



Startups exhibited and promoted the millets based products during the conclave

OUR IMPRESSIONS

The growing importance of millets is phenomenal. Several studies have proven the nutritional benefits for children and adults. Considering the emphasis given by central and state governments for improving the production, productivity and marketability of millets, startups getting involved in the millets business have better prospects in the future. Especially, for ready to cook and ready to eat products the demand is high. This was evident from the stalls and response exhibitors received from participants of the conclave.



Dr. Saravanan Raj, Dr. Sagar Deshmukh and MANAGE team at Conclave

Some of the startups like Health Sutra, Inner Being Wellness have already raised funding from some of investors/venture capitalists like Ankur Capital, CCube Angels Network, etc. Many new startups have also made inroads into the ecosystem and have come up with several innovative food products. The ecosystem too is ready to accept, nurture and help startups flourish by providing adequate support in terms of mentoring, funding, access to customers and markets and favourable government policies to make sustainable ventures out of them.

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