

FAO kicks off International Year of Millets 2023 in Rome

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The opening ceremony of the International Year of Millets 2023 (IYM) was held at the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome.

As the global agrifood systems face challenges to feed an ever-growing global population, resilient cereals like millets provide an affordable and nutritious option, and efforts need to be scaled up to promote their cultivation.

This was the message at the opening ceremony of the IYM.

Millets encompass a diverse group of cereals including pearl, proso, foxtail, barnyard, little, kodo, browntop, finger and Guinea millets, as well as fonio, sorghum (or great millet) and teff. They are an important source of nourishment for millions of people in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. They are deeply rooted in Indigenous Peoples' culture and traditions and help guarantee food security in areas where they are culturally relevant.

"Millets are incredible ancestral crops with high nutritional value. Millets can play an important role and contribute to our collective efforts to empower smallholder farmers, achieve sustainable development, eliminate hunger, adapt to climate change, promote biodiversity, and transform agri-foods," QU Dongyu FAO Director-General told participants at the hybrid event.

Greater millet production can support the livelihoods of smallholder farmers and can provide decent jobs for women and youth. The revenue created can boost economic growth. With the possibility of a health healthy alternative with millets, the risks associated with production shocks can be mitigated.

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Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Amina Mohammed delivered a video message during the opening ceremony. Indian Minister of State for Agriculture, Shobha Karandlaje, delivered a message from the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. India presented the proposal for the International Year and is the chair of the Year's Steering Committee.

Nigeria's Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development Mohammed M. Abubakar, also delivered a keynote speech while Panama's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Janaina Tewaney Mencomo, spoke via video message.

IYM 2023 hopes to galvanise interest in millets among various stakeholders like farmers, the youth and civil society and push governments and policymakers to prioritise the production and trade in these cereals.