

MANIFESTO FOR MILLETS

OCTOBER 1 2018

We are glad that all political parties are addressing the issue of Food & Agriculture as important concern of their party. While doing so we would like them to look at the whole issue of millets which is going to be critical for the country for the coming decades for the following reasons.

1. With the declining of food crop production area in the country, the issue of food security becomes extremely critical for Telangana. More and more commercial crops like cotton and sugarcane are occupying the small space that used to grow food crops in general and millets in particular. The impact of this is extremely horrifying even for our imagination.
2. In recent years the national and global discourse has shifted away from food security to nutritional security. The most glaring example is India itself, which produces a lot of food, but is in a pitiable position of 128th among the malnutrition nations of the world including the famine riddled sub Saharan countries. For a country that prides itself of being a global economic giant and one of the largest food producers in the world, this is not a very proud position for India to be in. Similar is the case of Telangana. According to "India: Health of the Nation's States, 2017," released by the State government, malnutrition is the major cause of risk among women. According to another report published in the International Journal of Medical Science and Health, Telangana tops the southern Indian states for severe underweight in children under five.
3. Since we have been struggling to find water for agriculture, we must also remember the forecast that the climate change experts tell us. For example there can be no water for agriculture in two decades from now. Because water will be very scarce under the tectonic climate change effects. And we must be ready for crops that can be resilient in a water starved regions.

4. Millets are our best bet for both of the situations explained above because :

- Millets offer the highest level of nutrition for our populations.
- Historically Telangana fed us millets but wrong policies have led us to pursue low nutritional and high water intake crops like rice in recent years.
- We appreciate the concerns of all parties that they want to provide a certain quantity of fine rice at a cheap price for the population. In the short run this may be an attractive proposal to get people towards them. But in the long run if they are really worrying about the wellbeing of the populations of our state, then they must rethink this strategy and should say that they will provide a fixed quantity of millets for every ration card holder in the state.

5. We can clearly see that millets have fled from the plates of the poor to the urban dining tables. Because urban people who are more educated and more informed have started understanding the great quality of millets for their health and nutritional wellbeing. Whereas the rural people having been constantly misguided by the arguments and advertisements like cheap rice have lost their way in this discourse. We sincerely hope that this gap is bridged and an enlightened political party will take up the cause of millets and draw policies for greater and affordable access to millets.

6. To be precise, we request all political parties to include the following points in their manifesto:

For Farmers

Every millet farmer will be given a string of incentives to grow millets. The incentives could include

- Bonus for the affordable and accessible nutrition that the millet farmer provides to the population
- Bonus for the water saved in agriculture by growing millet crops
- Bonus for hosting climate resilient crops
- For nurturing less fertile lands and producing food and nutrition for our population
- For pursuing agriculture that can withstand severe flux in temperature and rainfall.

All these suggestions together add up to about Rs. 10, 000 per acre for every millet farmer for all the period that the farmer grows millets on her / his land. This will be the true Rythu Bandu both for the farmer and for the general population. Though this may appear a bit expensive, a real analysis of this money can give us lot of indications as to how it will lead to a larger welfare of the state and thereby make the cost very attractive and less prohibitive. This can save a lot of state expenses on health-care for farmers suffering from ailments caused by pesticides and malnutrition.

For Women & Children

Being the most vulnerable sections, women and children especially in rural areas as per the available statistics suffer from extreme malnutrition.

- Therefore Introduce millet meal for women and children in Anganwadis and mid day meal school programme. This will develop a very strong and healthy young population for the state.

Go Organic

By and large, organic millet production will also drastically reduce the chemical pollution in our soils and in our air. Thereby it would largely improve the quality of life for the common citizens.

- This will also reduce the cost on chemical fertilizers which are bound to go northwards considering the climbing costs of petroleum products.
- We must take a leaf out of neighbouring state which has turned organic food production into a global propaganda and has been attracting a lot of investments from international institutions.

For Poor of the State

Faithfully implement the National Food Security Act which recommends inclusion of atleast seven kilos of Millets per ration card. In Telangana we have done a great disservice to our malnourished population by ignoring this recommendation. It is time that we build a strong correction in our food policy.

For Urban Consumers

Every year the millet markets have been expanding under an increasing demand from urban consumers who are completely fed up with the toxic food that is supplied to them. Following this trend we must respond to this consumer demand and put more and more millets in to the market which is produced by local farmers. This will contribute significantly to the emergence of larger numbers of ecologically sensitive consumers.



PV Satheesh

Director, Deccan Development Society (DDS)

National Convenor, Millet Network of India (MINI)

Member, International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES), Brussels

National Convenor, Southern Action on Genetic Engineering (SAGE)

To

All Party Presidents, Secretaries & Manifesto committees, Telangana