



POTENTIAL USES OF LITTLE MILLET (*Panicum sumatrense*), AVALUABLE CEREAL NEGLECTED IN CONTEMPORARY WORLD

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Cereals play a major role in human diet as they are rich in energy, protein, dietary fiber, vitamins and minerals. The dietary fiber found in cereals has been proved to reduce the risk of developing diabetes mellitus, obesity, heart diseases and constipation. Traditionally millets, the minor cereals were grown and consumed widely in Sri Lanka. Yet, little millet (*Panicum sumatrense*, known as ‘Saamai’ in tamil), a round shaped cereal which adds several health benefits to consumers is neglected in contemporary world. This study was conducted with the objectives of investigating the value and use of little millet in traditional dishes and to find out the level of awareness about little millet among the young generation. Data were collected via interviews, field observations and group discussions with cultivators, sellers and consumers of little millet in Jaffna district. A questionnaire was distributed among randomly selected 60 males and 60 females between 18- 25 years old – 32% males and 39 % of females know about little millet while only 2% of them consume the cereal at home. Even though the crop can withstand drought conditions and can be grown in a short period, cultivation and consumption rates of this cereal are very low. The farmers who know the traditional value of little millet cultivate and use it for household purposes. ‘Dosa’, ‘idli’, porridge, milk rice, ‘payasam’, ‘kesari’, ‘uppuma’ and ‘kozukkadai’ can be prepared from little millet and people replace the cereal with rice for lunch. Elders responded that apart from its food value the little millet has medicinal value. In the past it was used to treat poisoning and heal broken bones. Little millet is rarely found in retail shops and it is found mostly in Tamil medical shops. The younger generation knows the cereal as food for pigeons. Since wheat and rice are readily available in shops and wheat plays a major role in bakery foods, the demand for those cereals are high. The forgotten cereal, little millet has to be promoted to build a healthy nation. Awareness should be carried out via demonstrating healthy recipes from little millet in order to improve the nutritional status of the community.

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