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Millet Production in the World

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Millet Production in the World

India grows nearly four of every ten tonnes of the world’s millet. No other country comes close. Yet millet is a small crop next to rice and wheat, and its output has barely grown in years.

This lesson follows the grain in four steps. First, who grows it. Next, where it grows inside India. Then, where it is sold. Last, why the world suddenly cares.



A millet crop ready for harvest on a farm in Tamil Nadu, India. Photo by J’ram DJ, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons.



A field of pearl millet (bajra). India is the world’s largest millet producer. Photo: Herovaclicks, CC BY 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

Millet: a group of small-seeded grasses grown as food grain. They grow well on dry land with few inputs. Bajra, jowar and ragi are all millets or close cousins. They matter because many poor regions can grow little else.

Nutri cereals: the Indian official name for millets and jowar taken together. The group covers jowar, bajra, ragi and small millets. It is used in farm statistics. Reading it right stops you mixing up two different totals.

Lakh tonne: an Indian unit, where one lakh is one hundred thousand. So 100 lakh tonnes equals 10 million tonnes. Indian reports use it often. Knowing it lets you compare Indian and world figures.

FAOSTAT: the statistics database of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. Countries report crop output to it each year. Researchers use it to compare nations. It is a common source for exam facts.

Who grows the world's millet?

How big is India's share?

India is the largest millet producer in the world. According to the US Department of Agriculture, it grew about **39%** of the world's millet in 2022. That was about 120 lakh tonnes out of 304.8 lakh tonnes worldwide.

An ICAR paper gives a similar picture. It puts India's global share at about 40 per cent. It also gives world output as 30.86 million tonnes, from FAOSTAT.

Sources: factly.in; epubs.icar.org.in

Who comes after India?

Niger is the second largest producer, with about 11% of world output. **China** follows with about 9%. So India, Niger and China together grow close to six tonnes in every ten.

The ICAR paper also lists Niger right after India.

Rank	Country	Approximate share, 2022
1	India	About 39%
2	Niger	About 11%
3	China	About 9%

Sources: factly.in; epubs.icar.org.in

Quick check 1. India grows about four-tenths of the world's millet. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Is world millet growing or shrinking?

Over the long run, it is not growing much. An ICAR study says world millet output fell sharply from 1961 to 2022 in Asia, which is still the main producer. Africa went the other way. Its output rose because farmers planted more land.

India shows the same pattern. Its output has stayed below 200 lakh tonnes for many years. From 2000 to 2022, the area under small millets, jowar, bajra and ragi kept shrinking.

Sources: epubs.icar.org.in; factly.in

Where does millet grow inside India?

Which states grow the most?

In the three years from 2019-20 to 2021-22, India grew about 170 lakh tonnes of millets a year. **Rajasthan** led with nearly 49 lakh tonnes. Maharashtra and Karnataka followed with around 24 lakh tonnes each.

Uttar Pradesh came fourth, at 22.3 lakh tonnes. Together these four states gave almost 70% of the crop. With Haryana, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, seven states gave 89%.

Sources: factly.in

Is millet gaining or losing ground in Indian farming?

It is losing ground. Nutri cereals made up 8% of India's foodgrain output in 2010-11. That share has now dropped to 5%. Output topped 200 lakh tonnes in 2010-11 and fell to 137.1 lakh tonnes in 2018-19.

Support schemes have not turned this around. Rice, wheat and maize together make up about 85% of foodgrains.

Sources: factly.in

> **Quick check 2.** The share of nutri cereals in India's foodgrain output has risen since 2010-11. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

How steady is India's millet output?

Not very steady. Over 15 years India grew an average of **167 lakh tonnes** of millets a year. The peak was above 200 lakh tonnes in 2010-11. The low was 137.1 lakh tonnes in 2018-19.

So the crop swings by about a third between a good year and a bad one. Nothing in the data shows a steady climb. That is why experts call output "largely stagnant" despite the attention millets now get.

Sources: factly.in

Why does it matter that seven states grow most of it?

Seven states give **89%** of India's millet. That means a poor monsoon in a few places can cut national output. It also means new schemes must target these states to work.

For an exam, link the two facts. Rajasthan leads in tonnes, and the top seven states hold almost nine-tenths of the crop. A scheme spread thinly over every state would reach few millet farmers.

Sources: factly.in

> **Quick check 3.** Millet output in India has risen steadily every year since 2010-11. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Where does India’s millet go?

Is India a big millet exporter?

Yes, in the world ranking. India is the second largest exporter of millets, behind its place as the largest producer. Its main buyers are the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Nepal, Bangladesh, Japan, Libya, Germany and the USA.

Bangladesh is the steadiest buyer. An ICAR model finds it kept 96.85 per cent of its share from year to year. The UAE kept 51.29 per cent.

Sources: factly.in; epubs.icar.org.in

Why does the world suddenly care about millet?

What makes millet a climate-smart crop?

Millets can grow on arid lands with minimal inputs, according to FAO. They also stand up well to changes in climate. That makes them useful where rain is scarce or uncertain.

Millets can also help countries rely less on imported cereal grains. A country that grows its own dry-land grain depends less on shipments from abroad.

Sources: fao.org; southregion.fssai.gov.in

What was the International Year of Millets?

The UN General Assembly declared **2023** the International Year of Millets. It did so at its **75th session in March 2021**. FAO was named the lead agency for the year.

The goals were to raise awareness of the nutritional and health benefits of millets. The year also aimed to promote their suitable cultivation under adverse climatic conditions, and their sustainable production.

Sources: fao.org; southregion.fssai.gov.in

> **Quick check 4.** FAO was the lead agency for the International Year of Millets. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

> **Quick check 5.** Millets need heavy irrigation and large amounts of fertiliser to grow well. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

What should you remember for exams?

What are the common traps?

Exam setters like to twist the facts about millet. Watch for these traps, which are easy to fall into when you revise in a hurry.

- “China is the second largest producer.” Wrong. Niger is second, with about 11%.
- “India’s share is about 20%.” Wrong. Most sources give about 38 to 40%, though totals differ a little by source.
- “Millets need rich, irrigated soil.” Wrong. They suit dry land with minimal inputs.

Keep these quick recall points ready. They cover the three facts that appear most often in questions on this topic.

- India is first, Niger second, China third.
- The International Year of Millets was 2023, declared in March 2021 at the 75th session.
- Rajasthan is India’s top millet state, with nearly 49 lakh tonnes a year.

Practice MCQs

1. According to US Department of Agriculture data, about what share of the world's millet did India produce in 2022?

A. About 39%

B. About 60%

C. About 50%

D. About 25%

See answer ↓

2. Which country is the second largest millet producer after India?

A. Nigeria

B. China

C. Mali

D. Niger

See answer ↓

3. When did the UN General Assembly declare 2023 the International Year of Millets?

A. At its 74th session in 2019

B. At its 75th session in March 2021

C. At its 70th session in 2016

D. At its 76th session in 2022

See answer ↓

4. Which UN body was the lead agency for the International Year of Millets 2023?

A. FAO

B. WHO

C. UNESCO

D. UNICEF

See answer ↓

5. Why are millets called a climate-smart crop?

A. They grow on arid lands with minimal inputs

B. They need heavy irrigation

C. They grow only in cold regions

D. They need rich, fertile soil

See answer ↓

6. Which statement about India's millet trade is correct?

A. India is the second largest exporter, with the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Nepal among its buyers

B. India imports most of its millet

C. India does not export millet

D. India's only buyer is Bangladesh

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **A.**
   USDA data puts India at about 39% of 2022 output, or about 120 lakh tonnes of 304.8 lakh tonnes. An ICAR paper says about 40 per cent.
   Sources: Factly, Production of millets is largely stagnant · ICAR, Millets in India: current scenario and export dynamics.
   ↑ Q1
2. **D.**
   Niger comes next with about 11% of world output. China is third with about 9%.
   Sources: Factly, Production of millets is largely stagnant · ICAR, Millets in India: current scenario and export dynamics.
   ↑ Q2
3. **B.**
   The Assembly made the declaration at its 75th session in March 2021. The Year itself was 2023.
   Sources: FAO, International Year of Millets 2023 · FSSAI, International Year of Millets.
   ↑ Q3
4. **A.**
   FAO was the lead agency for celebrating the Year, working with other stakeholders.
   Sources: FAO, International Year of Millets 2023 · FSSAI, International Year of Millets.
   ↑ Q4
5. **A.**
   FAO says millets can grow on arid lands with minimal inputs and are resilient to changes in climate.
   Sources: FAO, International Year of Millets 2023 · FSSAI, International Year of Millets.
   ↑ Q5

6. **A.**
   India is the second largest exporter of millets. The UAE, Saudi Arabia, Nepal and Bangladesh are among its major buyers.
   Sources: Factly, Production of millets is largely stagnant · ICAR, Millets in India: current scenario and export dynamics.
   ↑ Q6

Quick-check answers

1. **True.** USDA data gives India about 39% of 2022 output, and an ICAR paper says about 40 per cent. ↑ 1
2. **False.** It fell from 8% in 2010-11 to about 5% now, while rice, wheat and maize make up about 85%. ↑ 2
3. **False.** It peaked above 200 lakh tonnes in 2010-11 and fell to 137.1 lakh tonnes in 2018-19. ↑ 3
4. **True.** The UN General Assembly declared 2023 the International Year of Millets, with FAO as lead agency. ↑ 4
5. **False.** FAO says millets grow on arid lands with minimal inputs and resist climate change. ↑ 5

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