

CONSUMER DEMAND OF FOXTAIL MILLET IN JAFFNA

Sivakaran M.^{1*}

¹Home Economics, Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka

*jmenakaj@yahoo.com

Millets are small seeded cereals available in different colours. They were cultivated and used widely for food preparation traditionally in Sri Lanka. Foxtail millet (*Setaria italica* L) ('Thinai in Tamil) is rich in vitamins, minerals and dietary fiber. It has higher protein and iron value compared with rice and wheat. Although the dietary fiber found in foxtail millets help to prevent non communicable diseases such as diabetes, obesity and heart diseases, the consumption rate of the cereal is very low. This study was designed with the objectives of investigating the uses of foxtail millet among the users and finding out the reason for low level of consumption in Jaffna. Foxtail millet cultivators and users of the study were found from an Exhibition conducted under the theme of 'value of neglected small cereals' at Thirunelvely Agriculture Department Exhibition. Interviews and group discussions were conducted with twenty users and twenty retail shop owners who sell foxtail millets. This millet is still cultivated in Alaveddy and Inuvil areas of Jaffna district. Even though foxtail millet needs less water to grow, cultivation of the cereal is gradually declined where the farmers revealed that poor demand by the people is the major reason. The household users prepare 'dosa', 'idli', porridge, sweets from the de-husked foxtail millets and 'pittu', 'rotti', 'pakoda', cake, cookies and string hoppers from the flour of the millet. Hindus mix the flour with honey to make oil lamps for lord 'Muruga'. Retail shops sell unpolished foxtail millet where consumers need to polish before consumption. Little effort is needed to polish as the millet is very small in size and the husk is light in weight which is another reason for poor demand. Though imported polished foxtail millet is available in Tamil medicinal shops it cannot be purchased in large amount due to its higher prize. Retail shops owners responded that consumer demand for the millet is high as pigeon food compared to household purposes. It can be concluded that cultivation is low due to poor demand among people and actions should be taken to encourage the cultivation and consumption of the low glycemic foxtail millet.

Keywords: *Foxtail millet, Millet, Cereal, 'thinai'*