

Reviving Traditional Wisdom: The Cultural Significance and Culinary Heritage of Millets in Jaffna

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Millets are ancient, nutrient-rich cereals traditionally cultivated and consumed across Sri Lanka. They are known for their health benefits and hold cultural significance in rural diets. Despite their value, millets are now underutilized, calling for renewed attention and revival efforts. This study explores the cultural significance and culinary potential of millets while examining the factors contributing to their reduced presence in contemporary diets. The objectives of the study were to identify the millet varieties currently cultivated in Jaffna, understand the reasons for their underutilization and develop millet-based food products to promote their dietary inclusion. Field observations were conducted to millet cultivation areas where finger millet, little millet, foxtail millet, pearl millet, kodo millet and sorghum were identified. A visit to a processing factory in Karainagar revealed that millets cultivated by local farmers are cleaned, milled and packaged as grain and flour for sale. An interviewer-administered questionnaire was used to collect socio-demographic data from 100 participants. During millet identification, participants could only recognize finger millet as a food source, while other varieties were largely identified as bird feed. Discussions with the participants revealed barriers to millet use, including lack of awareness on cooking methods, limited availability in grocery stores and challenges in milling raw millet using standard mills. Rice and wheat remain dominant staples in the region. To address these gaps, a range of millet-based food products were developed, such as dosa, idli, string hoppers, pittu, hoppers, porridge, kool, milk rice, sweets, savorys, cakes, and cookies. Awareness sessions were conducted to the community on millet benefits and encourage daily use. The study concludes that reviving traditional wisdom on millets is crucial for preserving Jaffna's cultural and nutritional heritage. The findings highlight the need for community education, innovative millet-based products, and improved supply chains. Enhancing awareness and accessibility can effectively restore millets as essential elements of daily diets and local food traditions.

Keywords: Millets, Culinary heritage, Jaffna, Traditional knowledge, Food culture

Rural Hunger and Its Causes: A Qualitative Study Evident from Kirimatiyawa Village in Madawachchiya

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Food insecurity can be identified as a critical concern in rural Sri Lanka, especially in the dry zone area, where farming is the primary livelihood. This study aims to investigate major factors that affect food insecurity in rural areas of the country. This research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors affecting rural food insecurity using a qualitative approach. The methodology employed includes in-depth interviews along with the review of relevant literature. The sample of twenty participants was selected from Kirimatiyawa village in Madawachchiya based on purposive sampling, considering their economic background. Thematic analysis was applied to identify key themes and patterns of food insecurity. Despite farming being the main source of income for the villagers, results indicate that 80% of them suffer from food insecurity. Market competition and high demand for specific foods have created a food shortage and causing prices of food items to rise and creating limited access for low-income people. The growth of farmers' migration from rural to urban areas also contributes to reduced harvest. Politicians' arbitrary development actions, like banning fertilizers within a day, have also affected the harvest and created food insecurity, along with a lack of plans to protect water and soil in the dry zone. Finally, it can be concluded that low income, unequal access to resources, politicians' arbitrary actions and unawareness about the environment lead to food insecurity in rural areas. The study emphasizes the urgent need to establish economic stability in the country and administrative mediation to increase harvesting by promoting farmers' welfare, along with educating them with modern agricultural knowledge.

Keywords: Economic Stability, Food Insecurity, Food Shortage, Rural Community, Social Class