

FOREWORD

Coarse Cereals have been traditionally the main components of the food basket of the poor in India. Predominantly grown in the resource fragile agro-climatic regions of the country, these crops include jowar, ragi, bajra, *save*, *harka* and other small millets. These are cultivated more in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat. When it comes to research on technology and promotion, coarse cereals as a crop group has received little attention in agriculture as well as social sciences, hence also in the policy matrix. The area under coarse cereals has been declining in most of the regions growing these crops and as a result the crop group is relegated as 'inferior crops'. The neglect of this crop group is also quite strong on the economic front as the relative price structure as well as the market conditions are not very favourable for it. Above all, these crops are grown by the small and marginal farmers residing in such regions having repercussions of changes upon their household economy.

Coarse cereals have been known for their rich nutrient contents and drought resistance quality. These are comparable and at times even better than wheat and rice in their calorie and other nutrients contents. As these crops tolerate longer moisture stress, they are preferred as well as predominated the cropping pattern of drought-prone areas in Central India. Ecologically these are well suited to the drought-prone regions of Deccan plateau. Above all, the cost of production has also been quite low and thus they become affordable for consumption as well as production for the rural poor. The crops also offer a good potential in food processing industry and as a promising exportable commodity.

Keeping in view the specific nature of the crop group this study was undertaken at the instance of the Commission on Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP), Government of India by Dr. R. S. Deshpande, Professor and Head, Agricultural Development and Rural Transformation (ADRT) Unit of ISEC and Prof. V. M. Rao, National Professor, ICSSR, and Former Member, CACP. The study is essentially focussed on locating the growth trends in coarse cereals, and identifying the constraints in cultivation, technology and marketing. Karnataka being a predominant region growing this crop group, the study incorporates both secondary as well as primary level data from the State to understand the decision-making behaviour of the farmers as well as other stakeholders. An attempt has also been made here to understand the price responses of coarse cereals at the micro-level as well as the behaviour of the crops in the domestic market. The study comes out with quite a few interesting results including a disaggregated food distribution system incorporating local level production of coarse cereals and the existing network of Panchayat Raj Institutions.

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