

Kezoma Village Undertakes Mission to Upscale Millet Farming

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Introduction

Milletts like foxtail, finger, and jobstea have been traditionally grown in Nagaland, with efforts to boost their production as these crops have been a part of the region's history and are known for their nutritional value and have been believed to help with joint pain in the past. However, the rapid decline of traditional farming practices in the face of modern agriculture has raised concerns about food security and biodiversity in many rural regions. In Kezoma Village, located in Kohima District, Nagaland a collective effort is underway to revive an age-old agricultural practice—millet farming. This initiative, driven by the National Food Security Mission (NFSM) 2024-2025, is empowering over 100 farmers in the village, marking a significant step in the region's agricultural resilience.

On a bright spring day, farmers from Yohotsomi B Khel, Kezoma, gathered for a millet sowing demonstration on a 2-hectares field at Chieza, Kezoma. The event was part of a larger push to integrate millet cultivation as a primary crop in the area, a crop that has long been relegated to the background by the dominance of rice. As District Agriculture Officer (DAO), Kekhrieletuo Yhome (Male), addressed the farmers, he emphasized the importance of millet cultivation not only for food security but also for its immense health benefits, especially in light of rising health concerns related to rice consumption, such as diabetes, "This crop is more than just food; it's an essential part of our cultural heritage," said Yhome. "Millet offers a rich source of protein and is a great alternative to rice, particularly for diabetic patients."

A Community United by Tradition and Innovation

Historically, millet was considered a crop for the less affluent in the village, with rice seen as the staple of wealthier households. However, over time, the narrative has shifted. As Yhome pointed out, the decline of millet cultivation over the past decades has been accompanied by a corresponding loss of crop diversity and resilience. Yet, in recent years, Kezoma Village has emerged as a leader in revitalizing millet farming in Kohima District, with nearby villages such as Chiechama and Mima also adopting large-scale cultivation.

"Millet was once the grain of choice during the lean months, especially in July and August, when rice stocks would run low," explained Yhome. "Now, we are encouraging farmers to not only grow it for consumption but also to explore its economic potential in the market."

The importance of integrated support systems for farmers was also highlighted. While millet farming can be labor-intensive, particularly during the milling process, Yhome assured the community that modern equipment like millet mills would be provided to ease the burden and ensure that the crop reaches its full potential.

This development has been backed by Kezoma Village Council Chairman, KikrosaNaki, who shared that the village has made a collective decision to observe the “Chünyi” festival—dedicated to millet—every year on July 20. This cultural and agricultural event is set to reinforce the importance of millet in the village’s food systems.

Transforming Traditions with Modern Solutions

Elder and former village council chairman, ZadehoRikha, recounted how millet was once traded at a much lower price than rice, symbolizing its position as a “poor man’s food.” However, times have changed. With the rise in demand for millet and its acknowledged health benefits, the price of millet has surged, positioning it as a valuable crop both for subsistence and market sales.

“Today, millet costs more than rice. This shift presents a unique opportunity for farmers,” said Rikha. “But we must remember that the goal is to grow millet not for the market alone but for food security, so other villages can follow in our footsteps.”

The collective effort in Kezoma reflects the broader shift in the agricultural community—a move toward climate-resilient, nutritious, and sustainable farming practices. This initiative, coupled with financial assistance and technical support from the government, has provided farmers with the tools they need to scale up their millet farming. Farmers have been given access to three varieties of millet seeds, offering diversity in cultivation and resilience against the unpredictable challenges of climate change.

Looking Ahead: A Milestone for Sustainable Farming

As the day-long demonstration came to a close, it was clear that Kezoma Village is not just reintroducing a crop, but revitalizing a way of life. With continued support from agricultural officials and a commitment to modern practices, the village is set to become a model for other communities looking to integrate sustainable farming systems into their agriculture.

Mission Overview: As part of the NFSM initiative for 2024-2025, over 100 farmers from Yohotsomi B Khel, Kezoma, gathered for the millet sowing ceremony held at Chieza, a designated field in Kezoma. The mission’s goal is to cultivate millet on a large scale, not just for local consumption, but also to ensure food security and enhance economic stability in the region.

Key Participants:

- District Agriculture Officer (DAO), KekhrieletuoYhome
- Chairman, Kezoma Village Council (KVC), KikrosaNaki
- Elder and Former Village Council Chairman, ZadehoRikha
- Agriculture Department Officials
- Village Council members and elders

Target Areas:

Millet cultivation across 2 hectares in Chieza

Support for 100+ farmers involved in millet farming

Key Points of the Mission:

- 1. Reviving Traditional Practices:** The cultivation of millet, once considered food for the poor, has experienced a resurgence in recent years due to its nutritional benefits and health value. The villagers have witnessed a shift in perceptions, as millet is now considered a more valuable crop, commanding higher market prices than rice.
- 2. Government Support:** Under the NFSM initiative, the government provides technical assistance, financial support, and modern equipment to farmers. The government also offers a unique approach to overcoming the labor-intensive challenges of millet farming by providing modern machinery like millet mills, which will replace traditional pounding methods.
- 3. Health Benefits and Market Potential:** Millet is known for its rich protein content and nutritional benefits. It serves as an alternative for people with dietary restrictions, such as diabetic patients. Moreover, millet farming offers a potential income source for local farmers, especially with the increasing demand for millet in the market.
- 4. Millet as a Sustainable Crop:** The crop is recognized for its resilience in drought-prone areas, making it ideal for sustainable farming practices. Millet farming could play an essential role in maintaining biodiversity and ensuring the ecological balance in the region.
- 5. Village Initiative:** The Kezoma Village Council has passed a resolution to observe a yearly festival, Chünyi (Millet Festival), to celebrate millet cultivation on July 20. This event brings together various Khels and groups within the village, further promoting millet farming as a communal effort.

Interventions and Activities:

- 1. Training and Demonstrations:** The agricultural department organized a day-long training and sowing demonstration event. Farmers were introduced to new millet farming techniques and educated about the proper cultivation, care, and harvesting practices.
- 2. Distribution of Seeds:** Three different varieties of millet were sown during the demonstration to ensure diversity and improve the overall yield.
- 3. Financial Assistance and Machinery Support:** Farmers received financial aid for the purchase of inputs like seeds and fertilizers. The introduction of modern millet milling machinery will significantly reduce the manual labor traditionally involved in millet processing.

Economic Impact:

Income Generation: The success of the millet farming initiative could provide local farmers with an additional source of income, ensuring better economic resilience for the community. Millet is expected to fetch higher market prices compared to rice, providing a profitable

alternative for farmers.

Market Expansion: The growing demand for millet in urban areas presents an opportunity for farmers in Kezoma to capitalize on the market potential, thus strengthening their economic position.

Challenges and Concerns:

Labor-Intensive Nature of Millet Cultivation: Despite the efforts to introduce modern machinery, millet farming remains a labor-intensive practice. The challenges of processing the crop, particularly during milling, could still pose a constraint unless more machinery is made available.

Sustainability of Practices: While the mission focuses on scaling up millet production, there remains a need for continuous support to ensure the long-term sustainability of the practice. Farmer education and market access must be prioritized to ensure the viability of millet farming in the region.

Summary and Future Outlook: With strong government support and increasing community involvement, millet farming in Kezoma and neighboring villages holds significant promise. The mission aligns with broader goals to ensure food security, improve nutritional outcomes, and support sustainable farming practices across the region.