

Small Millets - Food for the Poor or Elite? - An Online Market Study in Coimbatore City of Tamil Nadu, India

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ABSTRACT

Small millets are the ideal food group for all the people irrespective of age. Nowadays awareness about the nutritive richness and therapeutic property of small millets, increased the domestic demand for consumption. While from production side, short-duration nature, drought resistance, fodder usage and higher price add up the advantage and encouraged the farmers in growing small millets. In marketing of small millets, each player in the market played a different marketing strategy. Online marketing is one among such marketing strategy, currently developing at a faster rate in India. Impropportionate demand and supply leads to price hike and made small millets, once seen as food for the poor to food for the elite group. This study aims at listing out the prices of small millets and its various value added products in online grocery stores operated in Coimbatore city of Tamil Nadu. The study results showed that price of small millets were devastatingly high in online markets and hence it suggested that government should come forward in small millet promotion schemes in order to bring this nutri rich cereals to the access of every Indian.

Keywords

Small millets, Price, Online stores.

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Introduction

Millets are rich source of fibre, minerals, B-complex vitamins, polyphenols, lignans, phytosterols, phyto-oestrogens, and phytocyanins. They also acts as antioxidants, immune modulators and detoxifying agents and therefore have potential to protect against age-related degenerative diseases like cardiovascular diseases (CVD), diabetes, cancer etc. (Rao *et al.*, 2011). Millets are non-acid forming, easy to digest and non-allergenic. Compared to polished Paddy rice, millets release lesser percentage of glucose over a longer period of time. Hence consumption of millets reduces risk of heart disease, protects from diabetes, improves

digestive system, lowers the risk of cancer, increases immunity in respiratory health, and protective against several degenerative diseases such as metabolic syndrome and Parkinson's disease (Manach *et al.*, 2005; Scalbert *et al.*, 2005; Chandrasekara and Shahidi, 2012).

Unlike paddy and wheat which require more inputs especially water, millets grow well in dry regions as rainfed crops. These goodness of small millets create awareness among consumers and make it popular especially among the educated and economically well doing consumers. But the price of its whole

grains and value added products acts as a hindrance in the promotion of small millets consumption especially among the middle and lower class section. Hence it necessitates a study on price comparison between organic and conventional whole grains produce along with its value added products in the retail stores. In addition to stores and super markets, a variety of retail channels has emerged now. Currently online marketing is developing at a faster rate in India.

The number of internet users in India is expected to reach half a billion before 2020 and 1044 billion households are expected to purchase food grocery online. At present 144 million households buy more than 5000 worth of food and groceries per month.

The size of retail business in India is close to about 500 billion dollars out of which 70 % is food and grocery (Hari Menon, 2016). Keeping all these, this study aimed at assessing the price of various small millets and its value added products in the online market stores of Coimbatore city of Tamil Nadu.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in Coimbatore, the second largest city of Tamil Nadu and one among the proposed Smart cities of India. The city was selected because of the growing concern of online marketing in this district.

In order to study the price of various small millets and its value added products, 8 online grocery stores operated in the city was selected (Table 1). It was observed that in most of the stores, both organic and conventional produces were available in many brand names (Table 2). Hence the average price of existing brands in the selected produce was taken for analysis.

Results and Discussion

During data collection it was found that most of the value added products of small millets were marketed in online organic stores. Hence the prices of organic produces were also taken into consideration. Considering the uncertainty in price of various produces, the online price data for all the selected stores was collected on the same day during September 2017. The value added products from small millets which are commonly seen in the online grocery market were flour, idiyappam mix, sevai, suji, cookies, noodles, flakes and rusk. The price list of various small millet whole grains and its value added products were given in Table 3. It was observed from Table 3 that there exists an average price difference of Rs. 37 to Rs. 129 between conventional and organic whole grains.

The maximum difference between organic and conventional price was seen in Proso millet with the difference of Rs 129 per kg. Among the small millet category, the average price of value added products was seen maximum in proso millet with Rs 333 per kg, while it was minimum in fox tail millet with Rs. 217 per kg. The overall rate of small millet whole grains was Rs. 78. per kg. Whereas its counterpart, organic whole grains cost Rs.122 per kg. The overall average price of value added products was Rs.235 per kg. This price was comparatively higher than the average price of rice or wheat in the market.

The results from the study suggested that the price of small millets were comparatively higher than that of rice or wheat in the market. Small millets were once seen as food for the poor but currently it is valued as food for only upper class as the cost is unaffordable for lower middle class Indian. Higher price in the market is mainly due to less supply from the production side.

Table.1 Online grocery stores selected for the study in Coimbatore

S.No	Online Grocery Stores
1	Big Basket
2	Grocery Raja
3	E-Kadai
4	Nellai Stores
5	Dhanyam
6	Indian Super Heroes
7	Gunam
8	B and B

Table.2 Various brands of small millets and its value added products marketed in online grocery stores in Coimbatore

S.No	Brands of small millets
1	Aero
2	Ecogreen
3	Parambaryam
5	Arya
6	Dhanyam
8	Gunam
10	B & B
11	24 Mantra
12	BB Royal
13	Safe Harvest
14	Millet Cookies
15	Millet
16	Arya Farm
17	Organic Mandya
18	Swasth
19	Dear Earth
20	ABNS Amirtham

Table.3 Price list of small millets and its value added products (Rs.)

Particulars	Rate per kg
Finger Millet	
Whole grains	46
Organic Whole grains	83
Price difference	37
Average price of VAP	223
Barnyard Millet	
Whole grains	87
Organic whole grains	129
Price difference	42
Average price of VAP	249
Little Millet	
Whole grains	109
Organic whole grains	151
Price difference	42
Average price of VAP	241
Foxtail millet	
Whole grains	66
Organic Whole grains	117
Price difference	51
Average price of VAP	217
Kodo millet	
Whole grains	77
Organic Whole grains	123
Price difference	46
Average price of VAP	238
Proso millet	
Whole grains	84
Organic Whole grains	129
Price difference	45
Average price of VAP	333
Overall average price of small millets	
Average price of whole grains	78
Average price of organic whole grains	122
Average Price of VAP	235

In order to bring down the price of small millets, farmers could be educated about the demand for small millets and its products in the market. Most of the farmers, relent in the

cultivation of small millets mainly because of drudgeries involved in processing of small millets. Hence it could be cleared off by way of providing small millet processing

equipments at subsidized price or renting these equipments at a reasonable cost to the farmer societies. This will encourage more farmers into small millet cultivation and thereby hike in their production.

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