Aims of the Smart Food initiative

A Smart Food initiative has been developed with the aim to mainstream Smart Food back as in a developing countries — bringing diversity in diets and on the farm. This is to make a major breakthrough in overcoming malnutrition and rural poverty, and being more sustainable on the environment.

The approach

The overall approach is based on:
1. Creating a Smart Food concept and messaging: This will include building a strong scientific case for selected Smart Food, developing the marketing approach and building an accreditation scheme for Smart Food.
2. Creating a demand pull with consumers: This will include promoting a modern image for the selected Smart Food through an intensive and highly creative viral campaign, complemented with facilitating innovative, and nutritious convenience food products. From policy makers to urban aspirational markets, rural communities, processors and investors will be engaged, along with the food service, media and health industries.
3. Ensuring smallholder farmers and rural communities are pulled out of poverty and hidden hunger: This will require a concerted effort working with rural health workers, connecting farmers to the value chain and advocacy for research and development and supporting policies.
4. Filling the knowledge gaps: Identify and address the gaps and scientific research needs on how these foods affect you (nutrition and health), the planet, the farmer and the whole value chain (cooking, processing, marketing, etc.).

How are they Good for You?

These Smart Food crops are highly nutritious and target some of the largest micronutrient deficiencies and needs, especially of women and children. For example:
- Iron, zinc and folic acid — Pearl millet has very high levels and bioavailability studies have shown that they will provide the average person’s daily requirement of iron and zinc.
- Calcium — Finger millet has 3 times the amount compared to milk.
- Affordable protein — provided by grain legumes.
- Low Glycemic Index — which means escalating levels of diabetes — can be avoided or managed by sorghum and millets because they have low Glycemic Index.
- High antioxidants — Fights against heart diseases, life style disorders and cancer.
- Gluten Free

How are they Good for the Smallholder farmer?

Smart Food are good for the smallholder farmers because:
- Their climate resilience means they are a good risk management strategy.
- Legumes have an important contribution to soil nutrition and when rotated with other crops, increase the water use efficiency of the entire crop cycle.
- Their multiple uses and untapped demand means they have a lot more potential.
- Unlike the other crops they have not yet reached a yield plateau and have great potential for productivity increases.

Smart Food is a global initiative founded and coordinated by ICRIAR.

Leading the Smart Food initiative globally:

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Smart Food is a good for the small holder farmers because it
- Can provide the average person's daily requirement of iron and zinc.
- Provides a low glycemic index.
- Is high in antioxidants.
- Is gluten free.

Leading the Smart Food initiative globally:

How are they Good for the Planet?

These are also crops critical in the drylands that will best survive the harsh environments and are most resilient hence climate smart crops. Basiclly, millets are the last crop standing in times of drought. The millets, sorghum and legumes have the lowest water and carbon footprints of all the crops.

How they affect you (nutrition and health), the planet, the farmer and the whole value chain (cooking, processing, marketing, etc.).

Partners on the Smart Food initiative

Significant impacts and mainstreaming Smart Food can only be achieved through partnership. This requires a wide variety of players, from the food, retail and catering industries (new entrepreneurs to multinationals); the health industry; marketers; social media players and governments to development agencies, foundations and NGOs.

Smart Food is food that fulfills all the criteria of being:
- Good for You
- Good for the Planet
- Good for the Farmer

The major constraints

The major constraints for these dryland cereals and grain legumes are that holding them back from reaching their full potential are — very little investment, significantly under developed value chains, and the image of the food as old-fashioned, especially the case for millets and sorghum.

Dryland cereals like millets and sorghum, and grain legumes are Smart Food.

The major impacts and policy support have significant potential to increase yields, provide better nutrition, fulfill multiple uses (food, feed, biofuels, brewing), develop modern processed food products and integrate farmers into the value chain.

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