



# Performance of Different Nutri-Cereals in Non-Traditional Rainfed Agroecosystem of Eastern India

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## ABSTRACT

A long-term field experiment was initiated during kharif season of 2020 and 2021 at the ICAR Research Complex for Eastern Region, Patna, Bihar, India (25°30'N, 85°15'E, 52 m above mean sea levels) with an objective of designing the most productive, profitable, and sustainable climate-resilient cropping system for eastern India. Soil of experimental site was loamy in texture (50.4, 35 and 14.6% sand, silt and clay) with pH of 7.5, EC of 0.12 dS m<sup>-1</sup>, soil organic carbon content of 6.0 g kg<sup>-1</sup>, KMnO<sub>4</sub> oxidizable N of 64.6 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>, Olsen P-23.9 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>, NH<sub>4</sub>OAc exchangeable K-78.3 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> and DTPA-extractable Zn-0.66 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> (0-15 cm soil). During  $1^{\text{st}}/2^{\text{nd}}$  year of study, 07 nutri-cereals including [(jowar (CSV 15) and bajra (Proagro 9001)] and 5-minor nutri-cereals [(ragi (RAU 8), barnyard millet (VC 207), foxtail millet (Rajendra Kauni), proso-millet (TNAU 202) and kodo-millet (JK 41)] grown under 3-different planting window i.e., starting with onset of monsoon (05 July) and later at 10-days intervals (15 and 25 July). Our results revealed that 2<sup>nd</sup> planting window system (15 July) was performed better as compared to first and second planting system (5 and 25 July) in terms of crop yields. Among the nutri-cereals, jowar (3.43 t ha<sup>-1</sup>) and bajra (2.89 t ha<sup>-1</sup>) as major and barn yard millets (2.06 t ha<sup>-1</sup>), ragi (1.93 t ha<sup>-1</sup>) and kodo-millet (2.05 t ha<sup>-1</sup>) as minor nutri-cereals found more productive when planted on 2<sup>nd</sup> planting window (15<sup>th</sup> July). Thus, from the present study, it may be concluded that nutri-cereals planted up to 15<sup>th</sup> July performed better in terms of crop productivity for the sustainable millets production system under non-traditional rainfed agroecosystem of eastern India.

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## INTRODUCTION

In changing scenario of the globalization, agriculture in India must face new challenges to compete at global level in agricultural commodities (Kumar et al., 2019). Indian agriculture is now facing the second-generation problems i.e. lowering the water table, nutrient imbalance, soil degradation, and salinity, resurgence of pest and environmental pollution (Kumar et al., 2021a, b). Despite fact that, area in millets cultivation has been drastically reduced over years in India and particularly in eastern India (Kumar et al., 2023a, b). It is one among major producers of millets in the world. This is due to productivity gains in millets which showed increase despite area shrinkage. With increase in population, per capita availability of food grains including cereal has decreased over year (Kumar et al., 2022a, b). Whereas in stress tolerance conditions, millets provide nutritious food compared to other cereals with high fibre

content, minerals, and slow digestibility. Millets can constantly help to meet our needs of their animal feed/fodder and will continue to be grown by dryland and resource poor farmers in the foreseeable future.

Millets are one of the cheapest sources of energy, higher digestive fibre, protein, vitamin, and mineral. In terms of nutrient intake, sorghum account for 35% of the total intake of calories, protein, iron, and Zn in dominant production/ consumption areas (Kumar *et al.*, 2017). Production of cereal demands more water and fertilizers compared to millets. Millets are hardy crops, can grow in less favourable conditions and have potential to bridge gap between demand and supply to ensure the nutritional security (Mishra *et al.*, 2017a, b). While, population pressure continues, acreage is decreasing. Despite a wider climatic adaptability, cultivation of diverse nutri-cereals/ millet species is gradually decreasing

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in recent past (Mishra et al., 2018). Lack of institutional support for millets in contrast to rice and wheat continue to shrink millet growing. Despite this, several communities in dry/rainfed region having known food quality of millets over generations continue to include range of millet in traditional cropping patterns and recognize millet as an essential part of diets (Pandit et al., 2020; Supriya et al., 2023). Unlike in other parts of world, almost all millets are grown in rainy season while a few likes, sorghum and pearl millet are grown during winter in South and Central India, used for human consumption, livestock feed and raw materials for industries (Pan et al., 2024). Thus, millets are key for sustenance of human and livestock population in an era of the perceptible climatic changes. Introduction of nutri-cereals/ millets cultivation in dry/rainfed farming of country will help to support the farmers' livelihood in coming years (Prakash et al., 2017). For this, knowledge on standardization of improved production technologies has a vital role to create the awareness among end users and for its wide adoption. Thus, keeping in view of the above facts, present study was to undertake during two consecutive Kharif season of 2020 and 2021 at the ICAR Research Complex for Eastern Region Patna, Bihar, India.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

A long-term field experiment was initiated during *Kharif* 2020 at the ICAR Research Complex for Easten Region, Patna, Bihar, India (25°30'N, 85°15'E, 52 m above mean sea levels) with an objective of designing the most productive, profitable, and sustainable climate-resilient cropping production system for eastern India. The experimental area falls under the eastern Indo-Gangetic Plain (IGP) of India and is characterised by sub-tropical humid climate. Mean rainfall received was 727 mm during cropping period. Soil the of experimental site was loamy in texture (50.4, 35 and 14.6% sand, silt and clay) with pH of 7.5, EC of 0.12 dS m<sup>-1</sup>, soil organic carbon content of 6.0 g kg<sup>-1</sup>, KMnO<sub>4</sub> oxidizable N of 64.6 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>, Olsen P 23.9 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>, NH<sub>4</sub>OAc exchangeable K-78.3 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> and DTPA-extractable Zn-0.66 mg kg<sup>-1</sup> (0-15 cm soil, Table 1).

 
 Table 1: Initial physico-chemical properties of soil of nutricereals experimentation

Mechanical composition	Texture		
Particulars	0-15 cm	0-30 cm	Loam
Sand (%)	50.40		
Silt (%)	35.04		
Clay (%)	14.56		
Ph	7.43		
OC (%)	0.60	0.45	
Mineralizable N (kg/ha)	146	134	
Available P (kg/ha)	54.09	35.05	
Available K (kg/ha)	177	218	
DTPA-Zn (mg/kg)	0.66	0.46	
DTPA-Fe (mg/kg)	32.95	22.90	
DTPA-Cu (mg/kg)	2.88	2.21	

During 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> year of the study, 07 nutri-cereals including 2major [(jowar (CSV 15) and bajra (Proagro 9001)] and 5-minor nutri-cereals [(ragi (RAU 8), barnyard millet (VC 207), foxtail millet (Rajendra Kauni), proso-millet (TNAU 202) and kodomillet (JK 41)] grown under 3-different planting window i.e., starting with onset of the monsoon (05 July) and later at 10days intervals (15 July & 25 July 2021). Net plot size of experimental plot was 5.0 m×4.0 m. Sorghum and pearl millet planted manually at a spacing of 45 cm ×15 cm, while all minor millets were planted at a spacing of 25 cm×5 cm (Table 2).

Crops	Varieties	Seeding rate (kg ha-1)	Spacing (cm)	Fertiliza- tion (kg NPK- ha-1)
Sorghum/	CSV-15	15	45×15	60-40-30
Jowar				
Pearl millet/	Proagro-9001	05	45×15	80-40-40
Bajra				
Foxtail millet/	Rajendra Kauni	10	25×10	60-40-25
Kauni				
Barnyard millet/	VC 207	10	25×10	60-40-25
Sawa				
Proso-millet	TNAU 202	10	25×10	60-40-25
(Cheena)				
Finger millet/	RAU 8	10	25×10	60-40-25
Ragi				
Kodo-millet	JK 41	10	25×10	60-40-25
(Kodo)				

 Table 2: Crops, varieties, seed rate and fertilizers of different nutri-cereals used in experiment

To manage initial weed flushes, atrazine @ 0.50 kg/ha was applied as pre-emergence using 500 litres water/ha with help of knap-sack sprayer, fitted with flat-fan nozzle. Hand-hoeing was also done at 25 DAS and intra-row weeds removed by hand-weeding simultaneously. Crop was grown on fully on monsoonal rains and no-supplemental irrigation was given to crops during their cropping periods. Recommended dose of phosphorus and potassium was applied in respective crops as standard dose as basal through di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) and muriate of potash (MOP), respectively. Nitrogen was applied as per need of respective crops through urea after subtracting N amount supplied through DAP. The dose of nitrogen was applied in two equal splits, 50% as basal and remaining at 35 days after sowing (DAS). Standard agronomic management practices were followed as per crop requirement and mentioned in Table 3.

The crop was harvested separately for estimation of grain and straw/stover yield of each crop. After harvesting and threshing, the crop yield was recorded and then it was adjusted at 12% moisture content. Rice equivalent yield (REY) was computed to compare the performance of millets-based rotations by converting grain yield into equivalent yield of rice on market price of the component crops. All recorded data were analysed with help of analysis of variance (ANOVA)

	Days to 50% flowering (no.)			Days to crop maturity		
Nutri-cereals	1 <sup>st</sup> Planting window	2 <sup>nd</sup> Planting window	3 <sup>rd</sup> Planting window	1 <sup>st</sup> Planting window	2 <sup>nd</sup> Planting window	3 <sup>rd</sup> Planting window
Sorghum/Jowar	87	70	70	115	109	108
Pearl millet/Bajra	66	53	57	104	92	105
Foxtail millet	53	45	44	81	78	74
Barnyard millet	55	49	45	87	78	73
Proso-millet	53	44	46	87	79	74
Finger millet	82	77	76	106	99	104
Kodo-millet	65	59	56	100	92	100

Table 3: Crop phenology of different nutri-cereals under different planting windows system (Mean data of 2-years)

technique using Indian NARS Statistical Computing Portal. Least significant difference test (LSD) was used for comparison of the treatment means at 5% level of significance (P=0.05).

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Results from Table 4 revealed that different nutri-cereals differed significantly among themselves to attain 50% flowering and physiological maturity under different planting windows system. Among major nutri-cereals i.e., sorghum and pearl millet, recorded the minimum days (70 & 53, respectively) while planted on 15<sup>th</sup> July to attain 50% flowering while among the minor nutri-cereals, foxtail millet,

barnyard millet, finger millet and kodo millet (44, 45, 76 and 56, respectively) on 3<sup>rd</sup> planting window (25<sup>th</sup> July) and proso millet (44) on 2<sup>nd</sup> planting window system to attain 50% flowering. For attaining the physiological maturity, sorghum (108), foxtail millet (74), barnyard millet (73) and proso millet (74) observed minimum days on 3<sup>rd</sup> planting window (25<sup>th</sup> July) compared to pearl millet, finger millet and kodo millet on 2<sup>nd</sup> planting window (15<sup>th</sup> July). This might be due to inherent variations in their genetic behavior of nutri-millets that has led to these differences in specific phenological attributes (Mishra *et al.*, 2017; Prakash *et al.*, 2017; Kumar *et al.*, 2023b).

 Table 4:
 Crop yields and rice equivalent yields (REY) of different nutri-cereals under different planting windows system (Mean data of 2-years)

Nutri <sup>-</sup> cereals	1 st Planting window (05 July)		2 <sup>nd</sup> Planting window (15 July)		3 <sup>ra</sup> Planting window (25 July)	
	Crop yields (t ha <sup>-1</sup> )	REY (t ha <sup>-1</sup> )	Crop yield (t ha <sup>-1</sup> )	REY (t ha <sup>-1</sup> )	Crop yield (t ha <sup>-1</sup> )	REY (t ha <sup>-1</sup> )
Sorghum/Jowar	2.75ª	4.12ª	3.43ª	5.14ª	2.91ª	4.37ª
Pearlmillet/Bajra	2.21 <sup>b</sup>	2.72 <sup>de</sup>	2.89 <sup>b</sup>	3.55 <sup>de</sup>	2.29 <sup>b</sup>	2.82 <sup>de</sup>
Foxtail millet/Kauni	1.39 <sup>ef</sup>	2.52 <sup>ef</sup>	$1.74^{\mathrm{f}}$	3.16 <sup>f</sup>	1.52 <sup>ef</sup>	2.76 <sup>ef</sup>
Barnyard millet/Sawa	1.67 <sup>cd</sup>	3.14 <sup>c</sup>	2.07 <sup>c</sup>	3.87 <sup>b</sup>	1.72 <sup>d</sup>	3.21 <sup>bc</sup>
Proso-millet (Cheena)	0.66g	1.23g	0.86g	1.62g	0.59g	1.11g
Finger millet/Ragi	1.50 <sup>de</sup>	2.80 <sup>d</sup>	1.93 <sup>de</sup>	3.61 <sup>cd</sup>	1.59 <sup>e</sup>	2.98 <sup>d</sup>
Kodo-millet (Kodo)	1.75°	3.28 <sup>b</sup>	2.05 <sup>cd</sup>	3.83 <sup>bc</sup>	1.82 <sup>c</sup>	3.40 <sup>b</sup>
LSD (P=0.05)	0.12	0.21	0.15	0.26	0.13	0.22

Crop yields and rice equivalent yields (REY) of different nutricereals in diverse planting windows showed significant variations, with specific trends based on planting time. Among all the nutri-cereals, sorghum/jowar consistently outperformed other nutri-cereals among all planting windows. It recorded significantly highest yield in 2<sup>nd</sup> planting window (15<sup>th</sup> July) with 3.43 t ha<sup>-1</sup> showing 19.8 and 15.2% higher crop yields compared to 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> planting window system, respectively and the highest REY of 5.14 t ha<sup>-1</sup> showing 19.8 and 15% higher in comparison to 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> planting window, respectively. In 1<sup>st</sup> planting window (5<sup>th</sup> July), it outyielded 2.75 t ha<sup>-1</sup>, with a corresponding REY of

4.12 t ha<sup>-1</sup>, while 3<sup>rd</sup> planting window (25<sup>th</sup> July) produced a yield of 2.91 t ha<sup>-1</sup> and an of 4.37 t REY ha<sup>-1</sup>. However, pearl millet/Bajra also showed high yields, with its peak yield of 2.89 t ha<sup>-1</sup> on 2<sup>nd</sup> planting window showing 23.5% and 20.8% higher than 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> planting window, respectively and an REY of 3.55 t ha<sup>-1</sup>, 23.4% and 20.6% higher than 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> planting window, respectively. In 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> planting window system, significant yields had 2.21 t ha<sup>-1</sup> (2.72 t REY ha<sup>-1</sup>) and 2.29 t ha<sup>-1</sup> (2.82 t REY ha<sup>-1</sup>), respectively, indicating slightly better performance when planted on 15<sup>th</sup> July. While comparing among minor nutri-cereals, foxtail millet/kauni had lower yields than jowar and bajra, with the highest yield

of 1.74 t ha<sup>-1</sup> was recorded under 2<sup>nd</sup> planting window having 20.1% and 12.6% higher than 1st and 3rd planting window, respectively leading to an REY of 3.16 t ha<sup>-1</sup>, 20.3% and 12.7% higher than 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> planting window, respectively. In 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> windows, significant yields were 1.39 t ha<sup>-1</sup> (2.52 t REY ha<sup>-1</sup>) and 1.52 t ha-1 (2.76 t REY ha-1), respectively, showing a slightly improved performance in mid-July planting window. Barnyard millet/Sawa showed considerable variation across planting windows, achieving significantly highest crop yield of 2.07 t ha<sup>-1</sup> in 2<sup>nd</sup> planting window with 19.3% and 16.9% higher than 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> planting window, respectively and 3.87 t REY ha<sup>-1</sup>, 18.9% and 17.1% higher than 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> planting window system, respectively. 1st and 3rd windows recorded a significant yield of 1.67 t ha-1 (3.14 t REY ha-1) and 1.72 t ha-1 (3.21 t REY ha<sup>-1</sup>), respectively, indicating most favorable conditions in mid-July. However, during the study year, proso millet (Cheena) was the lowest-yielding crop across all planting windows. It produced significantly highest yield of 0.86 t ha<sup>-1</sup> in 2<sup>nd</sup> planting window with 23.3 and 31.4% higher than 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> planting window, respectively with 1.62 t REY ha<sup>-1</sup>, 24.1 and 31.5% higher than 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> planting window, respectively. The 1st and 3rd windows had yields of 0.66 t ha-1 (1.23 t REY ha<sup>-1</sup>) and 0.59 t ha<sup>-1</sup> (1.11 t REY ha<sup>-1</sup>), respectively. Finger millet/Ragi showed moderate yields, with significantly highest yield of 1.93 t ha<sup>-1</sup> was recorded in 2<sup>nd</sup> planting window showing 22.3 and 17.6% higher than 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> planting window, respectively and an 3.61 t REY ha<sup>-1</sup>, 22.4 and 17.5% higher than 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> planting window, respectively. In 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> windows, yields were 1.5 t ha<sup>-1</sup> (2.8 t REY ha<sup>-1</sup>) and 1.59 t ha<sup>-1</sup> (2.98 t REY ha<sup>-1</sup>), showing better performance when planted in mid-July.

Kodo millet showed relatively stable yields across windows. It was recorded significantly highest yield of 2.05 t ha<sup>-1</sup> in 2<sup>nd</sup> planting window, 14.6 and 11.2% higher than 1st and 3rd planting window, respectively with 3.83 t REY ha-1, 14.4 & 11.2% higher than 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> planting time, respectively. In 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> window, yields were 1.75 t ha<sup>-1</sup> (3.28 t REY ha<sup>-1</sup>) and 1.82 t ha<sup>-1</sup> (3.40 t REY ha<sup>-1</sup>), indicating favorable growing conditions across planting periods. Results indicate that timing of planting plays a critical role in determining crop yields and REY of nutri-cereals. Among all the nutri-cereals, 2<sup>nd</sup> planting window system (15<sup>th</sup> July) generally resulted in highest crop yields and REY, suggesting that mid-July planting offers most favorable conditions for growth. The performance of sorghum/jowar across all planting windows was notably superior compared to other cereals, thus making it resilient and high-yielding option for cultivation. The findings were in line with the results of researchers in their field investigation

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(Kumar et al., 2022b; Kumar et al., 2023b). Variability in the crop yield among crops like Pearl millet, Barnyard millet, and Kodo millet suggests that these crops also benefit from mid-July planting window system, though their overall yield potential was lower than that of sorghum. Foxtail millet and finger millet, while performing moderately well in 2nd planting window, indicating their relatively lower adaptability to varying planting conditions. Proso-millet consistently exhibited tlowest yields and REY across all planting window system, highlighting its sensitivity to planting time and lower productivity as compared to other nutri-cereals. This finding suggests that Proso- millet may require more specific growing condition or improved agronomic practices to enhance its performance. Similar relationship between sowing dates and crop responses have been previously reported by Kumar et al. (2023b). These studies demonstrated that delayed planting shortens time to heading or flowering, leading to reduced resource capture. This reduction in canopy exposes late-planted crops to prolonged dry-spells or severe drought during reproductive stage, negatively impacting grain setting and filling.

## CONCLUSION

From present study, it may be confirmed that:

Nutri-cereals crop planted up to mid-July had performed better in terms of crop yield possibly due to favorable weather conditions, including the adequate moisture and temperature, which are crucial for crop establishment and growth for sustainable millets/climate resilient system for non-traditional rainfed agroecosystem of eastern India.

- These findings provide a valuable insight for the farmers and policy makers aiming to enhance productivity of the nutri-cereals by adjusting the planting schedule based on crop type/local environmental conditions.
- Additionally, significant differences across planting windows suggest that further research may be needed to explore the influence of other factors, such as soil health, nutrient management, and pest control, on the yields of these cereals.

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