

North American Millets Alliance (NAMA): Project Concept

International Year of Millets: 2023

Summary: The United Nations has declared 2023 as the International Year of Millets. In this context, the mission of the North American Millets Alliance ([NAMA](#)) is to share knowledge about the social and economic benefits of millet cultivation, marketing, and consumption in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. NAMA proposes to organize a public education program in 2023, via webinars, around a “millet of the month” approach in which one of the 12 recognized “millets” is spotlighted each month (see page 3 below). The webinar would be complemented by information bulletins, social media engagement, podcast series, and a conference in early 2024 attended by representatives of agronomic, producer, consumer, business, and other organizations with social and economic interest in raising awareness of millet among the general public.

The generic term “millets” encompasses at least a dozen distinct genus-species of crops in the grass family that are cultivated for their edible small, round grains, and for animal fodder. Six of these millets (or eight if sorghum and teff are included) are grown to any significant extent in North America, primarily in the Midwest region of U.S. Most of the world’s millet varieties are grown and consumed in Asia, notably India and China, and in Africa, particularly Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. In a table on page one of a [technical bulletin](#) about millets, written by Dr. Rob Myers of the University of Missouri, the millets that are currently grown in North America are differentiated by common name, genus-species, and center of origin.

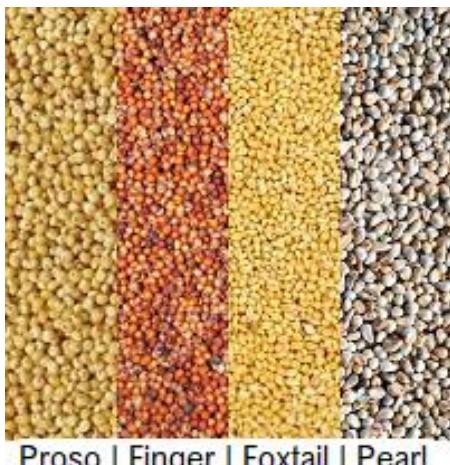
While much of the world’s production of millets is grown on small-scale farms, there is commercialization of [processed millet products](#) around the globe already, including millets products in North American markets and online. Indeed, there has been a steadily developing interest, in cultivating millets in North America as livestock fodder and bird feed, and more recently for consumption by people due to their health-related qualities (high nutritional profiles, gluten-free, and low glycemic index). Equally important is that millets grow well in drier soil conditions and warmer temperatures, so they respond to the effects of global climate change, and also require fewer irrigation and petrochemical inputs, as compared to wheat, maize, and rice.

The anticipated short-term and longer-term results of this project are:

- 1) Increased awareness of and interest by growers, processors, and consumers in North America about the actual and potential, social and economic, benefits of millets cultivation, marketing, and consumption.
- 2) Increased acreage devoted to the production of millets and to research about millets in North America.
- 3) Increased consumer demand for millets and products made with millets, both those that are grown in North America and those that are grown in and imported from abroad in unprocessed forms.
- 4) Financial benefits to farmers in North America and internationally who grow and market millets, and to food companies who venture initially or more deeply into processing and marketing millets products.

Other sources of information about millets’ potential in North American food and farming systems include: [The Millet Project](#) at the University of California; [Dr. Dipak Santra](#) at the University of Nebraska; [David M. Brenner](#) with the USDA National Plant Germplasm System; and for the consumption aspects of millets, [Dr. Kiruba Krishnaswamy](#) at the University of Missouri (please also see [Geisen, Krishnaswamy, and Myers](#)).

The North American Millets Alliance ([NAMA](#)) is a social benefit initiative dedicated to promoting millets as resilient crops and nutritious foods in the US and neighboring countries during and after the **International Year of Millets** (2023). NAMA has no legal status as a 501c3 organization, nor is it aligned with any public or private organization or institution. Donor contributions to support NAMA would be made to a fiscal sponsor. The idea of NAMA was developed by Don Osborn (PhD), D. Joni Kindwall-Moore (RN), and Jonathon Landeck (PhD). Don is a consultant and independent scholar. His diverse international career including 16 years in West Africa, East Africa, China, and the Middle East, has involved rural development (smallholder agriculture, community forestry, and pastoral systems), research and research management, university teaching, and localization of information technology. Publications include two books and several articles on African languages, and a book chapter on soybeans in local foods of West Africa. His interest in millets comes from encountering them in various cuisines and food products, and working with farmers of pearl millet, fonio, and sorghum. Joni is the founder and CEO of [Snacktivist Inc](#) and comes from a background in ethnobotany and health sciences. Joni spent her early career in research, evaluating medicinal plants for potential pharmaceutical and nutraceutical applications. She also spent 15 years as a critical care RN with a specialty in ICU, emergency, and diabetic education. It was her combined experience in health care and ethnobotany that lead her to found Snacktivist with the goal of creating future-forward, healthy foods from ancient grains including millets. Jonathon is an Advisor to the [Seeds, Soil & Culture Fund](#) who has worked in US and international agriculture since 1980, including many years in West African countries where millets are a common crop and staple food. Jonathon is an agronomist with much experience in managing social benefit organizations and private foundations. Needless to say, all three co-founders of NAMA have enjoyed the taste and nutritional benefits of millets many times, a key reason why they are behind the initiative.



Grains of four major types of millets



Left to right: Three millets in the field (foxtail, proso, pearl)

<https://extension.missouri.edu/publications/g4164>

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Examples of Possible Monthly Millets Webinar Themes (45 minutes)

(plus 15-minute segments to highlight individual millets)

MONTH	PRIMARY THEME	HIGHLIGHTED MILLETS
January	Introduction & Tour of the Millets, Sorghum, and Fonio	Proso millet <i>Panicum miliaceum</i>
February	Ancient Grains: Millets Prior to Wheat, Rice & Maize	Finger millet <i>Eleusine coracana</i>
March	Millets as Nutrition Powerhouses	Foxtail millet <i>Setaria italica</i>
April	Millets: Ideal Crops for Anthropocene Conditions	Pearl millet <i>Pennisetum glaucum</i>
May	Millets' Popularity: Past, Present, and Future	Sorghum <i>Sorghum bicolor</i>
June	Tasty Grain: What Millets Bring to the Table (Part 1)	Fonio <i>Digitaria sp.</i>
July	Tasty Grain: What Millets Bring to the Table (Part 2)	Barnyard millet <i>Echinochloa sp.</i>
August	Processing Millets: Equipment Needs	Little millet <i>Panicum sumatrense</i>
September	On and Off the Shelf: Millet Products in Stores Today	Browntop & Guinea millets <i>Brachiaria sp.</i>
October	Drink up! Millets Beverages Alcoholic & Non-Alcoholic	Kodo millet <i>Paspalum scrobiculatum</i>
November	Not Just for the Birds: Millets and Animal Farming	Teff <i>Eragrostis tef</i>
December	Brooms and Pillows: Millets' Other Uses	Job's Tears <i>Coix lacryma-jobi</i>