



Dr Shivendra Bajaj, Executive Director, Federation of Seed Industry of India and Alliance for Agri Innovation

The global wave of consuming 'superfoods' has taken Indians in its fold too. People are going back to the old treasures like amla (Indian Gooseberry), pumpkin seeds, berries, which are said to be rich in antioxidants, vitamins, minerals. These superfoods have multiple benefits as their consumption helps in weight loss, promotes heart health, control blood pressure, prevent ageing as well as reduce the risk of certain chronic diseases. Superfood markets are gaining considerable space in the food market due to the rising awareness on leading a naturally healthier lifestyle. People especially the youth are ready to spend significant money on health and nutrition and superfoods can contribute towards achieving that.

Superfoods are an assorted mix of various crops such as leafy vegetables, grains and cereals, berries, seeds, and seafood and dairy products, which have showcased several health benefits including reducing chances of cancers. It is modern consciousness that has been the driving force for the consumption of superfoods. But it saw exponential growth during the Covid-19 pandemic when healthy home cooked eating took the centre stage and strengthened the impression that superfoods have huge potential to keep infections away. Avocado, kiwi, blueberries and cranberries, oats, kale, chia seeds, are some of the famous global superfoods. Indian contribution to the international superfoods have been identified such as moringa, Jamun (Indian blackberry) amla, ashwagandha (winter cherry), buckwheat, flax seeds, forest honey, millets like ragi among others. The list is growing as different superfoods are seen as a solution to address different deficiencies and health problems.

The global superfoods market size in 2020 was USD 172 billion and it is expected to reach USD 287 billion by 2027. In India too, the market is growing and it is expected to see a growth of 6 percent during 2021-26. Superfoods have become a lucrative market due to their demand and profit margin, that is 3-4 times higher when compared to other foods. Global brands, supermarkets, cafes, fitness clubs are bringing innovations in use of superfoods in their products such as daily nutrition mixes, sports nutrition supplements, smoothie mixes, meal replacement drinks, nutraceuticals, daily protein. Turmeric latte is one such example.

Internationally famous superfoods like quinoa and chia are actually from Peru and Bolivia but they have found takers in urban areas in India. Farmers in Rajasthan, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka are earning big money by cultivating these superfoods. Quinoa has been adopted into Indian cuisine and is being used in various snacks such as idli, payasam, poha, and even in protein bars, cookies and beer.

Indian millets too are identified as superfoods and are set to get global recognition. The Government of India is encouraging the cultivation of millets that can help secure dietary, nutritional and economic security. Millets are rich sources of minerals like calcium, iron, zinc, phosphorus, magnesium, and potassium, besides containing appreciable amounts of dietary fibre and vitamins. Millet production in India had declined over time due to changes in consumption pattern and replacement by wheat and rice. Farmers in India can easily switch back to millets. The Indian government has asked corporates to brand and promote Indian millets. These superfoods can ensure higher income to farmers through exports. Similarly, another local superfood moringa has risen to fame for being rich in calcium and is in great demand worldwide. Moringa is traditionally used in South Indian dish Sambhar but has been adopted in Indian drinks. The superfood market is still underrated in India but there is going to be sharp growth due to the growing awareness about healthy food and new trends of switching to veganism and vegetarianism. Indian farmers can make farming a profitable business through superfoods cultivation as most of them need low inputs, less water and withstand harsh weather conditions.

