“Now it is an Easy Life”: Women’s Accounts of Cassava, Millets, and Labor in South India

Type: Journal Article
Author: Elizabeth Finnis
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Abstract:

Although coarse grains are considered underused and abandoned crops in much of India, they have gained increasing attention as having the potential to improve food security and positively affect small farmers’ incomes. These trends offer the opportunity to examine the specific ways that contemporary declines in coarse grains are understood at the local level; in particular, it is necessary to consider how women in specific locales and at specific times view agricultural transitions in terms of their impacts on everyday time demands. I examine the decline of millet varieties, in favor of cassava cultivation, in the Kolli Hills, Tamil Nadu, through the lens of the experiences and workloads of women. A close examination of attitudes toward millets, in terms of field labor and household work, provides insights into the possibilities for local-level coarse grain projects.

Short Title: “Now it is an Easy Life”
Date Added: Mon Jun 2 11:31:36 2014
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Tags:
coarse grains, India, labor, women

Notes:

This journal article discusses the state of agriculture in rural India. In many areas, coarse grains (such as millet) have lost popularity due to their difficult and time-consuming processing requirements. These drawbacks to millet processing have allowed space for other grains (such as rice) to increase in popularity throughout rural India. However, women have acknowledged their preference for the taste of millet, and the author calls for small-scale mechanical processors that would allow women to choose their grains of preference and enjoy reduced labor loads. Although this source is specific to millet in India and we have been focusing our attentions on the processing of millet in sub-Saharan Africa, the conclusions drawn from its ethnographic data support our mission of designing a small-scale millet thresher. This article highlights the importance of our project and points toward its applicability and (hopefully) acceptance amongst women in rural sub-Saharan Africa.

Attachments
- Snapshot

Beginnings of a Grain Revolution- A Senegalese experience with EAS private-public partnership in cereal value-chain development

Type: Report
Author: Brent Simpson
Date: 2012
Institution: University of Michigan & USAID
Date Added: Mon Jun 2 12:25:22 2014
Modified: Mon Jun 2 12:26:57 2014

Notes:

This report by Brent Simpson, professor of agriculture, development and resource economics at Michigan State University, provides a useful history of the development of millet markets in Senegal. Simpson identifies synchronized efforts by local female entrepreneurs as having been key in this project, especially a particular Madame Coulibaly (available for contact?). The article also details the roles of different actors in the millet market, including processors, ANCAR (a national extension agency), relais (local farmer contact groups), and individual farmers.

This report is key in characterizing potential partners and users of the pearl millet thresher. For field testing purposes, it may be helpful to contact Mme. Coulibaly, ANCAR or relais. Their contact information can likely be obtained through Brent Simpson.

Attachments

Chapter 6 - Food Storage and Processing for Household Food Security.

Type: Book Section
Author: Food And Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Place: Rome
Box 45 of this text describes methods for traditionally processing pearl millet by quern or mortar and pestle. Post-threshing processing includes pounding, winnowing, washing, drying, and pounding/sifting to create a flour. This text describes a method of processing similar to many other texts. However, it does not speak of where and how local variations may occur. More research on this subject is important to understand what variations on our design may be necessary or desirable.

Notes:

Codex Standard for Whole and Decorticated Pearl Millet Grains

Notes:

This codex alimentarius for pearl millet, published by the FAO, details the international standards for sale and shipment of pearl millet. It is useful in describing moisture content and storage in its “quality factors” for pearl millet.

Attachments

- w0078e07.htm#P5183_330479

Consumer Preferences and Utilisation of Sorghum and Millet in Rural Areas of Botswana

Notes:
This article details the processes surrounding the production and processing of millet and sorghum in rural Botswana. Work was done by both men and women (normally for household consumption), and this production was found to be constrained by poor soil, wild animals, or lack of fertilizers (166). Grains were processed with a mortar and pestle by women for household consumption, and was only taken to mechanical millers for big occasions when large amounts of flour were needed, as these were considered to be expensive (167).

This article is useful in providing another case study of millet production in a given community. The findings are similar to those included in many other articles, including the gendered nature of work and barriers to technology, largely being cost. This article also includes a useful methodology for participatory rural appraisal that serves as a useful model for developing an ethnographic research design for our thresher’s field testing (165).

**Attachments**

- JSTOR Full Text PDF

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**Enriching Nutrition in Senegal**

**Type:** Web Page  
**URL:** http://www.usaid.gov/news-information/frontlines/feed-future/enriching-nutrition-senegal  
**Abstract:** Early reports show booming sales for women’s groups that learn to make and market enriched flour, which is boosting the health of the region’s young.  
**Date Added:** Mon Jun 2 10:37:55 2014  
**Modified:** Mon Jun 2 10:37:55 2014

**Notes:**  
This article discusses a project of Feed the Future in Senegal to support the production and marketing of vitamin-enriched flour. This flour blends corn flour with the flour of more nutritious grains, including millet. This project was achieved through a group of women known as Jab Gollade, who produce and market the flour. However, it is important to note the strong bias in the reporting of this article, as it is about the success of a USAID project and is featured on the USAID website.

This article highlights one possible way that our thresher may be put to use in commercial markets involved in the production of enriched flours. It also gives another example of women’s collectives in Senegal and rural development in Africa. Jab Gollade may be a strong contact to pursue for field testing in Senegal.

**Attachments**

- Snapshot

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**Expanded Agribusiness and Trade Promotion**

**Type:** Document  
**Author:** Mamadou Sanfo  
**Publisher:** USAID  
**Date Added:** Mon Jun 2 10:37:55 2014  
**Modified:** Mon Jun 2 10:37:55 2014

**Notes:**  
This report discusses barriers to increased millet and sorghum production in West Africa and the mission and objectives of the USAID Expanded Agribusiness and Trade Promotion Project to develop a stronger regional market for these grains. Objectives include the creation of a value-added market, organizational capacity building/integration and increased transportation networks.

As this USAID program is involved in all aspects of the millet value chain, they may be able to act as an important partner in field testing or in connecting us to other local organizations. Dr. Mamadou Sanfo seems to be a strong connection and an expert in his field.

**Attachments**


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**Handbook of Cereal Science and Technology, Second Edition, Revised and Expanded**

**Type:** Book  
**Author:** Karel Kulp  
**Publisher:** CRC Press  
**ISBN:** 9780824782948  
**Date:** 2000-03-28  
**Library Catalog:** Google Books  
**Language:** en  
**Abstract:** This thoroughly revised second edition addresses the full spectrum of cereal grain science, employing agronomic, chemical, and technological perspectives and providing new and expanded treatment of food enrichment techniques, nutritional standards, and product quality evaluation. Written by over 40 internationally respected authorities, the Handbook of Cereal Science and Technology, Second Edition discusses recent developments in the chemical composition and functionality of cereal components such as proteins, carbohydrates, and lipids; highlights newly developed special ingredients and microbiological operations in processed foods; and investigates the most up-to-date production, processing, and uses of triticale, wild rice, and other grains. The book also addresses the latest standards set by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, international organizations, and industry lobby groups; illustrates how new breeds of cereal grains are developed and sustained; explains new processing techniques for producing baked goods, pasta, breakfast cereals, and...
This text details the dietary significance, crop morphology, methods of processing, and nutritional data of grains of “the millet” family. In detailing these processes of consumption, the authors discuss storage practices, types of milling, and secondary processing for consumption. The text indicates a threshing rate of approximately 7.5 kg per woman hour (43). The “figures” section of this chapter includes many images of pearl millet physiology and processing practices. The authors’ background are largely in chemistry and crop and soil sciences. McDonough and Rooney are affiliated with the agricultural research station at Texas A&M University and Serna-Saldivar with El Instituto Tecnologico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey in Monterrey, Mexico.

This chapter in “The Handbook of Cereal Science and Technology” is an important source of information on millet physiology and processing. It argues that millets are of great dietary significance and are often processed and consumed daily in areas in which they are grown. This data, in addition to the nutritional significance discussed by the authors, further supports the importance of our project. However, the author’s discussion of millet processing was rather general and broad, and this topic warrants further research.

Increasing Rural Community Incomes Through Processing Sorghum and Millet Grains into High Quality Processed Foods in Niger

This article discusses the status of millet and sorghum production and processing in Niger, as well as ways in which these systems may be improved to attain greater food security and income. In section 1.2 and tables 8-22 (a summary of a survey of farmers to assess their acceptance of mechanical threshers), the authors found that farmers would very interested in a mechanical thresher and were happy with its speed and the quality of grains that it produced. The article also discusses participatory capacity building in communities and points to the existence of women’s groups. This article is published by the Collaborative Crop Research Program, whose goal is in “helping smallholder farmers feed their world.” The author may be Moustapha Moussa (can we contact them?)

This text supports the stated goal of our project to create a thresher for communities to increase the ease of processing pearl millet, to reduce drudgery of women’s labor, and to produce a clean grain. Interviews and surveys reveal that the project is necessary and desired in these communities in Niger. Although the authors spoke of the importance of grain purity, they failed to detail their methods for assessing grain purity. This is an area for further research. This report also includes potential project partners, including McKnight, Hope; Promiso and Intsornmil projects.

Lost Crops of Africa: Volume I: Grains

Scenes of starvation have drawn the world’s attention to Africa’s agricultural and environmental crisis. Some observers question whether this continent can ever hope to feed its growing population. Yet there is an overlooked food resource in sub-Saharan Africa that has vast potential: native food plants. When experts were asked to nominate African food plants for inclusion in a new book, a list of 30 species grew quickly to hundreds. All in all, Africa has more than 2,000 native grains and fruits--
Along with other crops of significance in Africa, this text discusses the significance of pearl millet through its early history as a domesticated crop and, mainly, in a contemporary sense through an analysis of its wide geographical range, versatility, and importance in African lifeways. This text details the nutritional qualities of pearl millet, crop morphology and growth requirements, and the importance of millets for subsistence. In the chapter on subsistence millets, the authors discuss the norms around the growth, processing, and consumption of pearl millet, as well as potential areas for improvement. In a final chapter on commercial millets, the authors discuss the potential for the commercialization of millet and its requirements. This text has been published by the National Research Council and has utilized the knowledge and background of a large number of scientists.

This source is useful in its detailed information on the production and processing of pearl millet. Like many other sources, its discussion of the importance of millet further supports the goal of our project to maintain the significance of and ease the labor requirements for pearl millet in subsistence foodways in Africa. However, this text raises important questions about the commercialization of pearl millet which is a goal for many organizations, such as the NRC. It is important to consider the ways in which our design could be co-opted for commercial processes or may be used to resist this commercialization and maintain important subsistence connections—or perhaps something in between the two.

Attachments

- Snapshot


- Type: Book
- Author: Michel Mallet
- Publisher: Ministry of Agriculture, Water, and Rural Development, Directorate of Planning and Namibian Agronomic Board
- Date: 2001
- Library Catalog: Google Books
- Language: en
- Short Title: Mahangu Post-harvest Systems
- # of Pages: 66
- Date Added: Mon Jun 2 12:18:24 2014
- Modified: Mon Jun 2 12:18:24 2014

Notes:

This report discusses the importance of millets in Namibian foodways, post-harvest processing (storing, drying, threshing by beating with sticks, winnowing, primary/secondary processing for consumption, and marketing), and the dynamics of formal and informal grain markets. The authors qualify this information by saying that there is little understanding of the geographic distribution of particular traditional threshing methods or the existence of mechanized threshers. The text concludes by arguing that these systems of production are key for the subsistence and food security of rural households in Namibia and highlights the need for improvements and R&D, including mechanized threshers.

This text confirms the importance of our project, as many others have. It further lays out the system of millet production and processing in which our thresher would ideally be a part. However, it is important to note that the support of this publication by the Namibia Agronomic Board gives the conclusions a significant bias. Many scholars and international agencies that point to the importance of mechanization have explicitly or implicitly stated goals for the formalization and development of grain markets and commodification of millet. It is essential to keep these biases in mind as we move forward and consider the distribution of and access to our thresher.

Attachments

- Google Books Link

Mahangu Urban Consumption Survey

- Type: Report
- Author: Sabine Leporrier
- Author: Antoine Leveau
- Author: Sandrine Dury
- Author: Nicolas Bricas
- Report Number: Final
- Date Added: Mon Jun 2 12:14:06 2014

Notes:

This report discusses an urban market for millet in Namibia and provides a commodity chain analysis by detailing systems of production, distribution and marketing for this system. The study highlights the demand by urban consumers who had migrated from millet production areas and positions millet flour as a necessary, nutritious, and affordable part of their diet.

This article highlights other ways in which our thresher may be of use—for an urban formal or informal market. The authors further conclude that decentralized mechanization of processing is necessary to build this market and increase food security for those in urban areas, as well as income for rural producers. It is important to keep in mind these themes of access and control as we consider the marketing, distribution and "ownership" of our thresher.

Marketing Margin and Transaction Cost in Pearl Millet Market Supply in Borno State, Nigeria

- Type: Journal Article
- Author: Bashir Alhaji Baba
- Author: Yakaka Bukar Maina
- Volume: 3
This article discusses the characteristics of the market for pearl millet in Borno, Nigeria, including socioeconomic characteristics of actors, transaction costs associated with supply, and market constraints. Actors range from small scale rural farmers (usually selling surplus) to larger trading operations in structured networks, although the majority of trade identified was between rural areas. The authors suggest the importance of marketing cooperatives to avoid high transportation costs.

Although our thresher is intended for use by subsistence farmers in rural Africa, this article suggests that the lines between subsistence and commercial farmers may often be blurred. As such, it is important to be aware of the characteristics and processes involved in formal and informal markets for millet, as our thresher may be involved in such markets at times.

Attachments

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Millet Has Many Faces

**Type**: Report  
**Author**: Joani Dong  
**Date**: 2011  
**Series Title**: Dakar  
**Institution**: United States Department of Agriculture Food for Progress  
**Report Type**: GAIN Report: Senegal  
**Date Added**: Mon Jun 2 11:21:14 2014  
**Modified**: Mon Jun 2 11:22:48 2014

**Notes:**

This report discusses the importance of millet to nutrition and life ways in rural Senegal (nutrition, agronomic, cultural), as well as the challenges that rural areas face regarding sufficient millet production. The article reports that ⅓ of Senegal’s total agricultural land is devoted to millet (specifies millet as a "commodity") and that millet has a special relationship with peanuts, as the two are often grown together (3). The article also discusses the gendered labor of millet processing in Senegal, which includes threshing, de-hulling, and processing into flour by women. Dong argues that sufficient millet production include climate change, population pressures, and the needs for government and private sector involvement (4). However, the article is explicit in its goal to develop millet as a commercial crop and has a significant bias in this regard. This report is important in detailing the role of millet in Senegalese foodways and production systems. It is important to be aware of production practices in Senegal, specifically, as we hope to do our field testing in the country. The connection between millet and peanuts may be an interesting relationship to explore, especially given Jock Brandis’ project in the “Peanuts” film.

Attachments

- Millet%20has%20many%20faces_Dakar_Senegal_11-23-2011.pdf

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Pearl Millet for Grain

**Type**: Document  
**Author**: Lee Dewey  
**Author**: Waynee Hanna  
**Author**: William Dozier  
**Author**: Patricia Timper  
**Author**: Jeffrey P Wilson  
**URL**: http://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.cfm?number=B1216  
**Publisher**: University of Georgia  
**Date Added**: Mon Jun 2 12:00:15 2014  
**Modified**: Mon Jun 2 12:11:09 2014

**Notes:**

This brief bulletin details the growth habitats and requirements, pest control, harvesting and handling, and international marketing/economics of pearl millet. These include temperatures of 75-90º, deep and well-drained (sandy) soils, and soil temperatures of at least 70º at a depth of 2". This bulletin was published by the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension, the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, and the College of Family and Consumer Sciences.

This information will be helpful in growing and harvesting our own pearl millet in the area. It appears that the millet can be germinated in the greenhouse and transplanted in the late spring/early summer. The article specifically recommends against planting in water-logged clays (most of the Hampshire campus and surrounding area). Appropriate sandy soils can be found in Montague and perhaps closer.

Attachments

- detail.cfm?number=B1216
Chapter 1 gives some information on the range of millet anatomy: the height of the plant ranges from 0.5-4 m and the grains are ovoid (egg shaped) and 3-4 mm long. The section entitled “Millet Production” under Chapter 2 gives information on the amount of pearl millet production by country (information found in many other sources as well). Chapter 3 offers an outline of practices involved in the storage and processing of millet. Much of this material supports information already discussed in other sources, but of note is the description of long-term unthreshed millet storage in Nigeria, which is listed as 3-6 years. This highlights the variability of inputs for threshing, as the chemical composition and moisture content of this older grain has certainly changed. This also means that the aging millet that we have available may not be entirely off the mark of what would be used for threshing in sub-Saharan Africa.

This article discusses the presence of technology in a rural village in Zimbabwe and the reluctance by some women to adapt this technology over traditional methods. The authors argue for the strengthening of more traditional rural livelihoods, which have traditionally been attacked and dismantled by development plans. In discussing millet processing in Nyamadzawo Village, the authors describe methods of traditional processing, where millet is threshed by pounding and is followed by dehulling and grinding (4-5). Where modern threshers have been developed, they are out of reach due to distance and cost (4). Much of the discomfort and rejection was in regard to mechanical dehullers, which were perceived to produce a product of lower quality and be too expensive. In this, cost, accessibility, and central location seem to be key—all issues that our thresher hopes to address. Furthermore, as our thresher does not include mechanization of milling, issues of flour quality do not pertain. However, it is necessary still to determine what is considered to be quality threshed millet. The article also mentions to use of organized labor groups, or ‘nhimbe’ (8-9). Although it does not discuss how this organization and labor exchange is expressed in threshing, the ways in which threshing work may be shared by multiple individuals at a time is important to keep in mind as creating an easily scaled design.

Page 2 mention of a “modern thresher that [has] been developed which can do the work efficiently (UNIFEM 1988: FAO 1983)