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Ragi Demand on the Rise: A New Opportunity for Indian Farmers

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For generations, ragi, or finger millet, has been a familiar food in many Indian households. In several parts of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and other states, it has traditionally been consumed as ragi mudde, porridge, roti, dosa and other local preparations. Once viewed mainly as a traditional or low-cost food, ragi is now finding a new place in supermarkets, health-food stores, restaurants and processed food products. This change is being driven by several factors at the same time. Consumers are showing greater interest in nutritious foods, food companies are developing new millet-based products, governments are promoting millets and international markets are increasingly looking at Indian millets. At the same time, recent mandi movements in August 2026 have drawn attention to the changing market for ragi. The important question is whether the current increase in demand is only a short-term market movement or whether it signals a longer-term change in the value of ragi. For farmers, this distinction matters because sustained demand can create opportunities for better prices, diversification and value addition.

A noticeable movement in ragi prices

Recent market data show that ragi prices have experienced sharp movements in several mandis during 2026. In Davangere APMC, Karnataka, for example, the modal price reached about ₹3,569 per quintal on 25 August 2026, compared with ₹2,615 the previous day. This represented an increase of more than 36 per cent in the reported modal price. Kallakurichi in Tamil Nadu also recorded a sharp movement, with the reported price reaching ₹3,699 per quintal on 25 August, compared with ₹2,799 reported at the end of July. The movement has not been limited to one market. Recent mandi reports show considerable variation between markets, with some markets reporting prices above ₹5,000 per quintal. Bengaluru APMC, for instance, reported a modal price of ₹5,100 per quintal on 31 August 2026, while Bhimunipatnam APMC in Andhra Pradesh reported an average price of around ₹4,210 per quintal on 3 September. Such price movements should not automatically be interpreted as proof of a permanent shortage or an export-led boom. Mandi prices can change because of arrivals, local procurement, quality differences, trader activity, stock availability and short-term demand. However, repeated price strength across different markets is worth watching because it comes at a time when the broader millet economy is also expanding.

Why is ragi attracting more attention?

One major reason is the changing perception of ragi among consumers. Traditionally, ragi was strongly associated with rural diets and traditional food cultures. Today, it is increasingly being presented as a nutritious cereal suitable for modern diets. Ragi contains dietary fibre and important minerals, including calcium and iron and is naturally gluten-free. Its nutritional profile has helped it gain attention among consumers looking for alternatives to highly refined foods. The growth of health-conscious consumers has also encouraged food businesses to experiment with ragi biscuits, malt drinks, flour, dosa mixes, snacks, breakfast products and ready-to-cook foods. This is an important shift. Earlier, a farmer largely sold ragi as grain. Today, the same grain can potentially enter several different markets. It can be cleaned and graded, milled into flour, converted into malt, incorporated into bakery products or processed into ready-to-eat and ready-to-cook foods. Each additional step can create value beyond the raw grain. India's broader millet economy is already showing this transition. According to IBEF, India produced about 18.01 million tonnes of millets in 2024–25 and exported 1.21 lakh tonnes of millets worth about ₹500.81 crore in FY2024–25. The major export destinations included the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Nepal, the United States and Germany.

Domestic consumption is becoming a major market

Export markets receive considerable attention, but the domestic market may be even more important for the long-term growth of ragi. India has a large population with an established cultural familiarity with millets. Ragi does not have to be introduced as a completely new food. Instead, traditional consumption can be connected with modern food products. Urban consumers are increasingly encountering ragi in packaged flour, breakfast mixes, health drinks, snacks and bakery products. Restaurants and food businesses are also experimenting with millet-based dishes. This creates demand not only for ragi grain but also for consistently graded, clean and processed raw material. The growth of domestic demand is particularly important for farmers because it can provide a more stable market base than dependence on exports alone. If processors, retailers, institutions and consumers continue purchasing ragi throughout the year, demand can extend beyond the traditional consumption season. Government policy is also supporting this change. The Government of India has included millets within its broader nutrition and food-security efforts and has promoted processing, value addition and market development. Such measures can help move millets from being viewed only as traditional grains to becoming commercially viable food commodities.

The export window is also expanding

Ragi is not only an Indian food anymore. Indian millets are increasingly reaching international markets. According to APEDA, India exported 138.69 thousand tonnes of millets during 2025–26, valued at approximately ₹543.40 crore. The UAE accounted for 22.4 per cent of millet exports, followed by Saudi Arabia at 12.7 per cent, Nepal at 7.8 per cent, the USA at 6.7 per cent and Morocco at 3.8 per cent. Ragi is included among the millet commodities exported from India. This does not mean that all of the recent increase in ragi mandi prices is caused by exports. In fact, available market information points to several possible causes of short-term price movements, including supply conditions and procurement activity. Nevertheless, the expansion of the overall millet export market creates an additional avenue through which demand for ragi can grow. The opportunity becomes even greater when exports move from raw grain towards value-added products. Instead of exporting only ragi grain, India can potentially export ragi flour, malt, mixes, snacks, bakery products and other processed foods. Value-added exports can create opportunities for processors, farmer producer organisations and small enterprises while generating additional demand for farm produce.

Government support is strengthening the ragi market

The rising importance of ragi is also reflected in agricultural policy. For the 2026–27 marketing season, the Government of India fixed the MSP of ragi at ₹5,205 per quintal, compared with ₹4,886 per quintal in 2025–26. The government also reported that ragi's MSP increased from ₹1,550 per quintal in 2014–15 to ₹5,205 per quintal in 2026–27, representing a 236 per cent increase. Among the Kharif crops listed by the government, ragi recorded the highest percentage increase in MSP over the 2014–15 level. The increase in MSP does not mean that every farmer automatically receives the MSP in the market. Actual realization depends on procurement, quality, location, market arrivals, transportation and the buyer. Nevertheless, the higher MSP signals the growing policy importance of ragi and other millets. State-level initiatives are also contributing to the expansion of millet cultivation and marketing. Tamil Nadu, for example, has implemented millet-focused programmes aimed at increasing production, supporting farmers and strengthening the millet value chain. Such initiatives are important because demand cannot grow sustainably unless production and market linkages grow along with it.

Ragi fits an increasingly uncertain climate

Another factor working in favour of ragi is its suitability for relatively harsh growing conditions. Ragi is generally considered a hardy crop that can perform under lower-moisture conditions compared with many water-intensive crops. This makes it relevant at a time when farmers are facing increasing rainfall variability, water scarcity and temperature stress. However, climate resilience should not be misunderstood as complete immunity from climate risks. Ragi still requires suitable rainfall, soil moisture and good crop management. Poor rainfall during critical growth stages can affect establishment and yield. Therefore, the future expansion of ragi should be supported by improved varieties, appropriate agronomic practices, irrigation where available and location-specific recommendations. Its relative adaptability nevertheless gives ragi an important advantage in regions where farmers are looking for crops that can fit changing water conditions.

From grain seller to value-chain participant

Perhaps the biggest opportunity lies in changing how farmers participate in the ragi market. A farmer who sells raw grain immediately after harvest has limited control over the final value of the product. But farmers organised through Farmer Producer Organisations or cooperatives can potentially undertake cleaning, grading, storage, primary processing and collective marketing. For example, instead of selling ragi immediately after harvest, a farmer group could aggregate grain, maintain quality standards and supply a processor under a planned arrangement. With suitable infrastructure, the group could move one step further into flour or other primary processed products. This is where the connection between rising demand and farmer income becomes important. A larger market alone does not guarantee higher farm income. The benefits depend on how efficiently farmers are connected with consumers, processors, retailers and exporters. Better market information is also becoming increasingly important. When farmers can compare prices across nearby mandis, understand quality requirements and identify buyers, they are in a stronger position to decide when and where to sell.

The price rise should be watched carefully

The recent ragi price movements are encouraging, but farmers should be cautious about interpreting every sudden increase as a permanent trend. A sudden price increase can occur when market arrivals are low or when buyers compete for limited stocks. If arrivals subsequently increase, prices can moderate. Similarly, prices can differ significantly between markets because of quality, transportation and local demand. Therefore, the current market situation should be viewed as a signal rather than a guarantee. The more important indicator will be whether ragi demand remains strong over several seasons. If processors continue developing new products, consumers continue purchasing ragi-based foods, institutional demand expands and export markets grow, the current interest could develop into a sustained market opportunity. If demand weakens after a short period, however, prices may return towards more normal levels.

What farmers can do

For farmers, the emerging ragi market presents an opportunity, but it also calls for better market planning. Farmers can consider adopting improved and suitable ragi varieties, maintaining grain quality, harvesting and drying properly and reducing contamination during storage. Collective marketing through FPOs can help farmers aggregate produce and negotiate with larger buyers. Where possible, farmers should also explore contracts or supply arrangements with processors, provided the terms are transparent and commercially viable. Small-scale processing and local branding can provide another opportunity, particularly for farmer groups located close to urban markets. The key is not simply to produce more ragi, but to produce the right quality and connect that production with the right market.

A traditional crop entering a new market era

Ragi's story is changing. What was once largely a traditional food crop is increasingly becoming part of the health-food, processed-food and export economy. The recent price movements have brought attention to the market, while rising domestic interest and expanding millet exports are creating a broader foundation for demand. India's millet exports reached 138.69 thousand tonnes in 2025–26, while the country's overall millet production remains substantial. At the same time, the 2026–27 ragi MSP of ₹5,205 per quintal demonstrates the crop's increasing policy importance. The real opportunity, however, will come if this demand can be converted into a stronger and more organised value chain. Farmers need reliable markets, processors need consistent quality, exporters need internationally acceptable products and consumers need affordable and convenient foods. Ragi therefore has the potential to move beyond its image as simply a traditional millet. With stronger domestic consumption, expanding global interest, improved processing and better farmer-market linkages, it could become an important crop in India's future food and agricultural economy. The recent rise in demand may be only the beginning. The challenge now is to ensure that the value created by ragi's new popularity reaches the farmers who grow it.

Conclusion

Ragi is no longer confined to traditional diets; it is gradually emerging as a crop with growing commercial potential in both domestic and international markets. Rising consumer interest in nutritious foods, increasing demand for value-added millet products, government support and expanding export opportunities are creating a favourable environment for ragi. The recent price movements have further highlighted the changing market situation. However, sustained benefits for farmers will depend on stable demand, efficient marketing, quality production, processing facilities and stronger linkages with FPOs, processors and exporters. If these linkages are strengthened, the growing popularity of ragi can go beyond a temporary market trend and become a long-term opportunity for improving farm income, promoting crop diversification and strengthening India’s millet economy.

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