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Editorial

Preface to sorghum and millets reviews

Sorghum and the millets are the fifth and sixth most important cereal crops, respectively, in terms of world production. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization world production in 2005 of sorghum was 55.7 million tons and millets 28.6 million tons. Despite their importance, our knowledge about their science and the development of technologies to process them lags behind that of other major cereals. This probably reflects that they are cultivated primarily in the developing world. In recent years, however, there has been increasing interest in them as alternative food crops in these regions. A number of factors are responsible. Firstly and most importantly, they are uniquely well-adapted to cultivation in the semi-arid tropics and sub-tropical regions. Because of this, they can be cultivated far more economically in these environments than wheat, maize and barley. Thus in the many developing countries in the semi-arid tropics, sorghum and millets can be important drivers for economic development through the creation of local food and beverage processing industries using them as raw materials. Sorghum and millets also have a number of valuable attributes which may allow them to be exploited more widely than in their areas of production. Not least, is the fact that they do not contain gluten and are therefore suitable for those suffering from coeliac disease and other forms of intolerance or allergy to wheat gluten proteins. Additionally, most varieties are notably rich in phytochemicals, particularly phenolics, which may have health promoting properties. This issue of the Journal of Cereal Science carries five reviews by experts in their fields, which detail the state of knowledge in critical areas of sorghum and millet biotechnology, physiology, chemistry, pathology and processing technology. We hope that these reviews will stimulate research and collaboration work between scientists on these important but neglected cereals.

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