

India hosts three Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS)

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), India hosts three Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS): the Koraput region in Odisha, the Kuttanad farming system in Kerala, and the Saffron Heritage of Kashmir. These sites are recognized for their unique agricultural practices, biodiversity, and cultural significance, and they are supported by government initiatives to ensure their conservation and development.

India's three GIAHS sites

1. Koraput Traditional Agriculture (Odisha)

- **Significance:** This GIAHS site in the Eastern Ghats is managed by local tribal communities and is celebrated for its vast biodiversity, which includes over 1,200 indigenous rice varieties. The system uses sustainable methods like shifting and terraced cultivation for crops such as millets and pulses.
- **Recent news:** In 2025, the Government of Odisha reported taking proactive steps to conserve the region's biodiversity, protect its indigenous crop varieties, and support branding efforts for local products. This includes promoting organic farming methods and community seed banks.

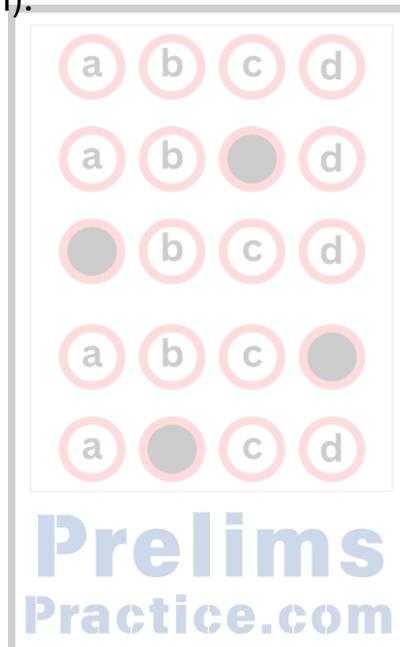
2. Kuttanad Below Sea-Level Farming System (Kerala)

- **Significance:** As the only below-sea-level farming system in India, the Kuttanad wetland system has sustained agriculture and livelihoods for over two centuries. It is a complex mosaic of integrated activities, including paddy cultivation, inland fishing, and growing coconuts and tubers.
- **Recent news:**
 - **Government support:** In a written reply to the Lok Sabha in August 2025, the government announced infrastructure development projects under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) for the Kuttanad region.
 - **Climate threats:** News reports highlight that rising sea levels pose a significant threat to Kuttanad's farming system, prompting the Kerala government to explore relocation for some communities.

- **Adaptation strategies:** Innovative projects are being funded to address environmental issues, such as researching the ecological utilization of water hyacinth in the region.

3. Pampore Saffron Heritage (Jammu & Kashmir)

- **Significance:** The saffron fields of Pampore are a rich agro-pastoral heritage system where saffron is traditionally cultivated on unique soil formations called Karewas. The practices involve intercropping and organic farming, contributing to local biodiversity.
- **Government revival efforts:** To combat threats like low yields and water scarcity, the Jammu and Kashmir government is supporting revival efforts through schemes like the RKVY and Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH).



Explanation of Exam Oriented Key Terms

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Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS)

GIAHS are outstanding agricultural landscapes with remarkable agrobiodiversity, traditional knowledge, invaluable cultures, and beautiful landscapes, managed by small-scale farmers to provide food and livelihoods. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) launched the GIAHS Programme in 2002 to conserve these unique systems under threat from factors like climate change and low economic viability.

Administering body and origin

- The GIAHS programme was initiated by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations.
- It was launched in 2002 during the World Summit for Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Primary objectives

The initiative focuses on dynamic conservation, not on replacing traditional methods with modern technology for higher productivity. Key goals include:

- **Identification and safeguarding:** Recognizing and protecting unique agricultural systems and their associated landscapes, biodiversity, and knowledge systems.
- **Mitigating threats:** Addressing challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and rural-to-urban migration that threaten these systems.
- **Socioeconomic development:** Enhancing the livelihoods and well-being of the local communities, including family farmers and Indigenous Peoples.
- **Preserving traditional knowledge:** Ensuring the conservation and transmission of ancestral farming techniques across generations.

Defining criteria

To be designated as a GIAHS site, an area must fulfill five core criteria:

- **Food and livelihood security:** The system must contribute to the food and economic security of local communities.

- **Agro-biodiversity:** It should possess globally significant biodiversity and genetic resources for food and agriculture.
- **Local and traditional knowledge systems:** The site must maintain invaluable traditional knowledge and adaptive technologies.
- **Cultures, value systems, and social organisations:** The system should exhibit a strong link with the cultural identity, values, and social structures of the community.
- **Landscapes and seascapes features:** It must display aesthetic landscapes or seascapes shaped by the long-term interaction between humans and their environment.

GIAHS sites in India

As of 2025, India has three recognised GIAHS sites:

1. **Koraput Traditional Agriculture, Odisha:** A highland plateau known for subsistence paddy cultivation, a repository of rice landraces, and the conservation of medicinal plants by tribal communities.
2. **Kuttanad Below Sea-Level Farming System, Kerala:** A unique system of rice cultivation in below-sea-level fields, combining wetlands for paddy, garden lands for coconuts, and inland water bodies for fishing.
3. **Pampore Saffron Heritage, Jammu & Kashmir:** An agro-pastoral system characterised by traditional saffron cultivation, intercropping, and organic practices, deeply rooted in the local culture.

GIAHS versus GI Tag

It is crucial for the Prelims exam to distinguish GIAHS from a Geographical Indication (GI) tag.

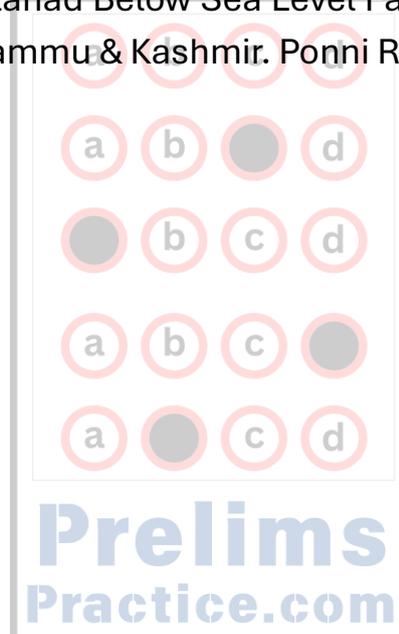
- GIAHS status is for the entire agricultural system, recognizing its ecological, cultural, and landscape importance. It is a programme for conservation and sustainable management.
- GI tag is a legal recognition given to a specific product that originates from a definite geographical area and has a special quality or reputation linked to that origin.

Practice Questions:

1. Which of the following site in India is not designated as Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)?
- a) Ponni Rice Heritage, Tamil Nadu
 - b) Koraput Traditional Agriculture, Odisha
 - c) Kuttanad Below Sea Level Farming System, Kerala
 - d) Pampore Saffron Heritage, Jammu & Kashmir

Answer: a

Explanation: The three FAO-designated GIAHS sites in India are the Koraput Traditional Agriculture in Odisha, the Kuttanad Below Sea Level Farming System in Kerala, and the Pampore Saffron Heritage in Jammu & Kashmir. Ponni Rice Heritage is not recognized as a GIAHS site.



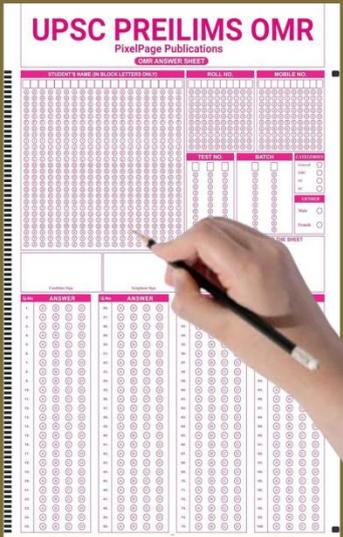
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