

WHOLE GRAIN



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The Continued Ingenuity of the U.S. Rice Industry – Right in Front of You

BY BOBBY HANKS

CROWLEY, LA — In my last column here I wrote about the resiliency of the U.S. rice industry. I wrote that after the extreme challenges we faced in 2020 and the first part of 2021, I was encouraged to see the industry rise up to adapt and overcome those challenges.

Right now you are looking at yet another example of our adaptability and resilience: the first ever all digital copy of the *Whole Grain* newspaper.

We went digital to save costs, but there's something about holding a newspaper in your hands and turning the pages that still feels right. To be honest, it makes this experience a little bittersweet.

When USA Rice launched this newspaper in 2014, the point was to put rice industry news physically in the hands of the thousands of rice people who may not attend USA Rice meetings or receive the daily e-newsletter.

Like my predecessors at the helm of USA Rice, I firmly believe a connected and informed industry is a strong industry. This newspaper is a big part of that effort. Which is why as we headed into the new fiscal year, looking at lower acreage and by extension, a very tight budget for USA Rice, I was happy to see the USA Rice Communications Committee, led by Missouri rice farmer Blake Gerard, find a way to keep on producing the *Whole Grain* and spread our news and information across the industry.


Who knows, maybe in this digital form we'll reach even more people than we did in print? We will certainly analyze the results and make adjustments accordingly.

So, thank you for reading this. Thank you for following whatever link brought you here, and please forward the



Hands-on learning at its best.

whole newspaper or individual stories to folks you think would benefit from reading it.

And know that we'll be back with a fully printed and mailed newspaper for the next issue that will coincide with the 2021 USA Rice Outlook Conference scheduled for December 5-7 in New Orleans. We'll go back to digital for the first issue of 2022, but look, if you really want to hold these stories in your hand, go ahead and hit PRINT. I know I'm going to. 

"... if you really want to hold these stories in your hand, go ahead and hit PRINT. I know I'm going to."



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USA Rice is the global advocate for all segments of the U.S. rice industry with a mission to promote and protect the interests of producers, millers, merchants, and allied businesses.

USA Rice is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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MAY WE REMIND YOU...

BY BETSY WARD

ARLINGTON, VA — Those of you who subscribe to and read our *USA Rice Daily* know we always include a quote of the day. It’s a piece of inspiration or wisdom, usually directly tied to the main story in that issue. The team responsible for the quotes pours over dozens of presentations, papers, and books each week, sharing quotes with each other, noting pithy remarks to be used later if the situation arises.

I came across one myself recently, but rather than share it with the team for use in the Daily, I thought I’d share it here because it applies so well to just about all of the stories in this issue.

Author Patricia Fripp said, “It is not your customer’s job to remember you. It is your obligation and responsibility to make sure they don’t have the chance to forget you.”


This simple reality underpins so much of what we do as a trade association. We always try to stay on top and ahead of issues that impact your bottom line and at the same time remind key decision makers about the contributions the rice industry makes to all facets of our lives.

And we do this all the time. Whether it’s our food aid team talking about the advantages of our products with humanitarian organizations (page 18), or our international team negotiating agreements with buyers in a major market like Iraq (page 19), we want to remind everyone to *Think Rice*.

... the staff, consultants, and volunteer leader members of USA Rice are working every day in all kinds of ways to make sure nobody has the opportunity to forget or overlook U.S. rice.

You can also read about how we did this here on the home front with our Domestic Promotion Plus program (page 10) that was created after a rigorous process led by a USA Rice Committee, a special Task Force, and three Boards of Directors! We also use social media and most recently TikTok (page 9) to further drive home our messages to consumers.

The word “customer” in the Fripp advice could just as easily be “legislator or regulator,” and staying front and center with key policymakers is central to our long-term success as an industry. You can read about examples of that domestically (page 17) and internationally (page 15).

What should come across in these and other stories in this issue is that the staff, consultants, and volunteer leader members of USA Rice are working every day in all kinds of ways to make sure nobody has the opportunity to forget or overlook U.S. rice. This newspaper, our *USA Rice Daily*, our webpage, our podcast, and our social media channels are doing the exact same thing. We’re working hard for you, we’re proud of what we accomplish, and we don’t want you to forget it. See you all in New Orleans in December! 



NEW LEADERSHIP
FOR TWO USA RICE
GOVERNING BOARDS

BY DEBORAH WILLENBORG


ARLINGTON, VA — With their two-year terms ending at the end of July, the chairs of two USA Rice governing boards handed their gavels to two rising industry leaders. Kirk Satterfield, a Mississippi rice farmer from Bolivar County, was unanimously elected to serve as the new chair of the USA Rice Farmers Board of Directors and Eric Unkel, a Louisiana rice farmer from Allen Parish, was unanimously elected to serve as the new chair of the USA Rice Council Board of Directors.

Farmers Chair-elect Satterfield thanked outgoing Chair Nicole Montna Van Vleck of California for her two years of service at the helm of the USA Rice Farmers.

“Nicole’s passion for policy work has helped us all, making sure rice farmers’ best interests were heard, and when the COVID-19 pandemic caused all sorts of issues for our markets, both domestically and internationally, Nicole played a key role to ensure rice farmers were included in the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program payments,” said Satterfield. “She guided us through long-needed USDA updates to rice crop insurance, including adding alternate wetting and drying and furrow rice as insurable practices, and she also re-established the Farm Policy Task Force to prepare for the upcoming Farm Bill.”

The USA Rice Council selected Louisiana rice farmer Eric Unkel as the new chair. He recognized his predecessor, Arkansas rice farmer Byron Holmes, for his leadership and commitment to the industry.

“Byron saw consumer behavior changing last year as a result of COVID-19 and though tragic, he knew this was a maybe once-in-a-generation opportunity for U.S.-grown rice, and he was integral in developing a new consumer outreach campaign,” said Unkel. “Through budget challenges, record-setting storms, a global pandemic, and reduced acres – we could always count on Byron’s cool, measured demeanor. He’s always got a smile and a kind word, and that steady leadership helped put the Rice Council on a glide path to rebuild reserves while maintaining excellent programming.”

The USA Rice Farmers Board also elected Texas rice farmer L.G. Raun as vice chair. Each new appointee will serve a two-year term that began August 1, 2021. 

Although she has never bought into the sentiment, Deborah Willenborg knows all the words to Carole King’s hit “Where You Lead, I Will Follow.”



Suited up: As of August 1, Kirk Satterfield (left) and Eric Unkel are the new chairs of the USA Rice Farmers and USA Rice council, respectively.

PUERTO RICO CRITICAL TO SOUTHERN U.S. RICE BREEDING EFFORTS

BY DR. STEVE LINScombe

LAJAS VALLEY, PUERTO RICO — The U.S. Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is of vital importance to southern U.S. rice breeding efforts as all the public and private rice breeding programs in the south use Puerto Rico as a site for winter nursery activities. The tropical environment allows warm season crops such as rice to be grown all 12 months of the year and thus rice breeding research is conducted year-round instead of only during the summer growing season.

There are numerous areas in the Caribbean and Central and South America that have the proper environment for a winter nursery, but because Puerto Rico is a territory of the United States, the rice seed produced there can easily be returned stateside and planted directly into research fields. Rice seed produced in a foreign country must be grown under strict greenhouse quarantine procedures, governed by USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service policies to prevent importation of noxious insects, weeds, and diseases. This quarantine requirement negates the utility of a winter nursery from time, facilities, and expense standpoints anywhere other than in Puerto Rico.

The island of Puerto Rico is somewhat rectangular and approximately 100 miles east to west and 40-50 miles north to south. As a point of reference, San Juan, the largest city and capital, is near the northeast corner of the island, and the research site is in the Lajas Valley near the southwest corner of the island.

The first nursery was planted at the Lajas Experiment Station in 1971 and has evolved into a cooperative effort between the public breeding programs in Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Texas, and the USDA Dale Bumpers Center. The main research site is approximately 30 acres. About 20 years ago, additional fields were developed where rice is grown just as it would be at the southern research sites using similar fertilizers, herbicides, and

insecticides. The location has similar plot equipment as found in the U.S., and, most importantly, a Hege row planter that plants individual breeding rows efficiently with little or no chance of seed mixture, something that is essential in breeding efforts.

Most of the breeding programs use the nursery for advancement of early and mid-generation breeding lines. The nursery is also commonly used for seed increase and purification of promising rice lines that have a very high probability of being released as new varieties. Most of the recently released varieties were grown in this manner prior to release. If used for several generations, the nursery can decrease the timeline on the development of a new variety by three years, if not more.

“I can’t overstate the significant impact our research plots in Puerto Rico have had on the U.S. rice industry,” said Dr. Xueyan Sha, with the University of Arkansas Rice Research and Extension Center. “The facility shaves years off the development of new varieties which as we all know, is critical for the long-term viability of the industry.” 

Steve Linscombe is the director of The Rice Foundation for USA Rice. Prior to assuming this position in 2017, he was the senior rice breeder at the LSU AgCenter Rice Station near Crowley, Louisiana, and used the Puerto Rico nursery for 30-plus years to facilitate his breeding research.

“The facility shaves years off the development of new varieties which as we all know, is critical for the long-term viability of the industry.”

— DR. XUEYAN SHA, UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS RICE RESEARCH AND EXTENSION CENTER



From left: The threshing machine gets a work out; farm foreman Anthony Rivera; selfing bags prevent inadvertent outcrossing and ensure pollination on an individual panicle comes from pollen only produced by that panicle.



FARMERS BREWING CO. FEATURES FULL SUITE OF RICE BEERS

BY PETER BACHMANN

PRINCETON, CA — Options for rice beer are growing, but not as fast as young on-farm brewery Farmers Brewing Company is!

Fifth-generation rice farmers Bill and Kristin Weller started home-brewing as a hobby in 2011, but in January 2020, that hobby became a fully operational brewery, and now their beer can be found in restaurants and on store shelves throughout northern California. The beer selection started small but has grown to include more than 12 beers, some of which are seasonal or limited run.

After less than 18 months in operation, the Wellers found themselves with demand exceeding what they were providing and made plans to expand their on-farm brewery and taproom to Chico, where they'll have another taproom with a restaurant featuring their brews.

Farmers Brewing Co. is not the first brewery to use rice in their beer, but what makes them unique is that rice is used in every beer the Wellers brew. "Rice provides a crisp and refreshing flavor to our beers which complements our easy drinking approach to the craft brewery scene," said Bill. "We use premium japonica rice as part of all of our beers. Most of it is grown in the fields right outside the brewery."

One of their most popular, year-round, beers is called 'Farmers Light' with just 99 calories per can and rice as the main grain used in the brewing process.

"Outside of Farmers Light, we use a variety of other grains to help flavor the

beer, like barley, corn, and wheat," said Bill. "We grow the wheat ourselves, right behind the brewery alongside the rice."

Opening a new venture during the COVID-19 pandemic was daunting. Bill admitted, "It was a little scary at first, but it turns out people held more social functions at home which helped our retail sales. Then, when things started to open up, folks wanted to get out of the house and socialize, and our large open taproom here in Princeton is a great place to do just that."

The Wellers also are using their new platform to highlight some of the sustainability benefits around growing rice, including wildlife. Several of the labels on their cans depict birds, like the '530' wheat ale that uses a colorful pheasant to attract attention, and the seasonal "Winter Migration" featuring flying waterfowl.

This exposure to a new audience is an easy way to educate consumers about buying, eating, and now drinking U.S.-grown rice. The Wellers' operation could serve as a model for others in the industry looking to incorporate rice into a direct-to-consumer business. [WG](#)

Peter Bachmann is the USA vice president of international trade who is happy to add domestic issues to his agenda, especially when it involves taste testing rice beer.

"Rice provides a crisp and refreshing flavor to our beers ... We use premium japonica rice as part of all of our beers. Most of it is grown in the fields right outside the brewery."

— FIFTH-GENERATION RICE FARMER BILL WELLER





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CONSUMERS GET THE MESSAGE THANKS TO USA RICE CAMPAIGN

BY MICHAEL KLEIN

ARLINGTON, VA — Last year, as the scope of the coronavirus pandemic was becoming clear, and consumers were shifting from eating out to cooking at home, leaders at USA Rice saw an opportunity as retail demand for rice surged, even as foodservice slowed to a trickle.

“Retail rice sales were going through the roof starting in mid-March 2020 as lockdowns were taking effect and Americans began panic buying of supplies like toilet paper, cleaning products, and rice and beans,” explained Robbie Trahan, a rice miller from Louisiana and chair of the USA Rice Domestic Promotion Committee. “We knew that not only did we have increased rice sales in general, we had a lot of new customers specifically who maybe weren’t very familiar with rice. We saw an opportunity to educate them and make them lifelong rice eaters.”

Trahan assembled a team of farmers and millers and advertising and branding experts to come up with a plan, which they quickly did.

“For three years the Louisiana Rice Promotion Board had been running a very impactful ‘Start with Rice’ campaign in the state that was based on USA Rice consumer research,” Trahan said. “We decided to base our effort on that work to show the messages would resonate in places less historically connected to rice than Louisiana.”

After analyzing more than three dozen U.S. markets against several factors Trahan’s

task force came back with the recommendation to target consumers in Boise, Idaho; Green Bay, Wisconsin; Peoria, Illinois; Roanoke, Virginia; Spokane, Washington; Springfield, Illinois; and Toledo, Ohio, with paid advertisements and retail partnerships.

“Our agency created 16 unique radio ads and 42 billboards ensuring consumers would be exposed to rice messages a lot, but that they’d be varied and fresh,” Trahan said. “We bought time on 28 traditional radio stations and streaming audio services Pandora, Spotify, and iHeart, all of which delivered more than 58.8 million impressions between mid-November 2020 and January 2021.”

He said retail partnerships delivered more than 4.1 million additional consumer impressions thanks to in-store signage, shelf talkers, and interactive kiosks at more than 560 Kroger and Woodman’s stores, and webpage and newsletter promotions with 1.4 million Meijer shoppers.

“The next step was to analyze the program. We looked at consumer attitudes, sales data, and consumer activation, and across every metric we showed very positive and encouraging results,” Trahan said.

Almost half of consumers surveyed in the test markets could recall ‘Start with Rice’ advertising and more than a quarter were able to accurately repeat rice messages with no



help from researchers. About one third of respondents correctly identified “America’s rice farmers” as the sponsors of the ads, with others naming “USA Rice Federation” and “Certified rice producers” as sponsors, even though neither appeared in any of the ads.

“It tells us that people got it,” said Trahan. “They knew they were seeing ads about rice and that it was being grown in the U.S. And when you think about all the advertising noise that’s out there, from huge advertisers like McDonald’s, Coke, Geico, P&G, and others, the fact that we were able to break through into consumers’ consciousness is a big win.”

Another metric used by researchers was about change in attitudes. Consumers who had been exposed to the advertising were 33 percent more likely to report planning to purchase rice six or more times in the coming month. There were also statistically significant increases in positive attributes assigned to rice from people who were ad aware, including “quick preparation,” “delicious,” “versatile,” “family favorite,” “empowering,” and others.

Trahan said scanner data also showed retail rice sales, that had spiked in 2020 as a reaction to the pandemic, remained above 2019 baseline levels.

The task force also was pleased with consumer activation represented by a huge increase in visits to the USA Rice consumer webpage.

“Between November 2020 and April 2021, nationwide traffic to our website was actually down 15 percent. But in our seven target markets traffic was up an average of 1,291 percent,” Trahan said. “We know it was based on exposure to the campaign because they were following a link we only publicized in the ads, and in fact, we didn’t even include the web address in every ad.”

“We set out to prove our messaging and approach worked and resonated with consumers, and we did that,” he said. 

The Start with Rice campaign is not Michael Klein’s first experience delivering on promises; he’s delivered newspapers on bike, food and drinks as a waiter and bartender, cars as a valet, and was a flower delivery guy in high school.



“We looked at consumer attitudes, sales data, and consumer activation, and across every metric we showed very positive and encouraging results.”

— ROBBIE TRAHAN, LOUISIANA RICE MILLER,
CHAIR OF THE USA RICE DOMESTIC
PROMOTION COMMITTEE



U.S. RICE AND TIKTOK? IT’S A TOSS UP

BY DEBORAH WILLENBORG


ARLINGTON, VA — Up in the air isn’t usually where you want to be but U.S. rice has gone airborne thanks to a new social media venture with “FriedRiceArt,” a Tiktok artist with more than two million followers who throws rice around for fun.

“A couple of months ago, the USA Rice Communications team became aware of the FriedRiceArt phenomenon,” said Michael Klein, USA Rice vice president of marketing, communications, and domestic promotion. “It was great to see these videos of rice being thrown in the air become so popular. When we got in touch with the artist, Alissa Teo, and found out she used only U.S.-grown rice in her tosses, we knew we had a partnership.”

Teo is an occupational therapist who lives near Dallas, Texas, and part of her job is making sensory bins for kids. “Sensory bins are basically bins filled with some sort of filler – I use colored rice – and you just add fun trinkets and tools in it to help children explore their world through their five senses.”

One day while surfing the internet, Teo saw several videos of people tossing rice in the air in different shapes. She was inspired to give it a try using the dyed rice she already had on hand for her sensory bins, and her creations literally took off! She has rice tosses depicting athletes, Disney characters, emojis, and favorite foods, and she shares them all on Tiktok, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram.

The logo toss Teo did for USA Rice is of the Grown In The USA logo, in red, white, and blue rice that premiered on the organization’s social media channels on July 4th. Teo also posted a time lapse video showing how she created the GITUSA artwork to celebrate the patriotic holiday.

“Every now and then, I like to highlight a business I’ve created artwork for on my Instagram that I feel makes a great impact upon others,” said Teo. “U.S.-grown rice is my medium so I ‘tossed in’ a little extra PR for this great grain!” 



“When we got in touch with the artist, Alissa Teo, and found out she used only U.S.-grown rice in her tosses, we knew we had a partnership.”

[Click here](#) to view the GITUSA rice toss in action!

WHOLE GRAIN CONSUMPTION ON THE RISE

BY LESLEY DIXON

ARLINGTON, VA — According to a new report from the Oldways Whole Grains Council, consumption and consumer acceptance of whole grains has significantly increased over the past five years with more than half of consumers increasing their whole grain intake. Data from the 2021 *Whole Grains Consumer Insights Survey* show that 59 percent of Americans are meeting the Dietary Guidelines' whole grain recommendation and 95 percent of consumers indicated that their whole grain intake has increased or at least remained steady since 2018.

"An interesting finding from our survey was that even though we hear a lot about ancient grains and how they continue to be trendy and popular, when we asked people what their favorite whole grains were, the top three were whole wheat, brown rice, and oats," said Kelly Toups, director of nutrition at Oldways.

Researchers surveyed 1,505 Americans to identify the rate of whole grain consumption, the influencing factors for purchasing whole grains, where whole grains are consumed, impact of the pandemic, and how sustainability and environmental considerations effect diet choices. Among the survey participants, health, flavor, and familiarity ranked as the leading reasons for choosing whole grains, and 88 percent of consumers indicated they are most likely to consume whole grains at home with 1 in 5 eating more whole grains now than pre-pandemic.


"Because we saw supply challenges at the beginning of the pandemic, particularly for flour and other shelf-stable grain foods, some shoppers purchased whole grain products out of necessity, even if that's not what they typically gravitate towards," said Toups. "The result is that some people were surprised to discover that they liked the flavor [of whole grain products] more than they expected to."

Sustainability continues to be an influence when purchasing as nearly 20 percent of respondents cited that as a reason for choosing whole grains, an increase of seven percent since 2019. Younger consumers showed an even

stronger affinity with 26 percent of Gen Z and millennials responding positively to sustainability as a purchasing factor. Overall, two-thirds of those surveyed consider whole grains to be both sustainable and environmentally friendly.

"The information in this report is tremendous. It shows what progress has been made when it comes to whole grain consumer acceptance and the continued importance in promoting whole grains, like U.S.-grown brown rice, with nutritional and environmental messaging," said Cameron Jacobs, USA Rice director of domestic promotion. "With the growing importance of sustainability considerations and rising familiarity of whole grains among consumers, I have no doubt that whole grain intake will continue to increase in the future."

Other important takeaways from the report include taste as a barrier to whole grain intake decreasing by nearly ten percent from 2018 to 2021. Knowledge of sprouted whole grains is growing with close to a quarter of respondents indicating they know about sprouted grains and seek them out. The report also showed a direct link between third-party packaging symbols, like the Whole Grain Stamp, and increased consumer confidence with 86 percent of consumers saying they trust the Whole Grain Stamp.

As a founding member of the Whole Grains Council, USA Rice was a sponsor of the 2021 Whole Grains Consumer Insights Survey compiled in May 2021. Data was collected from 1,505 Americans, ages 18 to 88, and was nationally census-representative for age, gender, race/ethnicity, region, and income. Seventy-five percent of respondents were the primary household food purchasers and 25 percent reported making half of household purchases. 

[Access the full report here.](#)

Lesley Dixon is a writer, editor, and geriatric millennial who needs to eat more whole grains for health purposes.

"... some people were surprised to discover that they liked the flavor [of whole grain products] more than they expected to."





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THE OLDEST RICE FARM IN ARKANSAS LOOKS TO THE FUTURE

BY CARTER PURCELL

Inspired by his past and looking to the future, fifth-generation farmer Matt Morris (below) is implementing innovative new conservation practices on his Arkansas operation to preserve precious natural resources. Looks like he has unanimous support from the family's sixth generation (right)!

CARLISLE, AR — When John Morris planted his first three-acre field in Carlisle, Arkansas, in 1901, he was one of the first farmers in the region to try to grow rice — and one of the first to fail.

“We are the oldest rice farm in the state of Arkansas,” explains John’s great-great-grandson Matt Morris with pride. “They were not successful with that first crop — but that’s how you learn. We’ve always been innovators in our family.”

History looms large on Morris Farms, from John’s failed gambit to the successful 1902 crop harvested by his wife, Emma, a pioneering female farmer who helped build the rice industry that now flourishes throughout Arkansas.

But for Matt, the real test of his family farm is yet to come, as he works alongside his father to deploy innovative conservation practices and technologies in order to preserve their land for the next century of Morris farmers.

“Over the last five years, we have implemented a lot of practices that have reduced our water use, our fertilizer application, and saved us money,” says Matt. “As we continue using these practices, we’ve realized how much of our natural resources that we’re saving. And that is a really big deal, because those resources aren’t gonna be there tomorrow if we don’t do something today.”

With help from partners like the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), USA Rice, and the University of Arkansas, Matt and his father have rethought their operation’s irrigation practices, using innovative new technology like water and weather sensors to better track their irrigation needs and conserve water.

“With technologies like photosynthetic sensors, I can track my growing degree days and know exactly when I still need to irrigate,” explains Matt. “Every year that helps shave off at least one watering, saving me time and money in the process.”


Another successful strategy has been the use of multiple inlet rice irrigation, which relies on recyclable poly-tubing and punch holes for water to flow into the



fields at precise locations. Recently, Matt’s neighbors have begun to take notice, with at least one family asking him to come by their operation to show them the ropes of these new methods. And while he’s happy to share his learnings in his community and on the national stage, Matt also recognizes that more strategies are needed from farmers and industry to drive his peers towards conservation in larger numbers.

“There’s a lot of resources out there, from county extension agencies to NRCS, that can help you adopt and pay for these practices. But it can be hard to get people to put their foot in the door,” acknowledges Matt. “Now using social media, showing videos, and promoting these things, I hope we can pique some curiosity.”

Located in a critical groundwater area, Matt stresses that time is of the essence when it comes to shaping a more efficient and sustainable operation. “Every year our well gives less and less,” he reflects. “That water’s not going to be here if we keep using it as much as we do. My biggest fear for other farmers is that by the time they realize that, it’s going to be too late.”

“A lot of these practices aren’t just about saving money, they’re about saving what you have, your land and your water,” emphasizes Matt. “I’ve got three boys, and if they’re going to be farming out here, I’ve got a lot of work to do right now to make sure that they have what they need for the future.” 

Carter Purcell is the communications & membership manager at Field to Market: The Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture.

NEXT MAJOR CONCERN IN CALIFORNIA RICE COUNTRY – WINTER WATER FOR WILDLIFE

BY JIM MORRIS

SACRAMENTO, CA — The well-chronicled California drought has been felt in the Sacramento Valley, where surface water cutbacks led to a reduction of about 100,000 acres of rice.

The approximately 400,000 acres of rice that were planted are largely progressing well and will be harvested this fall.

The big concern in rice country is what happens after harvest. Traditionally, a shallow amount of water is added to fields following harvest, which breaks down leftover straw and times perfectly with the massive Pacific Flyway migration of millions of birds through the state's Central Valley.


Unfortunately, the current outlook is for insufficient water for wildlife. A California Rice Commission industry survey of water districts indicates only about 25 percent of the normal acreage will be flooded for wildlife.

"We're facing an unprecedented drought," remarked Jeff McCreary, director of operations of the western region for Duck's Unlimited. "This is not just a drought that's in California. It's a Pacific Flyway drought. It's a western drought, and it's affecting birds all across this part of the country. What we're seeing here is an unfolding disaster, right in front of our eyes from a waterfowl perspective. Waterfowl need water, and that water is typically in wetlands and winter-flooded rice. This year we're seeing reductions in the acres of both of those."

Sacramento Valley rice fields provide food and a resting place for nearly 230 wildlife species. In fact, rice fields provide greater than 50 percent of the diet for the

7 to 10 million ducks and geese that migrate through the Central Valley each fall and winter. Rice fields serve as 'surrogate wetlands,' as more than 90 percent of the Central Valley's historic wetlands have disappeared.

To try to avoid historic death and disease among waterfowl, a coalition of water, agriculture, and conservation partners are seeking help from the California legislature and governor for \$10 million for groundwater pumping to make up for water shortfalls.

"What has worried me more than anything this whole year is waterfowl," commented rice grower and California Rice Commission Chair Sean Doherty. "Once we're done with harvest, massive amounts of snow geese and specklebelly geese will start landing in these fields. The ducks and shorebirds will soon follow. The Sacramento Valley is a lynchpin for millions of birds. If they show up and there's not enough habitat from flooded rice fields, it will devastate the flyway." 

Jim Morris is the communications manager for the California Rice Commission. When he's not on the job, he enjoys his family, faith, football, outrageous monster stories, and running marathons.



Left: Cinnamon teal cosumes in flight over a flooded California rice field.

Above: Snowy egrets find a lot to admire at a rice field in Marysville, CA.

All photos by Leslie Morris, California Rice Commission.

COLOMBIAN RICE SUPPLY GLUT THREATENS U.S. RICE RESEARCH FUNDING

BY PETER BACHMANN

BOGOTA, COLOMBIA — Since the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement was ratified by Congress in 2011 and went into effect in 2012, Colombia has been an increasingly important market for U.S. rice farmers.

In the ten years prior to the agreement, U.S. exports to Colombia averaged 12,700 metric tons (MT) annually at a value of \$5.1 million, while from 2011-2020, they averaged 135,100 MT annually at a value of \$62.1 million.

Under the agreement, Colombia will phase out tariffs on rice imports between 2012 and 2030, at which time, all U.S. rice may enter Colombia duty-free. Concurrently, Colombia offers a gradually increasing amount of duty-free quota through an auction process three times per year for Colombian import licenses. Auction proceeds are split to benefit rice research and promotion in both Colombia and the U.S., and researchers here have come to count and depend on those funds.

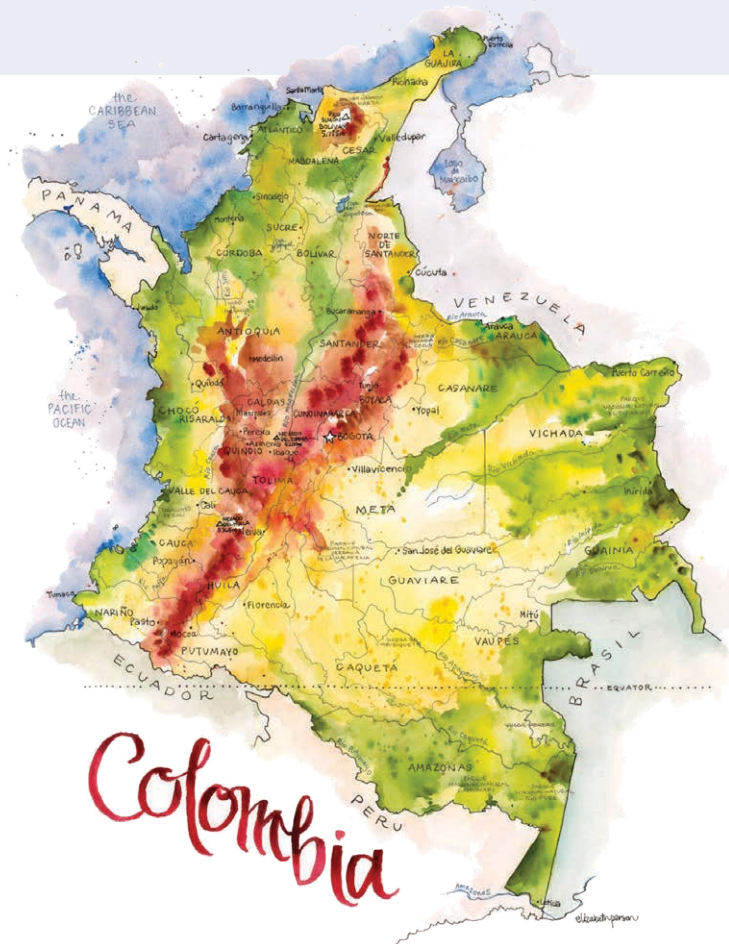
Until the January 2021 quota auction, the per ton prices were substantial and the available duty-free quota was over-subscribed, leading some U.S. exporters to ship outside the quota and pay the full tariff. However, Colombia's domestic production in 2020 exceeded expectations and created a supply glut, drastically reducing domestic rice prices and leading to very little demand at the January 2021 quota auction.

So far in 2021, a total of 7,134 MT of U.S. rice was sold of the 99,279 MT of combined quota available in the first two auctions of the year. Proceeds from the 2021 auctions going to research are on track to be miniscule, at a time when acreage is already down in the U.S. which places a further drag on research funding.

"I'm very concerned that if these auctions don't fill, our researchers are going to be left high and dry at a critical time for the U.S. industry," said Wayne Wiggins, an Arkansas rice farmer and a board member of both the Arkansas Rice Research and Promotion Board and the COL-RICE Board that oversees the auctions in Colombia. "At the very least we need to roll the unused portions of the quota forward."

In March of 2021, the USA Rice Board of Directors sent a letter to the COL-RICE Board outlining concerns around the under-subscribed quota in the January auction.

"Because of the unprecedented outcome of this auction, it is important that any unawarded quota be rolled forward to future auctions held this calendar year, to remain available for use by exporters within this calendar year," said USA Rice Chair Bobby Hanks in the letter. "While COL-RICE is



authorized to set parameters regarding auction frequency and tonnage, the TPA is clear that the increasing annual quota tonnage is to be available throughout the entire calendar year."

The COL-RICE Board was unable to agree on terms to re-offer the quota as part of the June 2021 auction. The final auction of the year will be held on October 7, 2021.

"We have been able to find replacement paddy markets for the 2020 crop, such as Venezuela, without Colombia as a major player this year," said Asih Grigsby, USA Rice director for international promotion in the western hemisphere. "The real harm is going to come at the end of the year with reduced COL-RICE auction proceeds that are shared amongst the states. Since 2012, more than \$86 million has been raised and distributed to the six U.S. rice growing states to bolster rice research. This year we're looking at a figure far below \$1 million to be allocated."

USA Rice is working with the U.S. government to push Colombia to fulfill the terms of the free trade agreement and offer the quota this calendar year. Even if the quota goes unsubscribed in the auctions, the long-term precedent of not rolling forward unused quota is more problematic than the short-term reduction in demand.

The supply situation in Colombia is likely to shift again in the coming years, resuming the need for more U.S. rice, but 2021 won't be the last year that the ever-growing quota goes under-subscribed. [w](#)

U.S. RICE EXPORTS RISE FOR 2020-21 MARKETING YEAR, STRONG START TO 2021-22

WASHINGTON, DC — The first rice trade figures of the 2021-22 marketing year have been reported and, as of August 5, 517,000 metric tons (MT) of outstanding sales have been recorded for this year, nearly 200,000 MT ahead of where sales were at the same time one year ago.

For the prior marketing year, which ran from August 1, 2020 until July 31, 2021, accumulated exports of 3,195,900 MT were up two percent from the marketing year before that. Accumulated exports encompass tonnage that was actually shipped overseas, while outstanding sales mean that an agreement has been reached but rice has not yet left port in the U.S.

USA RICE IS LEADING WTO REFORM EFFORTS FOR U.S. AGRICULTURE

BY PETER BACHMANN

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND—The World Trade Organization (WTO), the international institution responsible for regulating trade amongst its member countries, has been good for U.S. agriculture in the past, but more recently has failed those that play by the rules, requiring reforms to revitalize its antiquated policies.

When rice farmers across America plant a crop every year, harvest it, and sell it, there's an expectation that their rice will compete on a level playing field with a defensible price, based on quality and reliability of the U.S. market. Unfortunately, trade distorting policies used by massive rice producing and exporting competitors, like China, India, Thailand, and Vietnam lead to vastly underpriced rice entering the United States and other markets around the world.

Ideally, the U.S. would take economic data and evidence of programs that over-subsidize producers to the WTO and they'd rule to require changes by those WTO members in violation of their commitments. But because the WTO has been crippled in recent years, by disabling the internal appeals system and membership refraining from reporting requirements, slam-dunk cases don't always spur changes in behavior and get held up in bureaucratic entanglements for years on end.

The rice industry is not alone in this frustration. Dozens of other U.S. agricultural commodities are impacted. America has the safest, most efficient, and effective food production system in the world and produces a surplus to fill the demand for food around the world. But WTO members still manage to undercut U.S. prices, institute barriers for our products to keep their domestic food prices artificially high, and slide under the radar without regularly reporting their programs and subsidies to the WTO.

Earlier this year, USA Rice helped lead the charge in Washington to establish a coalition of agricultural


trade associations, representing the commodity, livestock, poultry, and biotechnology sectors to drive short and long-term agricultural reforms at the WTO. USA Rice and the coalition members have worked closely to craft principles around reform that can be used by the U.S. government to push for change at the upcoming WTO ministerial conference in late November and early December.

The group sent a letter in late July to U.S. Trade Representative Ambassador Katherine Tai and U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack outlining the desired reforms and realistic outcomes for the upcoming ministerial.

One such outcome would be improved transparency and notifications by WTO members. This centers around the various types of domestic support provided by governments to their agricultural sector, including payments directly to producers, subsidized inputs for producers, subsidized crop insurance, and export subsidies.

Less than half of WTO members have submitted notifications on their subsidies since 2016, and many of those are incomplete, manipulate data, or incorrectly categorize their policies. And according to USA Rice President & CEO Betsy Ward, only half of the major rice exporters around the world are actually reporting.

"Right now, we just have to assume they're living up to their commitments without seeing what they are actually providing to their producers," Ward said. "We have no idea if they are in compliance with their WTO commitments."

Ward continued, "Unfortunately, the WTO reform process is going to be complex and will not happen overnight, so many of the principles outlined will be laying the groundwork for future ministerials and slowly be integrated into U.S. policy down the road. The fact that U.S. agriculture is coordinating our approach and communicating with the U.S. government is promising." 



... WTO members still manage to undercut U.S. prices, institute barriers for our products to keep their domestic food prices artificially high, and slide under the radar without regularly reporting their programs and subsidies to the WTO.

CROP DAMAGE FROM RECORD RAINFALL AND HISTORIC FLOODING IN THE SOUTH CALCULATED AT MORE THAN \$200 MILLION

BY JOSH HANKINS

Additional reporting by Lydia Holmes, Steve Linscombe, Kane Webb, and Emily Woodall

As we go to press, Hurricane Ida made landfall on Sunday, August 29, in Port Fourchon, Louisiana, and is slowly moving through the mid-south. The impact on rice-growing areas is still being assessed.

As floodwaters from June storms in the mid-south receded and damage was still being assessed, it was feared the areas impacted would be much greater than originally estimated. Most folks said they had not seen rain or flooding or damage of this magnitude in 50 years.

According to the National Weather Service, rainfall recorded on June 8 in Desha County, just west of the Mississippi River, made for the wettest June day in the state of Arkansas since 1974.

The storms brought more than 15 inches of rain to some areas causing flash flooding, road closures, power outages, home and business evacuations, and early crops completely submerged with floodwater.

ARKANSAS

“In some extreme instances, rice fields were completely underwater,” said Dr. Jarrod Hardke, rice extension agronomist at the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture. “Rice tolerates a shallow flood but does not like to be submerged. Fields that are older will start to die after seven days of submergence. However, young rice can survive for weeks if floodwater conditions are right.”

U.S. Senator John Boozman visited affected areas starting in Humnoke and moving south. Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson issued a statewide emergency declaration on June 10 and formally requested a Secretarial disaster designation through the U.S. Department of Agriculture to jumpstart congressional action. Boozman and his staff worked with the Farm Services Agency (FSA) and their local offices to explore every opportunity for aid through existing programs.


“Some producers in our area experienced at least 25 percent loss, all the way up to 100 percent loss,” said Jim Whitaker, who farms in Desha County. “Most of our fields had water on them for 11 days. In addition to the flood water, a layer of scum formed on top of the water, and as the water receded, the scum worked to lay down our rice. Our corn and soybeans that went underwater were a 100 percent loss.”

Keith Glover, CEO of Producers Rice Mill in Stuttgart, said, “I’ve never seen anything like this in all my years. I was particularly struck by how unlucky it all seemed – here we had too much water and our friends in California don’t have nearly enough. But that’s agriculture.”

LOUISIANA

“Northeast Louisiana saw some flooding, particularly in Morehouse Parish,” said Marley Oldham, general manager at Kennedy Rice Mill in Mer Rouge. “While the extent of devastation was not as widespread as that of our neighbors in Arkansas, significant acres of this year’s rice crop, along with corn and soybeans, were lost due to the heavy rains and back flooding from rivers and bayous.”

MISSISSIPPI

“This area was fortunate to miss the tropical storm,” said Frank Howell, CEO of the Delta Council in Mississippi. “Our emergency management officials, governor, and Mississippi State University experts got busy immediately assessing the extent of the damage. Hundreds of thousands of acres were destroyed or negatively impacted, and the hardest hit areas were major rice producing counties in the Mississippi Delta.” 


HURRICANE ELSA SPARES FLORIDA RICE CROP

BY KANE WEBB

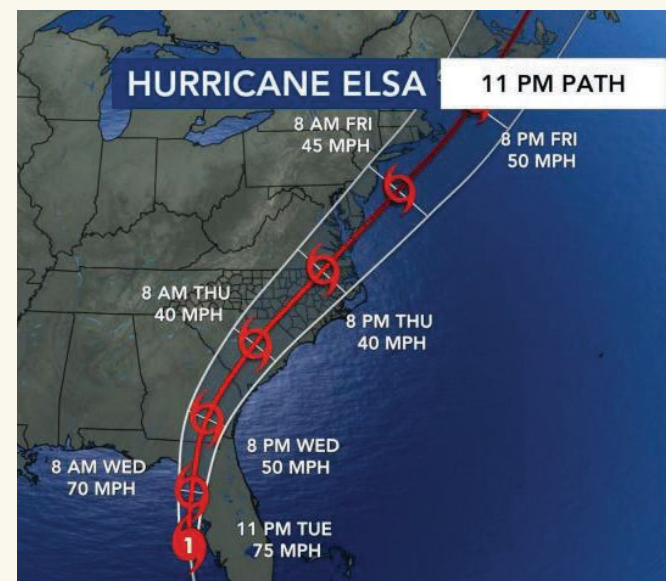
BELLE GLADES, FL — The first week of July, Hurricane Elsa made her way across the Florida peninsula, bringing winds and heavy rain to parts of the rice growing region located south of Lake Okeechobee, where Florida Crystals and neighboring growers have 25,000 acres of rice planted amid the towering sugarcane crop.

Rice harvest was already underway when Elsa threatened. “We had started harvest a couple weeks earlier in our organic rice fields,” said Danial Cavazos, director of rice farming for Florida Crystal. “It was slow going as the rain was persistent, but we dodged a bullet with this storm. Aside from some rain and wind, there was virtually no damage to the crop.”

Precautionary measures at the Florida Crystals Sem Chi Mill were instituted in case the storm decided to turn for a direct hit on the area. “The shutdown at the mill did not hurt us as the rice was behind schedule and needed the extra time to fully mature,” Cavazos said.

Dr. Matthew VanWeelden, with the University of Florida/IFAS Extension in Palm Beach County, reported similar good news. “This area was spared major destruction from Hurricane/Tropical Storm Elsa, other than the heavy wind and rainfall.” VanWeelden, who received his PhD from Louisiana State University, is familiar with storms of this nature and their potential for devastating crops, particularly rice, at a critical time in the production season. 

Now that the 2021 hurricane season has begun, USA Rice Director of Field Services Kane Webb wonders whether others in the mid-south are experiencing déjà vu all over again like him.



USA RICE LOBBIES FOR RELIEF IN THE WAKE OF NATURAL DISASTERS

BY JAMISON CRUCE

ARLINGTON, VA — From hurricanes in the Gulf last year to the ongoing drought in the west and floods throughout the mid-south, rice farmers in every rice growing region in the United States have been dealt a blow due to natural disasters, all while also dealing with trade wars and a global pandemic.

In response, the USA Rice Farmers sent letters to Congress in July expressing rice farmers' need for disaster assistance.

"[USA Rice Farmers] are asking for an extension of Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus (WHIP+) disaster aid or similarly designed program," said the letter. "This program worked well for rice farmers who experienced damages in 2017, 2018, and 2019, and we believe it should be extended for the 2020 and 2021 crop years."


The letter continues, "Specifically, as Congress considers future appropriations measures, we ask that hurricanes, flood, freeze, drought, and other natural disasters be added to any supplemental disaster appropriations/spending packages. We also ask that producers who experienced losses of rice stored in grain bins be covered similar to past on-farm storage payments in 2018 and 2019. Should Congress consider a more comprehensive standing disaster program, we would hope these same concerns are addressed."

Letters were sent to the leaders of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees and Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittees, as well as all Members of Congress who represent rice-producing districts. Shortly thereafter, Congress began earnestly working towards crafting disaster aid packages.

On July 27, the House Agriculture Committee held a hearing to consider a bipartisan disaster aid bill that would extend the Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus (WHIP+) and the On-Farm Storage Loss Program (OFSLP) for crop years 2020 and 2021, among other forms of assistance to farmers and ranchers.

On August 5, the Senate Appropriations Committee advanced the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022. In addition to discretionary funding, the bill would provide \$7 billion in funding for agricultural producers who suffered losses due to natural disasters in 2020 and 2021, including extending WHIP+ and the OFSLP.

Both bills are favorable to rice farmers who have experienced losses due to natural disasters, and will provide assistance to eligible producers based on actual losses. However, each bill contains differences which will need to be reconciled, so any forthcoming disaster assistance will likely have a long road ahead as Congress continues to negotiate these provisions. For instance, the House bill only authorizes the program and does not have funding attached, whereas the Senate bill both authorizes and appropriates funding for the programs.

"USA Rice is grateful for Congress' recognition of farmers in need of aid due to natural disasters last year and so far this year," said Nicole Montna Van Vleck, a California rice farmer and former chair of the USA Rice Farmers. "We support these ongoing efforts to get assistance to those who need it most." 

Jamison Cruce is the USA Rice director of government affairs.

LISTEN UP!

Two rice-related podcasts cover the U.S. industry from top to bottom, north to south, east to west, and all points in between!



TAKING STOCK – RICE IN GLOBAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

BY JESICA KINCAID

ARLINGTON, VA — Following an unprecedented year of human conflict, natural disasters, and the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are faced with the greatest levels of global hunger and food insecurity in many years. Fortunately, the U.S. rice industry has been there to answer the call. In response to crises around the world, and in support of economic development projects in recipient countries, 2021 has been a record-breaking year for rice usage in international food assistance.

This spring saw the completion of a two-part tender for a major U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) development project in West Africa. The rice purchased by USDA is being used in several projects through the Food for Progress program. According to USDA, Food for Progress has two principal objectives: to improve agricultural productivity and to expand the trade of agricultural products. Past Food for Progress projects have trained farmers in animal and plant health, improved farming methods, developed road and utility systems, established producer cooperatives, provided microcredit, and developed agricultural value chains. This particular project involves the monetization of rice to benefit industries in participating West African nations.

“This tender marks the completion of a project that began many years ago, calling forward rice, and culminating with this significant purchase in 2021,” said Rebecca Bratter, USA Rice food aid consultant. “Food for Progress projects can choose to call forward any commodity that makes sense in the local marketplace. USA Rice has worked to cultivate relationships



Famine threatens almost 30 million people in hot spots around the globe. The call to provide rice in response to widespread hunger and malnutrition remains strong, especially in school feeding programs that deliver food aid.



with various private volunteer organizations (PVOs) and implementing agencies over the years to ensure that rice is always considered.”

Another food aid success story has been the continued growth in the usage of fortified rice. Last year saw the largest total purchases of fortified rice for food aid with approximately 44,000 MT, which represented 35 percent of all rice in food aid. In 2021, with a month left to go in the fiscal year, fortified rice sales have topped 52,000 MT, across all USDA and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) programs. This is a record volume for fortified rice since its development and approval in 2015, a positive sign for both the U.S. rice industry and those who rely on fortified rice and its critical health and nutrition benefits.

Fortified rice is used primarily by the McGovern-Dole Food for Education program, the USDA’s global school feeding effort. Fortified rice is an excellent resource for McGovern-Dole because it provides not only a healthy, delicious staple food for children but also delivers additional nutrients that can be tailored to the needs of each region. Recently, fortified rice also has been used in the U.S. Agency for International Development’s Title II emergency feeding programs, delivering vital nourishment and nutrition to the world’s most vulnerable populations.

“Rice has proven to be one of the most reliable and heavily-used commodities in global feeding programs in an ever-expanding list of countries,” said Bratter. “USA Rice will continue to work with U.S. government partners, other commodity groups, and the PVO community to fight hunger and improve nutrition for those in need around the world.” [WFP](#)

Jesica Kincaid is the USA Rice senior manager for international trade policy.

NEW IRAQ MOU

BY SARAH MORAN

ARLINGTON, VA — One of the responsibilities of USA Rice as a trade association representing the entire U.S. rice industry, is to help create and maintain export markets. In July of this year, USA Rice did just that by developing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Al Awees, the new purchasing entity for the government of Iraq which is the primary purchaser of rice in Iraq. This MOU calls for purchases of 200,000 tons of U.S. rice annually, including both bagged and bulk rice, and references the broader government-to-government MOU signed between the Embassy of the United States of America in Baghdad and the Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Iraq in 2016.

On the heels of this new MOU, the U.S. rice industry made its first sale to Iraq in more than two years, selling 120,000 tons of U.S. long grain rice from Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas to Al Awees.

“Our MOU and the subsequent sales are the beginning of a solid relationship with Al Awees,” said USA Rice President & CEO Betsy Ward. “We’re proud to have

created an environment where U.S. exporters could make these sales and glad to see Iraq is again a top ten export market this year.”

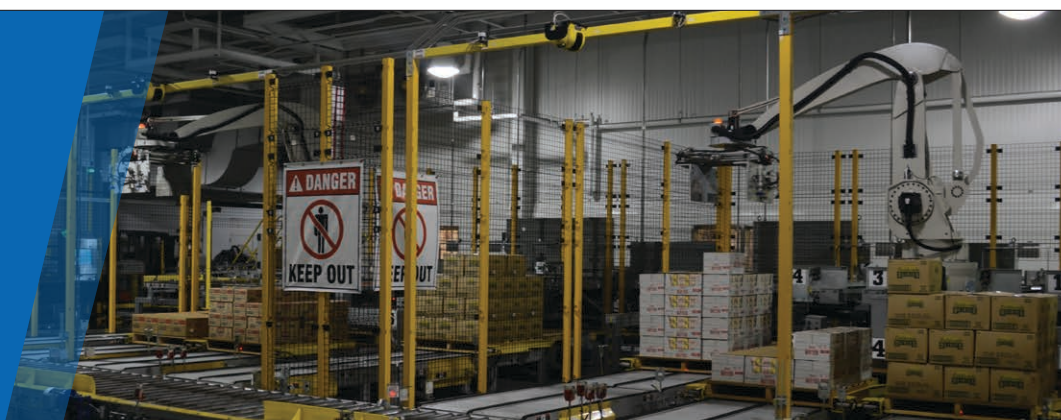
Iraq has been a top market for U.S. rice for decades, purchasing up to 150,000 MT (approximately \$80 million) annually in recent years. For the past two years, Iraq had not imported any U.S. rice amid drastic revenue shortages, given that crude oil exports account for 90 percent of Iraq’s revenue and the low prices of oil in 2020. Oil prices are higher in 2021, meaning that Iraq’s economy is stronger and they’re able to resume rice purchases.

Iraq imports more than one million tons of rice annually. The Iraqi government provides several food basket items to its citizens, including rice. Depending on domestic finances, the government is able to provide Iraqis this allotment monthly, bimonthly, or quarterly. [WSJ](#)

Sarah Moran is the USA Rice vice president international.

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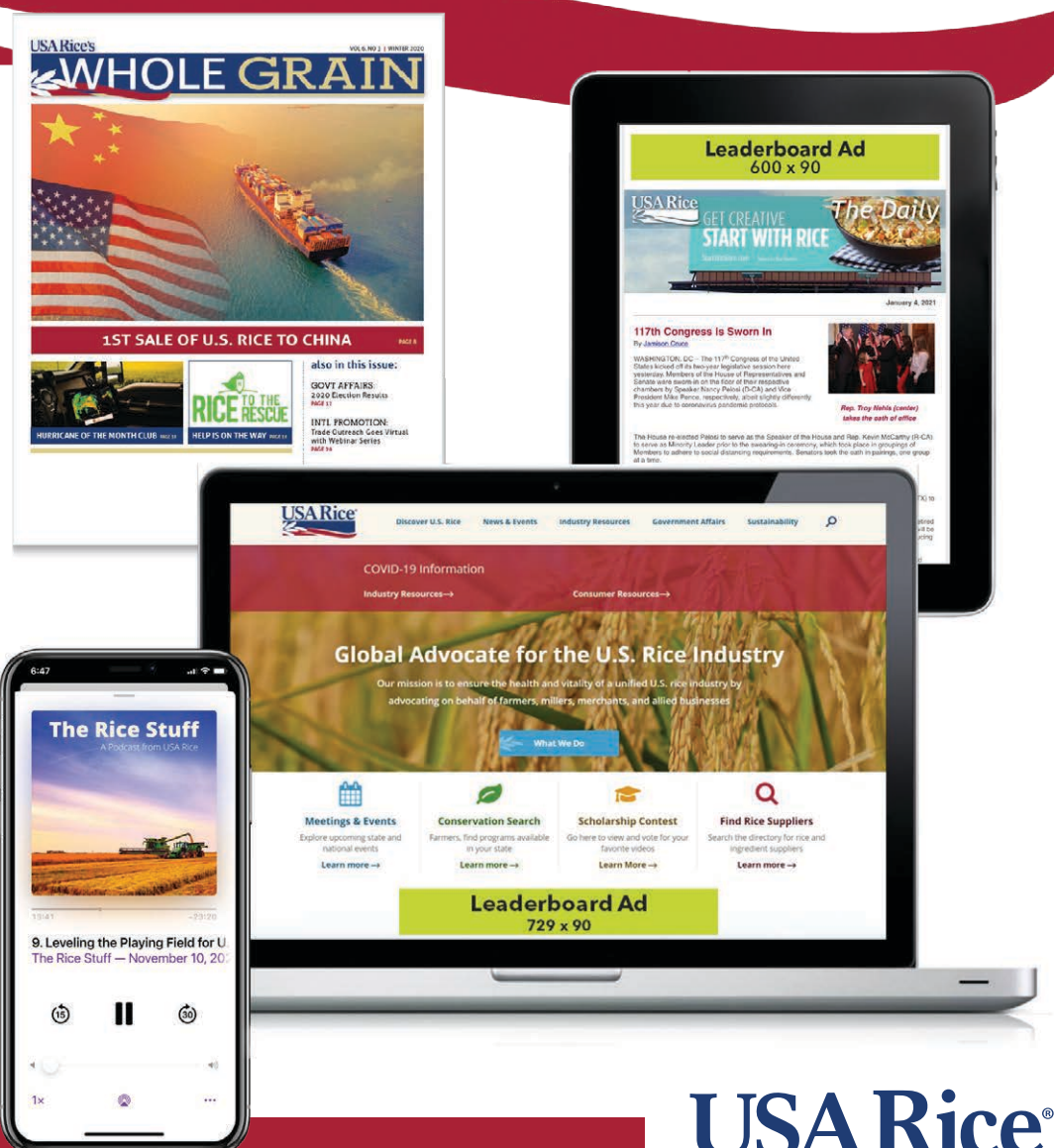
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