

Detailed Historic Timeline of the Australian Rice Industry

- 1850** Likely introduction of rice seed into Southern Australian Gold fields by Chinese prospectors.
- 1860** Small rice industry using 'upland' varieties and Chinese labour emerges in Northern Queensland to supply demand in the North Queensland Gold fields.
- 1882** Hugh McKinney, an engineer with the Public Works Department recommends development of an irrigation scheme on the Murrumbidgee River to the Lyne Royal Commission.
- 1891** NSW Department of Agriculture begins trials of 'upland' rice varieties in Northern NSW.
- 1895** Commencement of a catastrophic drought, conflict in land use, market down turn for wool, depression, industrial chaos and banker concern at possible collapse of the wool industry forces progress towards closer settlement. Little is possible without a reliable water supply.
- 1897** Colonel FJ Home, retired Executive Officer of the Indian Civil Service recommends construction of two dams, one each on the Murray and the Murrumbidgee Rivers.
- 1899** Samuel McCaughey acquires North Yanco Station.
- 1900** Fed up with delays, Hugh McKinney resigns from Public Works as Chief Engineer of Water Conservation.
- 1901** A Closer Settlement Bill becomes bogged down in Parliament on political grounds.
- 1902** A year of disastrous drought. Samuel McCaughey irrigates 750 acres of lucerne and 250 acres of sorghum through sixty miles of supply channels. He feeds 16,000 sheep for three months.
- Hugh McKinney joins Robert Gibson, a pastoralist from Hay, to promote the Murrumbidgee North Water Supply and Irrigation Bill. This calls for construction of Burrunjuck Dam.
- 1903** Liberal Government resurrects the Closer Settlement Bill.
- 1904** Two hundred miles of channels with the potential to irrigate 40,000 acres have been constructed on North Yanko, McCaughey floods 10,000 acres of grassland, makes up to six cuts off 5,000 acres of lucerne and grows oats and potatoes.
- Delegates to the Farmers & Settlers Annual Conference in Narrandera, accompanied by Ministers of the Crown and some Members of Parliament inspect McCaughey's irrigation development.
- 1906** Japanese ex-parliamentarian, Isaburo (Jo) Takasuka, begins rice cultivation near Swan Hill using Japanese (Japonica) varieties.



Public Works Department is authorised to proceed with construction of Burrunjuck Dam and distribution system. The Barren Jack and Murrumbidgee Canals Construction Act, a Bill introduced by CA Lee, then Minister for Public works is enacted. This officially launches the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA Scheme).



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1907 Work commences on Burrinjuck Dam.

1910 The Wade Liberal Government passes the Irrigation Bill - formally constituting the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Trust. LAB Wade is appointed Executive Officer and Secretary of the Trust.

The first Labor Government is elected in NSW. The Irrigation Trust plans ten acre blocks for intensive horticultural cultivation and two acre blocks for working men on second class soils around Yanco.

1912 On 13th July, the MIA Scheme (Yanco area) is officially opened. Construction of Leeton has already begun. In October, irrigation water reaches the Mirrool end of the MIA and settlement at Hanwood (Bagtown) commences, Construction of Griffith begins in December, The MIA is declared an 'alcohol free zone'.

Yanco Experimental Farm is established on land resumed from Samuel McCaughey near Yanco.



1913 The Industrial Undertakings Act requires the Water Conservation and Irrigation Commission to be self supporting.

Settlers suffer great hardship attempting to settle undersized farms on unsuitable soils. The MIA is pointed as a colossal waste of public money. Government Departments and the WC&IC struggle to put the project on a business footing.

1914 - 1915 Jo Takasuka grows the first commercial rice crop in South Eastern Australia. He sells part of his crop as seed to the NSW Department of Agriculture.

Takasuka seed is sown in trials at Yanco. Plants are vulnerable to pests and the elements. This results in discouraging yields.



1920 Horticulture is not paying. Leeton Cannery is in trouble, dairying requires massive capital injection, settlers are sinking into hopeless debt and the WC&IC has become a financial embarrassment to Government. Settler families are leaving the area in droves.

Water Conservation Irrigation Commission (WC&IC) employee, John (Jack) Brady, studies Japonica rice varieties growing in California and makes arrangements to secure seed.

1922 - 1923 Department of Agriculture experimentalist, Austin Shepherd, demonstrates the viability of rice under field conditions on the MIA.

1924 Seed harvested in 1923 from a successful 1922 trial of Japonica varieties is offered to settlers.

George Blencowe (Farm 240) and WW Hosking (Farm 778) sow 166 bushels 28 lbs on seventy acres.

Michael Duffy (Farm 731) sows 11 bushels 38 lbs on five acres. Roy Spice (Farm 1008) sows 119 bushels 2 lbs on fifty acres. MK Phelps (Farm 391) sows 28 bushels 24 lbs on twelve acres. Sue and Margaret Grant (Farm 281) sow 47 bushels 26 lbs on twenty acres. Sid Marchinton (Farm 344, Yenda) sows 38 bushels 4 lbs on sixteen acres.

Detailed Historic Timeline of the Australian Rice Industry Continued

- 1925** The Lang Labor Government introduces an Irrigation (amendment) Bill providing for reclassification of farms, writing down of debts and halving of valuation of all holdings.

Harvest of the pioneer crop yields 232 tonnes of paddy. Most is purchased by the Water Conservation and Irrigation Commission for seed. Lois Grant sells her crop and Sid Marchinton sells ten tons of paddy to a private Sydney based miller for fourteen pounds per tonne. The miller describes it as 'the finest sample of rice I have ever seen'.

Growers form the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Rice Growers' Co-operative Society. This is an attempt to establish an orderly industry infrastructure for handling, storing and marketing of future crops.

City based private millers form the Millers Association. They have watched the vulnerable marketing structure that has been emerging and plan to benefit.

- 1926** 1,570 tonnes is harvested from 804 hectares for an average yield of 1.95 tonnes per hectare.

Growers discuss establishment of their own co-operative mill. The Co-operative Society cannot afford it.

- 1927** 5,114 tonnes of paddy is harvested from 2,110 hectares for an average yield of 2.42 tonnes per hectare.

Growers and the Co-operative apply to Parliament for utilisation of the provisions of the new Marketing of Primary Products Act.



The Federal Government applies a duty on imported rice and provides an agreement to prevent rice production outside the MIA.

The Millers' Association threatens to boycott MIA rice.

- 1928** Following grower submissions for establishment of a rice marketing board, the NSW Government announces a 'Voluntary Rice Pool for the State of New South Wales'.

Millers' Association claims it will only accept half of the available crop. The industry has produced beyond its ability to store and market. Unsold paddy is placed in Government elevators where it is mismanaged by elevator employees.

Paddy worth several thousands of pounds spoils. Some growers blame the Co-operative and this weakens the co-operative spirit.

In November, the Rice Marketing Board for the State of New South Wales (RMB) commences operations. The Board's role is to receive and store paddy, negotiate with millers on price, pay the growers the pool price less associated costs, select and issue seed, purchase bulk farm inputs and promote rice. The Board immediately faces a carry-over production is anticipated to be 3,000 tonnes in excess of Australia's domestic consumption.

In barely four years, Australia has become self sufficient in rice and is poised for exports.

- 1929** A committee forms to meet with the WCIC and establish a rational and equitable basis for deciding rice production levels and permissible acreages in terms of available water. This is the nucleus of the Rice Industry Co-ordination Committee.

Again the Co-operative calls for establishment of a growers' mill: "The majority of growers ... and the Directors of the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Ricegrowers' Co-operative Society are strongly in favour of erecting a mill. It is contended that the Associated Millers have shown an unfriendly attitude towards the growers and some action will have to be taken to get the growers off the breadline".

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1930 34,405 tonnes of paddy is produced from 8,093 hectares for a yield of 4.25 tonnes per hectare.

In July the Co-operative is dissolved: "The millers broke the Co-operative with procrastination, ultimatums, refusal to export, continued import, buying only part of the crop, rumour, innuendo, passing on the costs of the tariff to consumers and orchestrating consumer contempt of growers. If rice growers would get down to the strict principles of co-operation they would achieve something, but today we are going to hell with our rice industry".

Remaining members of the Co-operative form "... a protective Organisation to keep growers together". This is the genesis of the MIA Rice Growers' Association later to become the Ricegrowers' Association of Australia.

Producer support for the Association grows and rice industry politics begin to hot up.



1931 A change in membership of the RMB sees a new, more ambitious and 'pro grower' organisation emerge. 250,000 recipe books are distributed and a schools education program is initiated.

Home consumption of rice improves as people substitute rice for potatoes in the Depression. Prices paid to growers fall as the Depression worsens. Revised cost for construction of a growers' mill is \$30,000. This is well beyond the resources of the growers.

1932 Wilfred T Henham constructs a small mill at Murrumbidgee and mills rice for a few local families and some local retail outlets.

1933 CS Hall and Co. builds a rice mill at Yenda.

1934 Australian Rice Pty Ltd builds a rice mill at Griffith.

1935 36,553 tonnes of paddy is produced from 8,847 hectares for a yield of 4.13 tonnes per hectare.

1936 Fire destroys the Yenda rice mill.

1943 1,662 hectares of land is opened up in the Wakool area of the Murray Valley as a temporary measure to increase rice supplies for Australia's war effort.

1945 32,809 tonnes of paddy is produced from 9,953 hectares for a yield of 3.30 tonnes per hectare.

1946 Growers become increasingly agitated at the low prices obtained for their paddy.

1948 Fire destroys the Griffith rice mill.

1949 Australian Rice Pty Ltd builds a new rice mill at Griffith.

Cremona Pty Ltd builds a new rice mill at Yenda.

A consortium of millers builds a rice mill at Echuca.

Detailed Historic Timeline of the Australian Rice Industry Continued

- 1950** The Central Executive of the Ricegrowers' Association forms a new Co-operative 'Ricegrowers' Co-operative Mills Limited'.

Growers pool funds and build the long awaited growers' mill at Leeton in time to harvest 17,780 tonnes of paddy from the 1951 harvest.



- 1951** Growers who deliver to the Co-operative mill receive £38 per tonne for their paddy at a time when private millers are offering £12. The following year, this increases to £40. Growers recognise the level of profit taking by the private millers. They refuse to supply paddy at millers' prices. The private millers cannot compete with the Co-operative.

- 1952** The Co-operative purchases the Yenda rice mill.

- 1955** The Co-operative launches its own branded retail pack of 'Sunwhite' rice. Nutritional value, quality and consistency are stressed in the marketing of this innovative new value added product. This will remain the fundamental marketing platform for the Co-operative.



- 1956** The RMB installs a locally designed system for aerating paddy in storage. This allows paddy to be stored in bulk instead of bags, revolutionising paddy handling.

- 1957** The Co-operative purchases Echuca rice mill.

- 1959** The Co-operative purchases Griffith rice mill.

- 1961** The development of the Coleambally Irrigation Area leads to a substantial increase in rice acreage.

- 1968** The Co-operative builds a rice mill at Coleambally.

The International Year of Rice, The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines releases IR8 the super yielding rice variety that fuels the Green Revolution.



- 1969** Against the recommendations of the RICC, the Minister for Conservation increases acreages permitted to grow rice by 25%.

- 1970** The Co-operative builds a rice mill at Deniliquin. This is the largest rice milling complex in the Southern Hemisphere.

- 1970 - 1980** The Green Revolution begins to bite rice exporters. Countries that were previously importers are now becoming self sufficient. Some even begin to export surplus production. Returns from overseas markets begin a downward trend as demand falls. 1971 sees the first carryover of paddy since 1928.

In 1972, returns to growers fall by 34%. The Co-operative loses its Okinawa market as the USA moves into the Pacific in an effort to shift growing rice stocks. As returns fall, growers begin to discuss rationalisation of the Co-operative and the RMB.

Growers call for some Federal Government assistance in the face of increasing hardship. Farm costs including water prices increase as the NSW Government begins to implement its 'User pays' philosophy. The Federal Government continues to reduce import tariffs.

Detailed Historic Timeline of the Australian Rice Industry Continued

- 1980 - 1985** Major exporting countries withhold stocks as demand and prices become more depressed. The world is awash with grain. Rice growers throughout the world are suffering as a result of depressed prices. Governments apply support schemes to protect their rice industries.



NSW rice growers know they must survive on their own. They decide on a plan to rationalise their industry structure. The resulting cost savings should allow growers to survive the period of oversupply. A new integrated organisation called Ricegrowers' Co-operative Limited (RCL) is established.

- 1986** The application of subsidies by rice exporting countries gathers momentum as large producers attempt to clear huge stockpiles. The USA passes its Farm Bill which includes an Export Enhancement Program designed to counter subsidised dumping of rice by the EC. The full effects of the USA/EC trade war impact immediately on the unsubsidised NSW farmers as international trade in rice grinds to a standstill and prices plummet.

On-farm costs increase by 25% and farm interest rates on borrowings rise to up to 22%. Average farm income for rice in 1986 is estimated at around \$2,300. Some farmers attempt to sell their farms to avoid debt spiral but with such a desperate outlook, there are few buyers.

More than a decade of research and new technology yields new ways to manufacture a range of valuable new products from rice and rice by-products. The Co-operative begins an urgent program of diversification to place a buffer between returns to growers and fluctuations in wholegrain rice prices. Excitement grows about potential products such as Rice Cakes, Rice Bran and horticultural products.

The industry applies to the Federal Government urgently requesting a price support scheme for the period of the 1986/87 season affected by the trade war. A protracted IAC inquiry delays a Government decision into late sowing period. Cabinet does not approve the scheme on the grounds that it is too late. Growers desperate to maintain some cash flow have already committed themselves to sowing. Rural counselling services are stretched to the limit.

- 1987 - 1989** The USA and EC clear some major grain stockpiles. A series of natural disasters provide some increased off take of worldwide stocks. Rice consuming countries that have allowed their rice import supply lines to empty during the trade war now begin to restock. Australian rice growers begin to recover. Their industry has emerged from the trade war as the last 'free trader' of rice in the world.

Domestic rice consumption continues to increase by about 4.5% per year. New rice based food and non-food products are launched as part of the Co-operative's diversification program.

- 1990** The new SunRice 'Sculptures' advertising campaign wins major Australian and international advertising awards and assists in driving domestic rice consumption by a record 17%.



- 1990 - 1993** The Co-operative maintains its push towards diversification.

The people of Swan Hill erect a memorial cairn near the site of Jo Takasuka's rice growing experiments. Among special guests at the unveiling ceremony are son, Mario Takasuka and Jo's grandchildren Murray and Nona.

The world spotlight focuses on the US, EC and Japan as the three major trading entities lock horns on their relative positions on trade issues, particularly export subsidies and market access.

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1990 - 1993 Japan's powerful rice farmer lobby maintains intense political pressure on the Japanese Government to maintain a closed market policy. However, a disastrous growing season forces Japan to import 2.5 million tonnes of rice to meet its domestic requirements. The US and EC reach an agreement. Japan and Korea concede to International pressure and introduce a schedule for reduction of market access barriers.

Australian rice growers look with some hope for future market opportunities as each country tables its plans for the progressive reduction of trade barriers and export subsidies under GATT.

The USA and EC negotiate on a program of subsidy reduction. This has been the main barrier to progress. Other subsidising countries awaiting the outcome of the USA/EC negotiations are now forced to examine their positions. Trade barriers and export subsidies are progressively reduced.

1994 Ricegrowers' Co-operative Limited supplies 180,000 tonnes of Japonica rice to Japan as part of the Emergency Import Program. Australian rice is well accepted in the market and achieves highest selling price at auction.

1995 'SunRice' - a joint venture company between Ricegrowers' Co-operative Limited and a well respected Japanese rice milling and marketing company successfully applies for a rice import licence in Japan under the SBS provisions of Japan's market liberalisation program.

A new rice variety called 'Millin' specially developed at Yanco for the Japanese rice market is simultaneously launched in Japan and Australia. The industry gears itself for future trade into new Asian markets including Korea and Japan.

First SunRice Premium Rices launched, including SunRice Jasmine rice and SunRice Organic Brown Long Grain rice.

1998 Launch of the new Premium Range from SunRice, including SunRice Arborio rice, SunRice Doongara rice, SunRice Jasmine rice, SunRice Koshihikari rice, and SunRice Wild Blend rice.

2000 SunRice becomes the new trading name for Ricegrowers' Co-operative Limited.

Re-launch of SunRice World Rices with new packaging illustrating quick and easy meal ideas, and easy step-by-step rice cooking instructions.

Launch of SunRice Doongara CleverRice.

Closure of Yenda and Griffith Mills to realise greater cost efficiencies to allow greater competition on a world class scale.

Opening of Convenience Rice Plant to produce innovative quick cook rice products such as SunRice 3 Minute Rice and SunRice Express Rice.

2001 Record rice production of 1,744,066 tonnes.

SunRice commissions a world class Rice Flour Mill at Leeton and makes major improvements to processing capacity at Leeton, Deniliquin and Echuca mills.

2002 Major refurbishment of Coleambally rice mill completed.

New automated packing facilities commissioned at Deniliquin and Leeton Mills.

2005 Rice grower members vote in favour of converting RCL from a co-operative to a company.

Ricegrowers' Co-operative Limited changes to Ricegrowers Limited.



The Rice Food Experts