

History of Australian Rice

Rice is the main source of nutrition for more than three-quarters of the world population and archeological evidence suggests rice has been feeding humankind for more than 5,000 years.

The Australian rice industry is world-class food business exporting rice products to many countries and the dominant supplier in the growing domestic market. This position needs to be seen in the context of its development during the course of the twentieth century.

■ Timeline

1914 - The Victorian Government allocated 200 acres of flood prone land on the Murray River near Swan Hill to Jo Takasuka for the purpose of demonstrating the cultivation of rice from Japan. Takasuka persevered through floods and droughts and produced rice for commercial sale.

1924 The first commercial crop of rice was grown in Australia by eight farmers around the townships of Leeton and Griffith in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area from seed that was provided from California by the NSW Government.

1928 The industry began operating under statutory marketing arrangements in NSW, with the establishment of the Rice Marketing Board. SunRice has been the sole authorised buyer of NSW rice for both the domestic and export markets

1950 The rice industry established a grower owned cooperative and vertically integrated the rice food business over the following decades. This structure was brought about by the findings of a Royal Commission which looked into the commercial failures of existing irrigation industries in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area. Since then the growers' company, SunRice (Ricegrowers' Limited) receives, stores, mills, processes, packages, sells and ships rice products for the domestic and export markets

2003 The rice industry launched a new breed of rice that is designed to reduce water use by a further 10% from the already reduced water usage by 60% in the past 10 years

Today Rice is Australia's third largest cereal grain export, and the ninth largest agricultural export and the industry generates around \$800 million revenue per annum, with around \$500 million of this coming from exports. Australia exports to 70 major international destinations including the Middle East, Japan and Hong Kong.

History of Australian Rice Continued

■ The Australian rice industry is an agricultural success story.

Since the establishment of rice growing on a commercial basis in the 1920s, the rice industry has achieved continuous increases in production levels, yields per hectare and tonnes produced per megalitre of water used. Australian rice yields at around 10 tonnes per hectare are the highest in the world.

Australian rice is grown in the Murrumbidgee and Murray Valleys of south-western New South Wales, with small areas of rice grown in adjacent areas of northern Victoria. Rice growing is concentrated in this region due to the large areas of flat land, suitable clay-based soils, availability of water, rice storage and milling infrastructure in or near the regional towns, and is relatively close to the Port of Melbourne from where Australian rice is exported.

■ The Australian rice industry is competitive on a global scale.

The Australian rice industry, while small by world scales, has become a successful and competitive supplier of quality medium grain rice products into world markets. It has achieved this through highly skilled rice growers and the vertically integrated milling and marketing arrangements owned by rice growers that were developed over the second half of last century.