

Who Can Grow Rice in Australia?

The rice industry has strict regulations in place to ensure the production of high quality rice that has minimal impact on the environment.

■ Strong industry regulations

Industry regulations ensure that regional management practices include drainage, recycling, storage and channel seepage control; as well as education programs, monitoring mechanisms, and research and development.



■ Not just any farmer can grow rice

In the Murrumbidgee Valley, rice grows on no more than one third of each farm. In the Murray Valley, there is a total hydraulic load limit of 4 megalitres per hectare. These policies seek to provide an even distribution of water over the landscape and balanced hydraulic pressure on the water table.

Rice grows only on approved 'heavy clay' soils that minimise seepage into water tables. Approval for growing rice is granted after electro-magnetic technology (EM31) and soil textural analysis of samples bored at intervals across the paddock is applied. More than three metres of heavy, continuous clay is required for unrestricted rice growing.

■ Water use on rice cannot exceed the industry target requirement.

Allowable water consumption levels for rice growing are set by irrigation companies utilising climatic data records by the CSIRO. Should these limits be exceeded, farmers may face fines, restrictions on the use of individual paddocks for rice in subsequent year, or the banning of rice production on those paddocks - **Rice is the only agricultural crop to have such rigorous restrictions applied.**

Water recycling systems are encouraged and within 10 years, recycling will be mandatory as part of the Land and Water Management Plans. Careful monitoring by irrigation companies of drainage water entering drainage schemes is undertaken and must meet Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards.

■ Australian rice farming is unique

In most countries rice farmers concentrate on growing only rice. In Australia, rice grows as part of a unique farming system. Farmers use a rotation cycle across the whole farm over four to five years. This means that our growers have other agricultural enterprises on the farm as well as rice. This system, designed for efficiency, sustainability and safety means our growers maintain water savings, have increased soil nutrients, higher yields and much healthier crops.

■ More crop per drop

Once our Australian rice growers harvest their rice, they use the subsoil moisture remaining in the soil to plant another crop, either a wheat crop or pasture for animals. This form of rotation is the most efficient in natural resource and agricultural terms as it is high yielding and establishes a pest and disease break.

Who can Grow Rice in Australia Continued

■ Water management

Careful water management of rice farms is needed to ensure both environmental sustainability and rice productivity. There are a number of measures that rice farmers undertake to grow high quality and water efficient rice in Australia:

- Follow strict regulations for the growing of rice such as location, soil types and water availability.
- Many grow shorter season rice varieties developed in Australia - these require substantially less water to grow.
- Most plant a winter crop directly into the remaining soil moisture after harvesting their rice crop which delivers two crops for the one application of water.
- Implement actions consistent with local Land and Water Management Plans, which minimise the impact of irrigation on environments.

■ Land and Water Management Plans

Land and Water Management Plans have been set by state governments, but rice growers have gone further and have developed their own Land and Water Management Plans. These plans are the cornerstone of environmental initiatives in the irrigation areas of the Riverina.

Each plan is an integrated natural resource management strategy prepared by landholders and local communities with technical and financial assistance in partnership with the NSW and Federal governments.

Plans set out the best practices for managing irrigation farming and improving water and soil management within the landscape. They also provide for long-term biodiversity restoration and better farm management techniques, so the land is preserved for future generations.