

Rice around the world

- Rice growing is believed to have originated in China and southern and eastern Asia around 10,000BC.
- In 2001/02, approximately 589 million tonnes of paddy rice was produced worldwide. China and India were the largest producers.
- Rice is the staple diet of over half the world's population. Approximately 405 million tonnes were consumed in 2001/02. China, India, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Vietnam are the largest consumers of rice.
- Rice is versatile and is used to make main meals as well as desserts. Some rice types have special qualities: jasmine and basmati rice have fragrant aromas that complement savoury dishes, while Arborio rice is preferred for risotto and paella because the grains absorb the flavour of the dish.

Rice in Australia

- Rice seeds were brought to Australia by Chinese gold prospectors around 1850.
- Rice production in Australia is believed to have first occurred in Queensland during the gold rush period around 1850-1860.
- The first record of rice cultivation in South Eastern Australia was in 1906, when the Victorian Government allocated 200 acres of land on the Murray River to a former Japanese parliamentarian, Isaburo Takasuka, to demonstrate rice growing. After persevering through floods and droughts, he produced a crop for commercial sale in 1914.
- The Water Conservation and Irrigation Commission trialed Californian and other rice varieties in 1922/23 and 1923/24. The first commercial rice crops were grown in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area in 1924/25.
- Rice is grown on irrigated farms in the Murray and Murrumbidgee valleys of south-western NSW and northern Victoria. Australia produced approximately 1.25 million tonnes of rice in 2001/02.

Nutritional benefits of rice

- Rice is an excellent source of energy. It is rich in carbohydrates, which are broken down into glucose to provide energy for working muscles and fuel for the brain.
- Rice is low in sugar and total fat and saturated fat. It is cholesterol-free, contains negligible amounts of salt and has no additives or preservatives. It is suitable to include in a diet for those watching their weight or on cholesterol-lowering diets.
- Rice is gluten-free, making it ideal for people who are unable to tolerate the proteins found in wheat, barley, rye, oats and triticale.
- The glycaemic index (GI) ranks foods based on their immediate effect on blood sugar levels. Eating low GI foods, such as certain varieties of rice, can lower insulin levels which makes fat easier to burn and less likely to be stored.