

THE MARKET

Australians are health conscious and active people who are increasingly well educated about nutrition. These factors have certainly played their part in the rapid increase in rice consumption in Australia over the past few years.

On average, each Australian eats nine kilograms of rice annually. That is considerably higher than the per capita consumption figures for most Western industrialised nations.

The total market for rice in Australia is approximately 150,000 tonnes. Sunrice Australia is the marketing arm and brand of Ricegrowers Cooperative Ltd, which numbers among its members all of the 2280 rice farmers in Australia. Over 90% of Australia's demand for rice is met by locally grown Sunrice which is now recognised internationally as among the highest quality rice in the world.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Consumption of rice has doubled in Australia over the past nine years, and Sunrice can take much of the credit for this. Sunrice has played a major role in raising the awareness of the Australian public to the benefits of rice as a high energy food. A stream of new products and new flavours, the result of intensive breeding programs and market research, has helped to promote public interest and to keep up with changing tastes and fashions. And tastes and fashions have changed fast in Australia. There is today a greater interest than ever before in Asian-style food complemented by rice.

Rice in Australia is grown in a comparatively restricted area of one state - New South Wales - where conditions for the crop are well-nigh perfect.



The limited size of the crop's geographical spread helps Sunrice to maintain a product of consistent quality. At the same time the excellence of Australian growing conditions means that quality is not simply uniform, but consistently among the best in the world. Yields are spectacular. Australian ricefarmers achieve an average yield of 8.5 tonnes/hectare, which is the highest in the world.

While these are natural advantages, Sunrice Australia's growers and marketers have worked hard to make the most of them. As a result of their efforts, Sunrice today holds 90% of the growing Australian market. Nevertheless, 88% of all rice grown in Australia goes for export, much of it to Asia, where Australian rice is recognised as premium quality by consumers who, after all, should know. Hong Kong and Japan are the largest

overseas that rice is now Australia's ninth largest agricultural export and third largest cereal export. The value of the exported rice crop now stands at some A\$450 million per year.

HISTORY

Rice (at least food rice) is not native to Australia. Like so many other crops it was introduced in the 19th century, though it had a more exotic history than most. Rice was first planted in the 1850s by Chinese workers and prospectors who came looking for wealth in Australia's rugged goldfields.

However, the crop could never become truly viable until a plentiful supply of water could be assured. That chance came in the early years of this century when the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area was established. There were some false starts, mainly because farmers needed time to identify the right varieties for cultivation here. But by the end of the 1920s

some 250 ricegrowers had 20,000 acres under rice. The industry received a boost in the Great Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s when many people took to eating rice instead of the more expensive potatoes.

After that, rice production in Australia moved, steadily rather than rapidly, from strength to strength. Not until quite recently did the market for rice in Australia really take off. The main reasons for the increasing success of the crop have been changing food tastes in Australia, a richer mix of migrants (especially from Asia), and the growth of health conscious eating habits.

Today Australian rice is still grown in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area and the Murray Valley, both in New South Wales. But nowadays more than 2000 Australian ricegrowers produce an annual crop of some 1.2 million tonnes from 152,000 hectares. Ricegrowers Cooperative Ltd is Australia's most successful producer cooperative and the largest of its type in the world. A far cry indeed from a few patches of rice grown by homesick Chinese gold prospectors nearly 150 years ago.

THE PRODUCT

The Sunrice range of products includes white rice, brown rice, long-grain and medium-grain rice, parboiled rice, organic rice, fragrant rice and wild rice. These are marketed under a variety of product names, but all carry the Sunrice brand. The product names are themselves familiar to most Australian consumers: names such as Sunlong Long Grain rice (specifically developed for eating with curries), Sunbrown Quick, and Sunlong Jasmine Fragrant Rice.

In recent years a number of value-added rice products have been developed from Sunrice, including Sunfarm Rice Cakes. Sunrice is also widely used in breakfast cereals, most notably in

WHAT'S BEHIND SUNRICE AUSTRALIA
Australia's wonderful rice:
A story of precious water, cooperative spirit and mighty effort.

LETONA AUSTRALIAN SUNRICE

Sunwhite RICE

Sunbrown Quick



Kellogg's Rice Bubbles, and in the manufacture of rice 'milk'.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

One of Sunrice's latest innovations has been the development of Sunbrown Quick. Brown rice is renowned for its nutritional value, and especially for its high fibre content. It was a popular choice as a 'health food' even before rice in general became widely accepted. Unfortunately the husk of the brown rice, which gives it its high dietary fibre, also makes it hard to cook. Brown rice can take twice as long to cook as white rice. Many people were unwilling to wait 40 minutes for a meal, no matter how healthy it might be.

Sunrice's response was to parboil the rice in what is effectively a giant pressure cooker before packaging and sale. The result is Sunbrown Quick, which looks and feels the same as 'raw' brown rice, but which takes the same time to cook as regular white rice. Sunbrown Quick has proved extremely popular with consumers, and has helped to promote the consumption of brown rice which had been failing to keep pace with the increased popularity of white varieties.

In another development, Sunlong Jasmine Fragrant Rice has been launched after a full decade of plant breeding and testing by Sunrice's experts. Contrary to popular belief the scent and flavour of such fragrant rices are not added at some stage during processing, but are entirely natural and are part of the rice itself. It takes years of research to grow a rice in any particular environment, and to ensure that it has precisely the right flavour, and combines this with high nutrition and ease of cooking. With Sunlong Jasmine, Sunrice has achieved this, and the market is responding enthusiastically to the new product.

PROMOTION

Sunrice's challenge in recent years has been to help change the perception of rice among the Australian public. As in most industrialised countries, the staple carbohydrate food in Australia had always been the potato. Rice had traditionally been seen as an accompaniment to various more or less exotic dishes (such as curry) and perhaps as an occasional dessert.

The challenge was a stiff one, since Australians are conservative people by nature, and have tended not to experiment with food.

Sunrice's opportunity came with the gradual

evolution of Australian society from the mid-1970s onward. The country was opened to immigration from Asia, effectively for the first time, and the cuisine available in Australian cities changed almost overnight. Thai, Malaysian, Indonesian, Japanese, Vietnamese and Korean restaurants appeared and suddenly became fashionable venues. In each case the cuisine featured rice as the main carbohydrate.

As Australia became more cosmopolitan, Australians developed a passion for Asian foods, and increasingly grew interested in cooking Asian dishes for themselves. This shift in tastes was followed, and encouraged, by the appearance in Australian supermarkets of frozen dishes ('TV dinners') as well as instant sauces, which either included rice or depended on the use of rice. This development promoted rice to a major new market of people who might only rarely eat out in restaurants, but who appreciated rice for its ease of preparation and for the way it blended easily and tastily with the new ranges of sauces and mixes.

At the same time, Australians developed a keen interest in healthy living. Australia became known as one of the healthiest and least polluted countries on earth, and health issues moved up most people's list of priorities.

Rice already enjoyed a wide reputation as a nutritious and healthy food, even among consumers who rarely ate it. This reputation is in fact richly deserved. Rice is extremely high in energy value, and is entirely free of fat or other constituents with negative connotations for consumers. It is perhaps



the only food on earth which can be eaten and digested with equal ease by a newborn baby and by a person in the frailest of extreme old age.

Sunrice's achievement has been to correctly identify these trends and to ensure that Australian rice is strongly associated with them. The success of this strategy is one reason why consumption of rice in Australia has doubled in less than a decade.

Sunrice's series of 'sculpture' advertisements launched in 1989 have proved to be among the most successful advertisements ever produced in Australia. The ads show sculptures of various foods - fish, bread, fruit and so on - moulded out from rice grains. The images are appealing in themselves, and are voiced-over with a series of

statements such as "There is one food that supplies protein to more people in the world than any other...and it's not a fish." The effect is to hold the viewer's attention while the message is brought home that rice is healthy, nutritious and tasty and has a proven track record among most of the world's population.

The advertisements have won every major advertising award worldwide. They are widely recognised by the Australian public, and are still running, with new versions introduced since 1989.

The latest version features a smiling and talking sun, also modelled in rice, which links the 'sun' and 'rice' elements of the brandname. The new slogan for Sunrice, launched in mid-1997, is Only one rice is Sunrice.

BRAND VALUES

Sunrice is quintessentially Australian. It is, like many other kinds of produce, a comparative newcomer in Australia which has risen to world ranking in terms of quality and - again like many other Australian foodstuffs - is increasingly sought after in the growing Asian marketplace.

The brand is associated with health, vigour and sunshine, like Australia itself, and Sunrice Australia recognises the absolute importance of maintaining that association by constant attention to quality, imaginative marketing and efficient delivery.

Things you didn't know about Sunrice

- Over 40 million retail packs of Australian rice are sold every year.
- Worldwide there are well over 60,000 varieties of rice.
- The 'father' of the Australian rice industry was in fact a Japanese grower called Joe Takasuka.
- Wild rice is not a rice at all, it's a grass.
- Rice is the staple diet for over 2.4 billion people, or about half the world's population.

