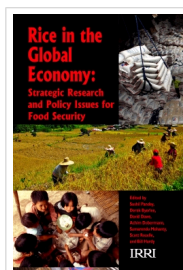


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Rice in the Global Economy: Strategic Research and Policy Issues for Food Security

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Sushil Pandey, Derek Byerlee, David Dawe, Achim Dobermann, Samarendu Mohanty, Scott Rozelle, and Bill Hardy

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Rice is the most important food crop of the developing world. It is the staple food of about half the world's population. Roughly 900 million of the world's poor depend on rice as producers or as consumers. On average, rice accounts for nearly half of the food expenses of poor people and a fifth of their total household expenses. It is well established that the rapid productivity growth of rice resulting from the use of improved varieties, fertilizers, and irrigation (popularly known as the Green Revolution) increased production and led to a long-term decline in rice prices. This has been the major factor helping to reduce poverty in Asia over the past several decades.

Despite the past achievements, rice productivity growth will remain essential in the future for several important reasons. Rice yield growth has slowed considerably in recent years and has failed to keep up with population growth, leading to shortages and higher prices that have adversely affected the poor. This was demonstrated by the food crisis and the rice price spike experienced in 2008. Clearly, food security remains somewhat tenuous despite the rapid economic growth experienced in many parts of the world.

The ongoing changes in the economy, resource competition from other sectors, environmental changes, increasing commercialization of rice farming, and the importance of international trade mean that the way rice will be produced in the future will be substantially different. Some traditional rice-growing areas may lose their comparative advantage while others may become new growth centers for rice. Changes will also occur in gender roles in rice farming and demographic profiles of rice farmers as the nonfarm sector expands in the course of economic growth. These changes will have far-reaching implications for crop production and for social organization of the farm household economy. Clearly, there is a need to develop a new vision for future rice farming given these global trends and likely scenarios. This vision is needed to strategically position investments in rice research, technology delivery, and the design of policy reforms.

This volume attempts to provide such a vision for the future of rice farming. We considered it an opportune time to feature scholarly contributions from experts in the field to commemorate the 50th anniversary of IRRI's founding. Contributions in this volume cover various aspects of the global rice economy; new developments in rice production technologies and postharvest management; environmental issues; institutional innovations in technology delivery, rice marketing, and trade policies; and broader R&D policy issues.

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