Australia has grown rice for more than 100 years and exports rice to more than 60 countries with major export destinations including the Middle East, Japan and the Oceania region. Australia’s rice exports were valued at $245 million in 2016–17.

Almost all rice production in Australia occurs under irrigation in the NSW Murray and Murrumbidgee regions of the southern Murray–Darling Basin. Important rice-growing centres include Leeton, Griffith, Deniliquin and Coleambally. In NSW irrigation areas, rice can only be grown on approved heavy clay soils and is regulated by the rice water use policies of the irrigation corporations—Murrumbidgee Irrigation Limited, Murray Irrigation Limited and Coleambally Irrigation Cooperative Limited. Work is underway to establish a Northern Australia rice industry.

Building a stronger rice industry

The Australian Government is driving a more profitable, resilient and sustainable rice sector by:

- providing dollar-for-dollar matching funds of $1.1 million in 2016–17, alongside the research and development (R&D) funding already invested by the rice sector through levies, for R&D initiatives to advance the rice industry
- funding the Rural R&D for Profit program for a range of innovative projects to improve productivity and profitability. For example, $4 million to improve irrigation practices across the rice, dairy, cotton and sugar industries, leading to increases in yield and reduced costs and water use
- providing $4 million over four years (2017 – 2020) to fund research, development and extension projects to assist in establishing and increasing the scale of a Northern Australia rice industry. The projects will examine varietal breeding and selection, pests and disease, agronomy, grower adoption and post-harvest handling
- improving farmer access to seasonal workers by reducing the tax rate to 15% for those on working holidays
- improving Australian rice yields are the highest in the world at around 10 tonnes per hectare. Australian rice growers have improved their water efficiency over the past 20 years to use 50% less water per kilogram of rice than the global average.
- Most Australian rice farms are mixed farms with four or more individual enterprises, across irrigated crops, dryland crops and livestock.
- Australian rice production varies significantly from year to year, largely as a result of changes in the availability of irrigation water. Over the past five years, the area planted to rice has been as large as 113,000 hectares and as small as 27,000 hectares.
- 80% of rice produced in Australia is medium grain Japonica varieties—most suited to our climate. The remainder includes Indica, Amaroo, Millin, Langi and Koshihikari varieties—the latter produced specifically for the Japanese market.
• introducing new country of origin labelling laws making it easier for consumers to see how much of their food is Australian made, grown or produced
• introducing legislation to establish an 'effects test' in national competition law to protect small businesses from the impact of anti-competitive conduct by large, counter party businesses.

Rice area and price indicator, Australia, 1988–89 to 2015–16

Note: The price indicator is the gross unit value of production.
Source: ABARES 2017, Rice farms in the Murray-Darling Basin, Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences, Canberra

Average farm cash income, rice farms, Murray-Darling Basin, 2006–07 to 2015–16

Source: ABARES Murray–Darling Basin Irrigation Survey