



‘Green’ the new color of rice as the world’s most important food crop gets sustainability targets

UNEP launches global rice initiative

Nairobi/Manila, 1 December 2011 -- Rice consumers worldwide can now look forward to eating “green” rice with the launch of an initiative that will set environmentally sustainable and socially responsible rice production management standards.

The Sustainable Rice Platform, an initiative of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and founding members Louis Dreyfus Commodities and Kellogg Company, will elevate rice production to a new level by helping farmers – whether subsistence or market-focused – boost their rice production, keep the environment healthy, facilitate safer working conditions, and generate higher incomes to address poverty and improve food security.

At the inaugural meeting of the Sustainable Rice Platform held at IRRI’s Headquarters in the Philippines this week, government representatives from Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar, many international and Asia-based companies and non-government organizations participated, demonstrating their support and interest in contributing to the initiative.

“There are many different sustainable technologies and practices for rice – the world’s most important food crop that feeds half the planet,” said James Lomax, from UNEP, which initiated the Sustainable Rice Platform.

“The challenge is to find a mechanism for scaling up these practices and their delivery in many countries,” said Mr. Lomax. “The Sustainable Rice Platform provides opportunities for promoting resource use efficiency and sustainable trade flows throughout the value chain of the global rice sector and deliver real results to the lives of rice farmers.”

The Sustainable Rice Platform will draw relevant lessons from established commodity initiatives that promote sustainability, such as for sugarcane, cotton, and coffee, and apply them to rice. It will set sustainability targets, develop and promote regional and global standards of best practices for rice production, and support rice farmers to adopt these practices. It will also identify criteria to assess how well the sustainability targets are being met and if farmers are implementing the practices.

“For example, we will harness our know-how to set standards to better manage insect pests in rice to reduce the unsafe and ineffective use of pesticides, which can damage the environment and the health of farmers,” said Bas Bouman, who will lead the work at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) – one of the project partners.

“We can also develop and promote the use of specialized field calculators to determine the environmental footprint of water, carbon, greenhouse gas emissions, or chemical use,” he added.

Rice presents a unique challenge for any quality control system because it is mostly grown by hundreds of thousands of poor farmers who have only very small farms of less than one hectare each. Moreover, 90 percent of rice is grown in developing countries in Asia where access to knowledge and support is limited.

National government agricultural departments will explore and test management practices to make them nationally relevant and to promote them to rice farmers. Non-government organizations and companies will assist to develop the sustainability criteria to help safeguard or improve environmental health.

Rice farmers, production, processing, or trade organizations and businesses, will use the Sustainable Rice Platform to secure a sustainable rice system and crucially explore incentive mechanisms for farmers to grow rice more sustainably.

“Rice is an extremely important food crop, both for Kellogg Company and the world. We are therefore delighted to support UNEP in the mass adoption of better and more sustainable rice-growing practices to improve the world’s food supply and the lives of the farmers and the communities who produce it,” Chief Sustainability Officer at Kellogg Company, Diane B. Holdorf.

“In addition to financial support,” she added. “We intend to fast track sustainable techniques into our contract growing programs as soon as 2012. We'll share the results with the Sustainable Rice Platform and use them to inform our global rice policies and direction.”

Fast facts

- The Sustainable Rice Platform will set management standards for rice production that will ensure it is grown in an environmentally-sustainable and socially-responsible way;
- Poverty will reduce as farmers stand to gain by higher incomes through reduced input costs, higher production, and/or getting a premium on their rice;
- Consumers and processors purchasing rice grown on the Sustainable Rice Platform will be assured it is good for the environment and farmer welfare.

Contacts

Moira O'Brien-Malone, Head, DTIE Communications, UNEP Paris, tel: + 33 1 44 37 76 12, mob: +33 6 82 26 93 73, moira.obrien-malone@unep.org

About UNEP

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the voice for the environment in the UN system. Established in 1972, UNEP's mission is to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations. UNEP is an advocate, educator, catalyst and facilitator promoting the wise use of the planet's natural assets for sustainable development. It works with many partners, UN entities, international organizations, national governments, non-governmental organizations, business, industry, the media and civil society. UNEP's work involves providing support for: environmental assessment and reporting; legal and institutional strengthening and environmental policy development; sustainable use and management of natural resources; integration of economic development and environmental protection; and promoting public participation in environmental management.

IRRI, or the International Rice Research Institute, is a non-profit independent research and training organization. IRRI is part of the [Consultative Group on International Agriculture](#) (CGIAR). IRRI's mission is to reduce poverty and hunger, improve the health of rice farmers and consumers, and ensure

environmental sustainability through collaborative research, partnerships, and the strengthening of national agricultural research and extension systems. For more information please go to www.irri.org.