

CALIFORNIA RICE

Production Practices

OVERVIEW | The California rice industry operates under some of the most stringent agricultural regulations in the country and reinforces them with industrywide practices that protect the quality and food safety of the rice we deliver to our customers.

The following summary outlines the principal regulatory programs and industry standards that govern how California rice is grown, treated, harvested, dried, and stored.

PESTICIDE PRACTICES

Every pesticide used on California rice must be registered with the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) in addition to its federal U.S. EPA registration. DPR conducts its own independent evaluation and routinely imposes restrictions that are tighter than the federal baseline, including prohibiting or limiting uses that EPA allows elsewhere.¹ Roughly 4 active ingredients are further classified as “restricted materials,” requiring a permit from the County Agricultural Commissioner before each application. All applications must be reported to the Commissioner, who monitors compliance.²

Pest control in rice is concentrated early in the growing season. This timing makes treatment more effective, keeps environmental impacts low, and allows ample time for materials to break down well before harvest.

WATER QUALITY

The California rice industry has monitored surface and groundwater quality associated with rice fields for more than three decades, and over that period has sharply reduced its impact on surface water. Ongoing monitoring shows no impact on groundwater and consistently high surface water quality. Each year the industry monitors water quality for multiple months at four to seven sites that capture approximately 85% of all rice field discharges, and reports the results to the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board.³ This monitoring is conducted under the Board’s Waste Discharge Requirements General Order for Sacramento Valley Rice Growers (Order R5-2014-0032-03), which the Board uses to confirm compliance and evaluate the industry’s management practices.⁴

AIR QUALITY

The industry has nearly eliminated the open-field burning of rice straw under California's Connelly-Areias-Chandler Rice Straw Burning Reduction Act of 1991, which phased burning down to disease-control fields only.⁵ The limited burning that remains is permitted solely for fields affected by plant disease, and only when local air districts — drawing on an industry-supported network of weather stations — determine that atmospheric conditions are suitable. In place of burning, growers now reflood their fields after harvest, creating wetland habitat for the millions of ducks and geese that migrate to the Sacramento Valley each fall.⁶

SEED CERTIFICATION

Rice seed planted in California is carefully regulated. Varieties are approved through an industry standards process to ensure that incompatible varieties are not commingled, and all certified seed is evaluated for varietal and physical purity and for the absence of pests before planting. Certification is administered by the California Crop Improvement Association, an independent third party that verifies seed cleanliness and identity against recognized national (AOSCA/AOSA) standards.⁷

DESIGNATED DRYING AND STORAGE

California rice is dried and stored in facilities designated specifically for rice. These facilities do not handle other crops such as wheat, barley, or rye, which protects rice from commingling and cross-contamination. Handling is governed by the California Warehouse Association's Standard Operating Procedures — industrywide practices reviewed and adopted annually by dryers, mills, and warehouses that cover quality and grades, equipment cleanliness, contamination prevention, and quality settlements.⁸

CROP ROTATION AND FOOD ALLERGENS

California rice is grown on heavy clay soils suited to flooded production, and fields are typically planted to rice year after year rather than rotated to other crops. Because wheat, barley, and rye are not grown in rotation on these fields, there is no pathway for gluten-containing grains to enter the rice supply through crop rotation.

REFERENCES

1. California Department of Pesticide Regulation, *A Guide to Pesticide Regulation in California*; pesticide registration under Food & Agricultural Code §12811. <https://www.cdpr.ca.gov/laws-and-regulations/>
2. California Department of Pesticide Regulation, Restricted Materials and County Agricultural Commissioner permitting and enforcement. <https://www.cdpr.ca.gov/enforcement/>
3. California Rice Commission, Water Quality program overview. <https://calrice.org/industry/water-quality/>
4. Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, Waste Discharge Requirements General Order for Sacramento Valley Rice Growers, Order R5-2014-0032-03. https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/rwqcb5/water_issues/irrigated_lands/regulatory_information/rice_growers_sacvalley_wdrs/
5. Connelly-Areias-Chandler Rice Straw Burning Reduction Act of 1991, California Health & Safety Code §41865. https://www.countyofglenn.net/sites/default/files/Air_Pollution_Control_District/CARSRA%20%20HSC%2041865.pdf
6. California Rice Commission, post-harvest field flooding and Pacific Flyway waterfowl habitat. <https://www.calrice.org/conservation/>
7. California Crop Improvement Association, Rice Crop Standards and Rice Seed Quality Assurance Program. <https://ccia.ucdavis.edu/standards/crop-standards/rice-crop-standards>
8. California Warehouse Association, Standard Operating Procedures (annually reviewed). <https://calwarehouse.com/sop/>



California Rice
It's in our Nature

