

The imminent crisis in rice

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A GLOBAL rice-supply crisis is unfolding, and the Philippines, today the world's top rice importer, will be no comfort zone.

In 2006, every Filipino consumed 118.7 kilos or 2.4 sacks of rice a year. That amounts to a daily per capita rice consumption of 325.21 grams per citizen. The Philippines produces about 90 percent of the rice it needs but also today needs to import up to 2.1 million metric tons, to be able to maintain its two-month inventory. Over the last three months, that inventory has thinned by 20 percent.

Vast hectares planted to rice and corn have failed to lift this semi-feudal nation's status from rice importer to exporter. In 2006, then Agriculture Secretary Domingo Panganiban told Reuters: "Except for a brief period in the seventies, the last time this nation produced enough rice to feed itself was in 1903, the year the Wright brothers (Wilbur and Orville) invented the airplane."

The alarm bells have been sounded: The world's rice stocks have dipped to their lowest level in 25 years. The most rosy estimates say the global rice supply could slide to 70 million tons, less than half the 150 million-ton inventory in the year 2000.

Conversely, rice prices have surged to their highest levels in 20 years, trading at \$500 to over \$700 per ton in recent months. In 2001, the price was slightly above \$300 per metric ton only.

Only last January, the Philippines bought rice at only \$474.40 per ton, and in two months, the price has surged by 43 percent.

Various reasons have been blamed for the sharp slide in supply: erratic weather; natural disasters; soaring fuel and transport costs; supply hoarding and smuggling; conversion of agricultural lands to cash crops, biofuel production, and other commercial purposes, etcetera.

But from country to country feeding on the staple grain, the context remains the same: galloping population growth rate has unduly stepped up the demand for rice, even as production has remained low or stagnant.

Download the following documents:

Rice and corn production and consumption statistics, 1990-2006:

http://pcij.org/blog/wp-docs/Rice_a...

Comparative rice price and freight costs:

<http://pcij.org/blog/wp-docs/Compar...>

Because of the supply crisis, in a series the world's major rice producers have decided to either ban (China and Thailand) or restrict exports (Vietnam, India, Egypt), further reducing the volume that could pass around importing countries.

Just three months gone in 2008, the figures seem alarming indeed. The global rice demand is

estimated at 423 million tons, or more than the current season's record harvest of 420 million tons, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Rising prices of rice, corn, wheat, soya bean and other crops will likely linger on in the next two to three years, it warned.

It must be stressed that only seven percent of the world's total rice production is exported abroad, and the bulk consumed by the teeming populations of rice-producing nations. Asia's 2.5-billion people mostly depend on the cheap rice for sustenance.

To its credit, the Philippine government has not wasted time to prepare for the imminent crisis.

Last week, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo gave the agriculture department authority to import up to 2.1 million metric tons, and an additional budget of P2.85 billion to boost rice and corn production.

Too, Mrs Arroyo herself contacted Vietnam's Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung to ask Ho Chi Minh to sell 1.5 million tons of rice to Manila, in a government to government deal. Vietnam agreed to supply just a million, including 700,000 tons covered in earlier contracts. The Philippines has also ordered 876,700 tons of rice in the international market.

A year ago, the Philippines imported 1.8 million tons of rice, or 16 percent of its requirements. This year, it hopes to buy at least 1.6 million tons, on top of a record production target of 17.33 million tons to raise self-sufficiency to 92 percent.

Still and all, the law of supply and demand, a cruel, unbending equation, is fast catching up with the Philippines, on account of its fast-rising population.

Local rice production over the last 16 years has grown from 6.09 million tons in 1990 to 10.02 million tons in 2006, or about 2.45 percent per year on average. This growth has been rendered meaningless, however, by the unbridled increase in the number of Filipinos — from 60.7 million in 1990 to 88 million in 2006. The national population is estimated to reach 94.03 million by 2010.

These days, other than the acute, noisy emergencies in conflict-torn areas of the world, the rice supply shortfall occupies many world leaders. The United Nations no less has called attention to a new war in the offing: against hunger and food inflation.

The World Food Programme (WFP), the UN unit in charge of stamping out hunger in the globe, has rushed to hold crisis meetings "to decide what aid to halt if new donations do not arrive in the short term," The Financial Times reported last week.

The London-based "newspaper of the world capitalist order" quoted Josette Sheeran, WFP executive director, as saying that the WFP "would look at 'cutting the food rations or even the number of people reached' if donors did not provide more money."

"Our ability to reach people is going down just as the needs go up," Sheeran said, adding that "the agency's budget requirements were rising by several million dollars a week because of climbing food prices."

Developing countries like Indonesia, Yemen and Mexico where even middle-income city dwellers are being "priced out of the food market" now constitute the "new area of hunger," FT quoted Sheeran as saying. "Situations that were previously not urgent — they are now."

Urgent? Now? Should Filipinos worry that rice could soon recede from their dining tables?

Long rice lines, rice rationing, or even rice riots are not lodged in the memory of many young Pinoys.

In recent history, the Philippines rationed rice twice. In 1991, supply nearly ran out because Fidel V. Ramos did not import at all. In the '70s, amid an oil crisis in the Middle East, Ferdinand E. Marcos restricted the purchase of rice to just a few kilos per family, and government resorted to selling rice mixed with corn.

Thus far, the most that the agriculture department has proposed is for fastfood chains to help stem wastage by offering customers the option to buy half-rice orders, apart from the standard cup servings.

Various saving tips have been offered to avoid wasting extra rice — turn it into fried rice, rice salad, rice soup, rice cake or pudding, rice casserole, rice pasta, rice crispies, or rice porridge.

Quick Facts About Rice

- The edible rice grain is actually the seed of a rice plant (semiaquatic annual grass).
- Every rice grain is harvested in its hull (husk), a hard and inedible outermost layer. Just beneath the hull is the kernel.
- When the kernels undergo a refining process, they will be stripped from their husk, bran and germ to gain the final polished and white grains (endosperm).
- Milling is the process to remove the hull and bran.
- Rice is basically categorized into long, medium or short grain.
- The amount of amylose, a starch present in rice will determine how sticky and fluffy the rice grains will turn out after being cooked.
- Long grain rice is four to five times as long as the width. It is slender and whitish. When long grain rice is cooked, grains remain separate and fluffy. A good choice for main dish, side dish or salad recipes.
- Medium grain rice means grain fits just in between the long and short grains. It is about two or three times as long as the width. Cooked grains are more moist and softer than the long grains. Perfect for dessert, casserole, bread and stir-fry recipes.
- Short grain rice is almost round and plump. Cooked grains tend to stay moist and gummy (sticking to each other). Great for sushi, stir-fry recipes and puddings. Has the highest amylose content among the three types of grains.
Though vitamins and minerals can be added to enrich white (refined) rice to a certain extent, unfortunately there is no way to replace the dietary fiber that is lost during the refining process.
- Rice is so versatile that it can go really well with any dish like sambal, curry, sweet and sour, vegetables, stew and soup.
- It is also popular in numerous Asian dishes to cook rice with coconut milk, garlic, coriander leaves, parsley, ginger, pandan leaves (screwpine leaves) to make plain rice smell very fragrant.

- The quality of the rice grains, the kind of water used and the cooking method determines the quality of cooked rice.
- Cooked rice breeds the pathogenic organism *Bacillus cereus* and can cause food poisoning when eaten. Always keep cooked rice in the fridge for not more than 2 days.

Source: <http://www.tipsofallsorts.com/rice.html>

The Different Types Of Rice

Brown rice

Also known as cargo rice. Hulls are removed and much of the nutrients are retained. The bran layer colors the rice beige when cooked. It is a good source of thiamine, niacin, riboflavin, iron, and calcium. It also contains protein and small amounts of fats. Soak brown rice one day earlier before getting it cooked increases the rice's nutritional value. Soaking stimulates the early stages of germination, when a tiny sprout, less than a millimeter tall grows from the rice grain. According to Dr. Hiroshi Kayahara, a professor of bioscience and biotechnology at Shinshu University in Nagano, Japan, a new sprout activates dormant enzymes in the brown rice all at once to supply the best nutrition to the growing sprout, in addition sprouted rice contains more fiber, vitamins and minerals than non-germinated rice. He and other Japanese researchers soaked the brown rice in warm water for 22 hours to make it sprout. He noted that soaked brown rice is easier to cook because the hard outer husk has been softened and tastes sweeter.

Source : "Soaking brown rice enriches nutritional value" Reuters Health December 18, 2000

White rice

Hull and bran are both removed. Very lacking in nutrients. Cooks faster.

Parboiled rice

Rice gets steamed under pressure prior to the removal of the hull and bran layers. Thus most of the nutrients are retained.

Arborio rice

Also commonly known as risotto rice in Italian cooking. Grains are short and have a sticky texture when cooked.

Basmati

Originally from the foothills of Himalayas, this long grain rice has a fine surface with a nutty flavor. Because of the natural subtle perfume, basmati rice has also been called the "Prince of rice." A favorite with curries, biryani and pulao. Strands of saffron are added to the cooking water to give rice that golden color and distinctive flavor. Note: Saffron, also called "King of spices" is pretty expensive so turmeric or yellow coloring is used instead, but they will not be able to give the saffron flavor.

Black rice

A medium-grain unmilled rice with a black bran. The rice becomes deep-dark purple color after

cooking. It has a nutty flavor with a whole grain texture.

Glutinous rice

Also known as sweet rice. It is sticky and commonly used to make rice dumplings, sweets and others.

Jasmine rice

Also widely known as Thai fragrant rice. Cooked grains give off a delicate jasmine scent.

Paella

A Spanish dish of saffron-flavored rice combined with a variety of meats and shellfish, along with tomatoes, artichoke hearts, garlic, onions and peas. It is named after a pan called paella which has 2 handles. This pan is wide and shallow. Comes in various sizes from 10 to 52 inches in diameter. The pan is used to cook and serve the dish.

Red rice

A long-grain unmilled rice with a red bran grown in India. Red rice is also referred to as rice cooked with tomato paste, onion and herbs. Carmargue red rice is an unmilled short-grain rice from Carmargue in France with a brownish-red color and a nutty flavor.

Wild rice

Also known as Indian rice. Wild rice comes from the seed of an aquatic grass. It has a higher protein and B vitamins content than refined rice. It has a nutty flavor and turns fluffy when cooked. Clean thoroughly before cooking.

Wild pecan rice/pecan rice

A hybrid that has a chewy and nutty flavor. Contains neither wild rice nor pecans. Carries a cooked fragrance similar to popcorn. Some bran is present because wild pecan rice is only partially milled.

Instant rice

Rice that is either fully or partially cooked before being dehydrated and then packed. Fast to cook but not good to eat.

P.S.

* From <http://www.pcij.org/blog/?p=2256#comments> Circulated on T'Bak list.