

European Rice.

Good for you,
great for the environment.



The future of sustainable European rice between innovative agronomic practices, efficient water management and biodiversity protection

Lisbon, 15 November 2023 - The 3rd European Rice Congress was held this morning in Lisbon, an initiative that is part of the **Sustainable EU Rice - Don't Think Twice** project to promote the japonica type grown in Europe. The meeting addressed the issues of **agronomic and environmental sustainability of rice cultivation** and in particular the **efficient management of water resources** in the light of the consequences of climate change.

Marco Romani, head of the Department of Agronomy and Crop Protection at the Rice Research Centre, kicked off the proceedings by illustrating the agronomic practices and cultivation techniques favoured for the **sustainable use of water resources** and the **mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions**.

Contrary to what most people believe, **rice farming does** not waste water because the complex system of rice paddies allows water from the Alps to be temporarily retained and later returned to the rivers, completing its natural cycle. This has not prevented rice growers, on the path to sustainability, from striving to minimise the use of water resources. One of the cultivation techniques described by Dr Romani that allows efficient water management is **winter submergence**. This agronomic practice, which consists of submerging plots of land at the end of the growing season for a period from autumn-winter until the beginning of the following spring, allows the groundwater level to be recharged in a season when water is abundant because it is not needed for other crops, such as maize or soya. Another positive effect of winter submergence is on the degradation of crop residues, which on the one hand releases valuable crop nutrients into the soil and on the other reduces methane emissions into the atmosphere. The **AWD (Alternate Wetting and Drying) practice** of alternating submerging and drying in the paddy field has also proven to be a successful strategy to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, as it contributes to a rapid degradation of the straw.

During her speech, **Corrine Romero**, Secretary General of the Syndicat des Riziculteurs de France et Filière, highlighted the fundamental role of rice cultivation in the **protection of animal and plant biodiversity**, with specific reference to the wealth of flora and fauna present in the Camargue area, where rice paddies are able to preserve the wetland habitat and act as a feeding and breeding ground, hosting a multitude of animal species, including amphibians, insects and birds.

Pedro Monteiro, President of Casa do Arroz, elaborated on the **uniqueness of the Portuguese japonica rice varietal heritage**, in particular the **Carolino**, whose cultivation area covers some **30,000 hectares** distributed in the areas close to Portugal's three most important rivers: Mondego, Tejo and Sado. The Portuguese, called 'the Asians of Europe', hold the record for the highest annual per capita consumption in the EU, with 200,000 tonnes of white rice consumed.

The Congress was followed by a press conference during which **Marco Romani**, **Pedro Monteiro** and **Corrine Romero** presented to the Portuguese media the objectives of the project they are promoting. **Sustainable EU Rice - Don't Think Twice** is a three-year programme financed with the support of the European Union whose ambition is to **spread knowledge about rice production** and the **uses of EU-grown rice in cooking**, and to strengthen **awareness of the value of rice-growing in terms of sustainability and the protection of natural resources**.

The morning ended with a cooking show where the **versatility of European rice was highlighted in the preparation of three different recipes** representing the target countries: Arborio risotto with radicchio, provolone cheese and crispy bacon for Italy, Carolino rice with grouper and basil mousse for Portugal, and riz rouge with black garlic and marinated courgettes for France.

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