

Texas Rice Industry expresses concern over rice imports as another blow to survival

EAGLE LAKE, Texas (April 4, 2013) – Rice farmers expressed deep concern about plans by American Rice, Inc., the largest buyer of Texas rice, to import rice from Vietnam to replace lost supplies from the lower Colorado River basin resulting from the cutoff of irrigation water.

“Bringing in rice from abroad to replace our Texas production is a body blow to our industry,” said Joe Crane of BU Growers, which provides rice seed, drying and storage. “It hits the farmers, the businesses that rely on them, our state’s competitiveness, and our national trade deficit.”

The replacement of Texas rice with 10,000 tons of Vietnamese rice was announced by ARI in March shortly after the Lower Colorado River Authority said it was cutting off irrigation water for rice farmers for the 2nd year in a row. That emergency cutoff, due to unprecedented drought, could become a permanent regime if a legislative bill in the Senate Natural Resources Committee ultimately becomes law.

“The senate bill would be another nail in the coffin,” said Ronald Gertson, chairman of the Colorado Water Issues Committee, which represents rice farmers in the lower Colorado River basin. “We’re already struggling to survive, hoping our local economies and communities can get through another tough year.”

A major concern of Texas farmers is whether ARI, which is based in Freeport, Texas, will permanently replace their rice with Vietnamese supplies – or come back to them when production resumes. Rice production in Colorado, Wharton and Matagorda counties accounts for 40% of Texas production.

Rice producers warn that the imports may worsen the US trade deficit, which widened more than 16% to \$44.4 billion in January from \$38.1 billion in December.

“We are some of the most efficient rice farmers in the world and have invested millions of dollars in our area to conserve water,” said Paul Sliva, a rice farmer and Chairman of the Matagorda County Farmers Advisory Committee. “We’re convinced that the food we produce will be needed by fast-growing populations around the world.”

The Colorado Water Issues Committee (<http://www.texasricefarming.org/CWIC/index.html>) aims to facilitate the availability of Colorado River water supplies for rice production in the four major irrigation operations on the Colorado River.

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