

# Rice Farmers Hear About Farm Bill, New Varieties

**CROWLEY, LA.**  
U.S. Rep. Charles Boustany said that the upcoming effort to pass a new farm bill will be a difficult struggle that threatens to divide commodity groups.

The congressman spoke at an LSU AgCenter rice meeting, one of several meetings being held across the state.

Boustany said the corn lobby has tried to advance provisions that would not be in the interest of rice farmers.

“We’ve got to do everything we can to keep ag groups together,” he said.

He said U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow of Michigan, Senate Agriculture Committee chairwoman, is running for re-election, so it’s in her political interest to get a farm bill passed.

The struggle to balance the federal budget should not rely on agriculture spending, Boustany said. “We cannot solve our deficit and debt problems on the backs of our U.S. farmers.”

The LSU AgCenter held meetings for rice farmers in Welsh, Ville Platte, Crowley and Kaplan the first week of January. Another meeting is scheduled for Wednesday (Jan. 11) in Bunkie, and the final one is scheduled in Rayville on Jan. 26.

LSU AgCenter rice breeder and regional director Steve Linscombe told farmers that planting their rice crop early last year boosted yields.

Linscombe conducts a study every year to compare yields of rice planted at different dates. In 2011, his earliest rice was planted Feb. 24 at the LSU AgCenter Rice Research Station in Crowley, and it had the highest yields, exceeding 10,000 pounds an acre.

“This is the most dramatic yield data I’ve seen in the 25 years I’ve been doing this date-of-planting study,” he said.

He urged farmers to get their crop planted by the end of March to get the best yields.

The LSU AgCenter has moved its recommended initial planting date to March 10.

A new rice variety released by the AgCenter this year is named Mermentau, Linscombe said. It is a long-grain, non-Clearfield variety that he said will have grain quality comparable to Cheniere and Cocodrie and with a higher yield.

The new Della-2 aromatic variety will have typical long-grain texture when cooked and create a stronger aroma than the Della or Delrose varieties, he said.

The amount of Jazzman and Jazzman 2 would be higher if the seed matched demand, he added. “If we had the seed available, we’d probably be knocking on 25,000 acres.”

Last year’s heat affected the rice crop’s reproductive functioning, said LSU AgCenter rice specialist Johnny Saichuk. The unusual heat on later-planted rice caused considerable sterility in numerous fields, a condition that was evident from the empty panicles.

“That was probably my No. 1 call,” he said. But rice planted early last year didn’t suffer as much from the heat.

LSU AgCenter agricultural economist Kurt Guidry advised farmers that fuel and fertilizer prices probably will be higher this year than in 2011. But he said prices for their crop could increase as well.

He said exports of U.S. rice have declined because of uncertainty.

Rice prices in 2012 are projected to reach \$15 per hundredweight, LSU AgCenter economist Mike Salassi.

Using Newpath and Ricebeaux herbicides has been shown to boost yields, said LSU AgCenter weed scientist Eric Webster. “You’re spending more money up front, but you are getting more money because your yields are higher.”

A study conducted last year indicated that the combination of the herbicide Permit Plus and the insecticide malathion can stunt a crop, delaying maturity and delay heading, Webster said.



**U.S. Rep. Charles Boustany, of Lafayette, talks with farmers in Crowley, La., about the upcoming farm bill negotiations during the LSU AgCenter meeting for rice growers in Acadia Parish on Jan. 5. Boustany stressed the importance of agriculture groups working together in the ongoing debate.**

Photo by Bruce Schultz

Bacterial panicle blight appears to be affected by nitrogen rates, said LSU AgCenter plant pathologist Don Groth. “The more nitrogen you have, the more disease pressure you will have.”

A soil test could help farmers determine the correct amount of nitrogen required by their crop, he said. Groth also said that LSU AgCenter agronomist Dustin Harrell has found that farmers often use excessive amounts of nitrogen.

Many farmers are still applying fungicides too late, Groth said, and application is most effective when the rice begins to head.

Propiconazole fungicide used against the disease cercospera should be applied early, he said. “The later you plant the rice, the earlier you need to put out propiconazole.”

Harrell said he conducted a soil test last year on a field with a phosphorous deficiency and obtained striking results with 60 pounds per acre of triple super phosphate. He said the optimum amount for a field that would be grown with a second crop would be 90 pounds per acre, and the test indicated the best results came with application before a permanent flood.

Harrell also advised farmers that their crop may not be able to absorb zinc if their soil is too alkaline.

LSU AgCenter entomologist Natalie Hummel said the Mexican rice borer was found late last year about 10 miles south of Welsh in a pheromone trap maintained by the state Department of Agriculture and Forestry.

The traps detect the presence of an insect but do not act as attractants to a field, Hummel said.

She also said the LSU AgCenter has assisted the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry in filing an application with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for approval to use Dermacor as a seed treatment for water-seeded rice.



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