

History of Arkansas Rice

Arkansas ranks first among rice-producing states, accounting for more than 40 percent of U.S. rice production -- primarily long and medium grain varieties. Rice production is concentrated in the eastern half of the state, stretching from the Louisiana to the Missouri borders. Arkansas rice is known for its versatility and can be used in a wide variety of cuisines. It is enjoyed in the U.S. and throughout the world.

In the 1800s, growers in the Arkansas Delta needed a dependable, profitable crop, and rice became a contender almost by accident, when William H. Fuller ventured south to Louisiana in August of 1896 on a hunting trip. It was there he first saw rice growing, which ultimately led to the development of a leading agricultural industry for the state. Fuller, along with his brother-in-law John Morris and John's wife Emma, are generally credited with founding the Arkansas rice industry. By 1910, rice production, research and milling sites were established in the state.

Today, rice is grown in 40 counties across Arkansas, primarily in the eastern region of the state but also in the Ouachita and Red River Valleys located in the west and southwest regions. In 2021, Arkansas rice producers harvested over one million acres and hit an average yield state record of 169.6 bushels/acre; in 1904, Fuller harvested an average of 74.6 bushels/acre. With that increase in rice production, sustainability is certainly not lost on producers. Arkansas rice farmers are committed to protect and preserve the natural state by producing more rice while using less land, energy, and water than they did years ago. Working rice fields also provide critical wildlife habitat for many species of birds, mammals, and reptiles. It is no coincidence that Stuttgart, Arkansas has the reputation of being named the rice capital of Arkansas as well as the duck capital of the world; rice fields and wildlife have a long-standing relationship that farmers fight to maintain.

With 96% of farms being family owned and operated across the state, consuming Arkansas-grown rice is supporting our neighbors who continually produce quality food and supplies.

References: Arkansasrice.org & UADA website & Arkansas Farm Bureau Federation