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**The Texas Rice Industry Coalition
for the Environment (R.I.C.E.):
Main Points from Six Focus Groups**

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The Texas Rice Industry Coalition for the Environment (R.I.C.E.):
Main Points from Six Focus Groups

by

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Preface

This paper is a summary of several focus group interviews which occurred during June, 1995. The authors collaborated with Laurence Armour and L.G. Raun, Jr., leaders of the Texas R.I.C.E. group, to assess appropriate actions for enforcing the viability and scope of outreach for Texas R.I.C.E.

Acknowledgments

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**The Texas Rice Industry Coalition for the Environment (R.I.C.E.):
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Abstract

The Texas Rice Industry Coalition for the Environment (R.I.C.E.) was formed in February, 1995. Their stated mission is to build a coalition of interests to foster and strengthen relationships between the rice industry and the natural resources of our rice-producing area in Texas. In June, 1995, a series of six focus groups was conducted. These round table discussions involved two groups of producers (from the East Side and West Side of Houston), two groups of environmentalists in the Houston area, and two groups of non-farming Houstonians (adults and children). These focus groups were structured to elicit opinions from various viewpoints concerning the opportunities, challenges, and priorities of Texas R.I.C.E.

The goal of the two producers focus groups conducted on the East Side and the West Side of Houston was to determine whether Texas R.I.C.E.'s activities were widely known and to ascertain producers' viewpoints on the coalition's priorities. Producers were agreed on their key concerns regarding compliance with environmental policy — they face a cost-price squeeze and therefore one-size-fits-all regulations are particularly burdensome. Water quality and quantity were most often mentioned as key factors in the continued viability of the rice industry in Texas. Producers recognize the natural synergy between rice production and waterfowl habitat enhancement, yet they are concerned because waterfowl habitat places increased demands on scarce water. Rice producers are concerned about the public being largely ignorant and uninterested in the environmental benefits of rice production, and they endorsed two-way education between rice producers and environmentalists. No clear consensus emerged in the focus group discussions about the role for Texas R.I.C.E. in lobbying. Some rice producers see education and lobbying as conflicting activities and would prefer for Texas R.I.C.E. to focus on education. Others were positive about collaborative opportunities between rice producers' lobbyists and environmental interest groups' lobbyists.

The two environmental focus groups were a mix of bird-watchers, hunters, hikers and conservationists. These environmentalists had a good idea of where rice is grown in Texas and knew that rice production is declining in the state. Their major concerns about the environmental effects from rice production were water usage and water quality, agri-chemical runoff, food and habitat for migratory birds, and trade-offs concerning wetlands. In sum, they appreciated that rice production makes a positive contribution to waterfowl habitat. They were concerned that lost Texas rice acreage will be replaced with urban land uses, thus reducing wildlife habitat benefits. They viewed rice production as being environmentally friendly compared with other types of agricultural production, such as cotton farming. They were favorably impressed that rice producers were taking the initiative to form a coalition. They were anxious to work collaboratively and offered several concrete suggestions about forums and issues for educational campaigns. They suggested that consumptive and non-consumptive users of wildlife habitat (such as hunters and bird-watchers, respectively) should compensate private landowners for allowing access. They acknowledged problems with adversarial attitudes going both ways between environmentalists and rice producers; they brainstormed about how Texas R.I.C.E. could help break down barriers.

The general public adult focus group, comprised of non-farming Houstonians, established a general interest and awareness concerning rice production. However, the Houstonians participating in this focus group were uninformed about the waterfowl habitat benefits associated with rice production. They offered positive endorsement of the Texas R.I.C.E. effort and expressed sincere (and specific) interests in educational programming.

The general public children focus group included several children from the Clear Lake area south of Houston. These children exhibited a natural inquisitiveness and concern regarding the environment and food safety. They were largely ignorant of commercial agriculture, excepting several recollections of “visits to relatives’ farms.” They expressed considerable interest in more agricultural-related curriculum being incorporated into their science and/or social studies curricula.

The Texas Rice Industry Coalition for the Environment (R.I.C.E.):

Main Points from Six Focus Groups

Background

The Texas rice industry has encountered new tests of its viability during the 1990s. Much of the enhanced prosperity which accompanied the release of the semidwarf varieties and the advent of the Texas Rice Research Foundation's Econo-Rice research project during the 1980s has eroded as the federal legislature has slowly moved toward a greater free-market orientation. A subset of Texas rice industry leaders met with representatives of the Texas A&M University System during the summer of 1993 under the auspices of "The Texas Rice Task Force." The economic disadvantages confronting Texas rice producers were associated with (a) the lack of a feasible production alternative; (b) abbreviated time periods for field operations due to weather, necessitating above-U.S. average investments in capital machinery and equipment; (c) climate-induced pest management problems; and (d) higher-than-U.S. average water pumping and distribution costs as well as increasing municipal, industrial, and recreational competition for scarce water supplies (Texas Rice Task Force, p. 6). Four principal areas requiring immediate attention were identified (Texas Rice Task Force, pp. 5-9):

- production research;
- alternative enterprises to rice;
- rice marketing; and
- rice policy.

Among the priorities noted for action in increasing producers' effectiveness in policy development was that of exploring opportunities for mutual gains through collaboration between rice producers and environmental interest groups. The Texas Rice Belt extends to the west and east of the Houston metropolitan area and is within driving distance of Austin and Dallas-Ft. Worth (Figure 1), providing ample opportunities to reach out to environmental interests. The

intent of doing so was recognized to (a) take advantage of the synergy among rice, waterfowl, and other wildlife, and (b) develop a proactive strategy on water quality and quantity (Texas Rice Task Force, p. 8).

Texas R.I.C.E.

The Texas R.I.C.E. was inaugurated on February 14, 1995. Their mission statement is broadly written:

To build a coalition of interests to foster and strengthen relationships between the rice industry and the natural resources of our rice producing area in Texas, through:

- *LEARNING: identifying major issues of concern impacting the rice industry in Texas, the environment, and the public.*
- *RESPONDING: researching and developing solutions to these issues while continually seeking ways to improve our understanding of the interaction between the rice industry and the environment.*
- *COMMUNICATING: communicating these solutions to all stakeholders, from school children to public officials, about the mutuality of the Texas rice industry and the natural resources of our state.*

In April and May, 1995, the first two authors of this paper interacted with the Executive Board of the Texas R.I.C.E. (a mix of rice producers and representatives of environmental groups). They suggested focus groups as a useful technique for identifying and learning more about various stakeholders' priorities for the coalition. The protocol used in interfacing with the rice focus groups followed that used by Thurow et al. in a related, broader research project. That effort involved focus groups conducted during December, 1994 in San Benito, Lubbock, Littlefield, San Angelo, Sonora, Midland, Alpine, Nacogdoches, and Tyler, Texas on environmental issues and property rights.

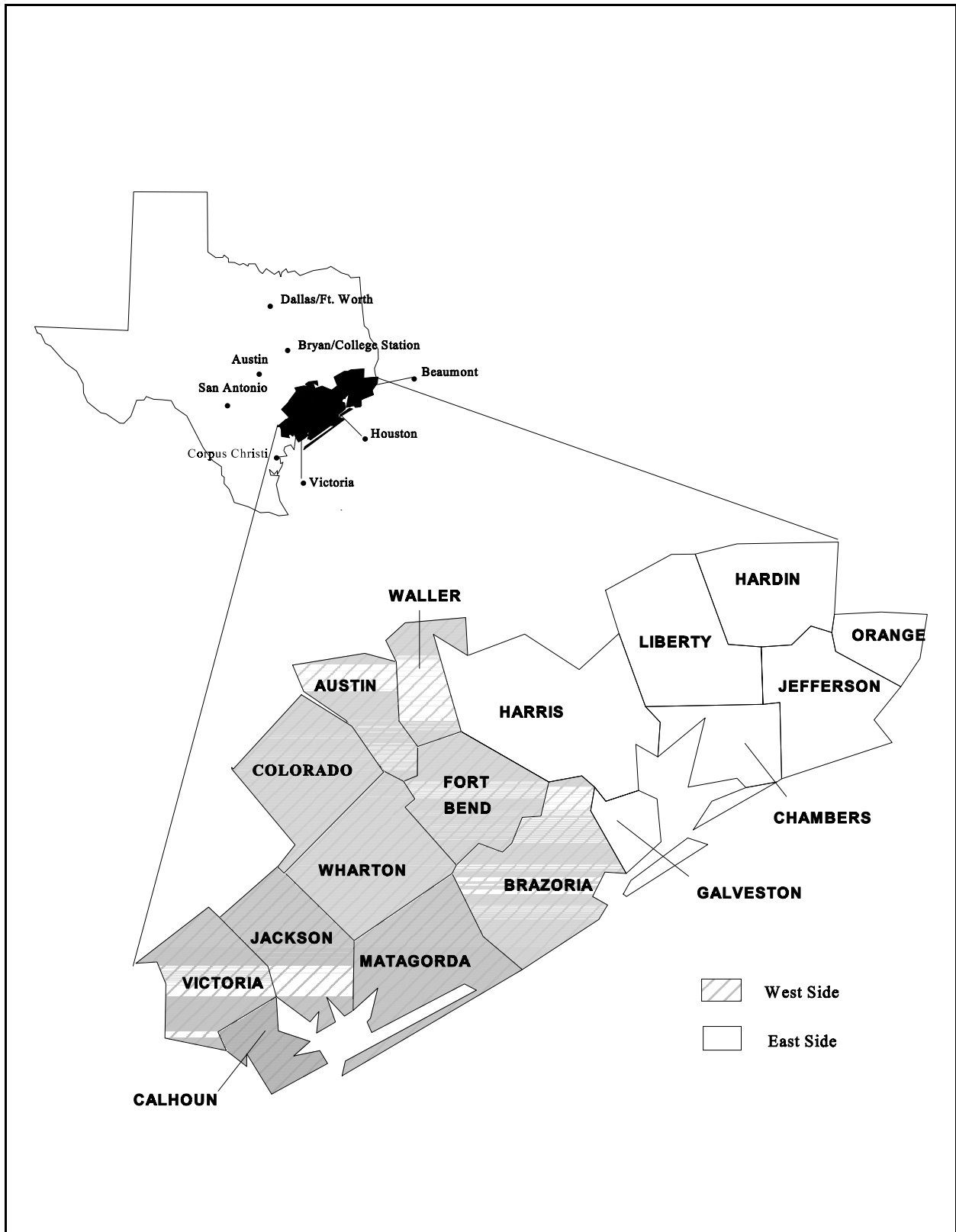


Figure 1. Texas Rice Belt and Nearby Metropolitan Areas.

Subsequently, six rice focus groups were held on June 20, 21, and 22, 1995. On June 20, a group of seven rice producers from the West Side of Houston (Figure 1) convened in El Campo. On June 21, a group of six rice producers from the East Side of Houston (Figure 1) convened in Winnie. Representatives from Houston environmental groups were convened during the evenings of June 20 and 21 in downtown Houston. The morning of June 22, a group of a dozen children, ages 6 to 14, were convened at the campus of the University of Houston at Clear Lake. The afternoon of June 22, a “representative sample of the Houston public” (four women, four men; four whites, two blacks, and two Hispanics) was convened in downtown Houston.

Methods

A focus group is an orchestrated round table discussion among a group of individuals with a common perspective on the problem set. Participants are chosen to have fairly homogeneous perspectives on and experiences with the issues being discussed. The participants of the six focus groups reported on in this paper were asked to respond to a structured set of questions, displayed on overhead transparencies. Their responses were recorded by the facilitator on overhead transparencies. In addition, the discussions were tape recorded and transcribed for later reference.¹

Two ground rules were set for these focus groups: (1) Everyone’s opinion gets heard. It is not necessary that everyone agree. (2) Differences are important and valuable. The goal is to listen to everyone’s opinion, not to debate and argue. Five of the focus groups were facilitated by Amy Thurow, with assistance by Ed Rister. Ed Rister facilitated the focus group with the children. Each focus group was two hours in duration.

¹ The focus group transcriptions are available from the authors for those wanting more in-depth information on the dialogue.

The purpose of this report is to summarize the main points from these six focus groups. This summary reflects the flow of the discussions in the focus groups. Please bear in mind that the viewpoints do not represent a consensus from the group discussing the issues. No votes or consensus statements were developed during the focus groups. Therefore, in this summary, little is offered regarding the extent to which the opinions expressed were widely or deeply held among the focus group participants. Note that the dialogue which occurs in a focus group process is different from the viewpoints likely to emerge from one-on-one interviews. The information obtained is not necessarily factual, but rather and (most importantly) representative of the participants' views. The objective of the focus group process is to catalogue all such views, so that others may deal with them at a later date.

Rice Producers Focus Groups Materials

Memoranda and other materials used in recruiting and interviewing the West Side and East Side rice producer focus groups are presented in Appendix A. First, there is a general memorandum to local Texas Agricultural Extension Service county agents and to James Stansel, Resident Director of the Texas A&M University System Agricultural Research Extension Center at Beaumont. This memorandum provides documentation for the process used in identifying the producer participants, including (a) Attachment A expressing the purposes and objectives of the focus groups, desired varied profiles for the participants, and the protocol for contracting the participants, and (b) a profile form to be completed for each selected participant. Next, there is a follow-up letter sent to each member of the producer focus groups, providing an introduction beyond what may have been verbally delivered via the various contracts. Then, there is a one-page outline of protocol prepared by Dr. Thurow for the actual producer focus groups interviews. Finally, there are a set of overheads which were used during the focus group interviews.

Environmental Interests and General Public Focus Groups Materials

The environmental interest focus group selection process was orchestrated by Bill Stransky of the Houston Sierra Club. He used a telephone contact approach. Materials similar to those used for rice producers facilitated the interviews (Appendix B), along with several

photographs of waterfowl and rice fields. Joe Gallehugh of Fellers and Company in Houston assisted in identifying eight public citizens in the Houston area to provide their perspectives on rice production, the environment, and other issues confronting Texas R.I.C.E. Materials similar to those used for the environmental interests focus groups were used with the public citizens (Appendix B).

Children Focus Group Interview Materials

Dr. David Polumbo from the University of Houston at Clear Lake recruited several urban children to participate in the focus group interviews, using children whose parents were attending day school at his campus. First a series of introductory questions were asked of the students (Appendix C), followed by a viewing of the U.S.A. Rice Council's promotional video "Rice — Food for the World" (1992) and another rice production video developed by the Lower Colorado River Authority and Haskell Simon (1994) "Rice: A Better Way." Thereafter, a second set of questions were discussed, and the interview concluded with the serving of Rice Krispie Treats and freshly cooked aromatic rice.

West Side Rice Producers Focus Group

June 20, 1995 - El Campo, Texas

Seven rice producers from Calhoun, Jackson, Matagorda, and Wharton counties participated in this focus group. These producers consider the market price and the increasing costs of production to be the most pressing issues affecting the profitability of their rice operations. Rice producers cannot pass on these cost increases directly to consumers. Yields for their ratoon crop (a second crop grown from first crop stubble), which depends largely on weather conditions, have been limited in recent years due to blackbird predation.

The most pressing environmental issues facing West Side rice producers include the possible losses of important pesticides, such as Furadan, and the likelihood that the high cost of labeling alternative agrichemicals will reduce pesticide availability and/or increase costs of production. The producers explained that the public sees fungicides, pesticides, and fertilizers as

problematic because of their persistence in the environment. Two water issues were also explicitly mentioned: the quality of tailwater and nonagricultural competition for water.

In regard to the possibility of a federal program requiring producers to perform conservation-oriented work to obtain “green payments,”² one opinion was that such a program would be misdirected — a waste of time and money — because there is no soil erosion associated with rice production. A consensus opinion during this discussion was that “rules from the Midwest are not appropriate for Texas Rice Belt conditions.” Since producers already have concerns about conservation and good stewardship efforts are underway, there is no need for further government involvement. Soil compaction may be a problem for rice producers, but 95 to 98% of rice producers are already doing land leveling (to conserve water and protect land quality). In a somewhat different direction, but related to the concept of federal conservation programs, the rice producers also expressed concerns about wetland protection being misdirected.

The producers also expressed opinions regarding carrying out conservation-oriented work to enhance public perceptions of the rice industry in Texas. The group articulated that waterfowl enhancements are usually profitable, but they require a great deal of scarce water. They also supported the idea of water-quality testing to demonstrate the beneficial aspects of rice production. They suggested the need for educating the public about the safeness of pesticides and about the precautions which rice producers are already following, e.g., timing their pesticide applications appropriately. They also suggested the need for publicity concerning minimum tillage practices — already being used by rice producers — which aid with soil and water conservation. The general issue was summarized as “where would we be without rice on the Gulf Coast of Texas?” It would be instructive and useful to demonstrate what is already being done with respect to conservation in rice production, in an attempt to “knock out extremists on both sides.”

² Government payment made to farmers for environmentally -sound practices.

The focus group's reaction to the idea of a coalition between rice producers and environmentalists was generally positive. One rice producer observed that the California rice industry's efforts had been successful — “they came out smelling like a rose!” The notion that rice producers are environmentalists was also expressed. The opportunity for learning by both producers and environmentalists was cited as a positive possibility. Hope was expressed that a coalition might help prevent the passage of “crazy laws.” One producer expressed the viewpoint that rice production has minimal negative environmental impacts and that a coalition might help spotlight this fact. High hopes were expressed about opportunities for mutuality (i.e., a common cause), e.g., by emphasizing water issues — “if we can improve polluted water, it creates an alliance.” The perception was that environmentalists have the political clout to obtain the water and that the Texas rice industry could benefit by collaborating with them. Several already-existing examples of environmental benefits arising from rice production were noted, including estuary improvement as a result of positive downstream impacts accruing from improved (relative to quality of inflows) water quality discharged from rice fields.

There were some concerns about the formation of a coalition. The discussion began with the question of whether such a coalition had the right idea about what constitutes conservation. The problem of liability issues and insurance costs associated with enabling environmentalists greater access to rice farms was expressed. For example, if an endangered species were discovered by a visitor, would the rice producer be “rightfully judged?” A fear of the unknown was expressed — “How will they treat us?” and “What is the common goal?” and “How will we focus the issue?” One rice producer who has experience working with the Nature Conservancy expressed the opinion that the environmentalists are learning from the rice producers. As a result, Nature Conservancy's spokesmen have started publicizing the fact that rice production enhances the environment. Finally, a fear of pseudo-informed environmentalists was articulated — could it be that ignorance is bliss and that the more informed some environmentalists become, the more questions and problems will arise? Regarding educational efforts, someone expressed the need for greater emphasis on information about what kind of environment is, in fact, natural.

Wildlife is not always natural. If uncultivated, rice fields might not return to desirable native vegetation, but rather, for example, to a lesser-quality, tallow-infested state.

Participants in this West Side focus group were all familiar with Texas R.I.C.E. Most had either read an October, 1994 article on L.G. Raun, Jr. in the *Houston Chronicle* or heard presentations by him and/or Laurance Armour at Texas Agricultural Experiment Station Beaumont and Eagle Lake field days during 1995. The group understood the thrust of the coalition to be “finding common ground” between rice producers and environmentalists. When asked pointedly about which environmental issues or activities should take the highest priority for Texas R.I.C.E., the discussion started with water quality and water scarcity (competition between rice production and municipalities). Texas R.I.C.E. perhaps could make a difference by providing information to the public about what would be lost (in terms of water quality and waterfowl habitat) without rice production. They also discussed the need for more research — “more involvement by those who know what is going on.” They perceived that the role of this organization is to provide a focal point for “clout.” Alone, a rice producer does not have much ability to influence future politics, but as a coalition member (rather than an individual targeting specific issues), there is potential to influence how things happen. As far as an agenda for Texas R.I.C.E. was concerned, the need to clarify people’s perceptions was emphasized as opposed to targeting specific issues; the latter will take care of themselves! Two-way educational needs were mentioned; both environmentalists and rice producers need to know more about each other.

Regarding a forum for Texas R.I.C.E., the difficulty of the general membership meeting more than once or twice per year was mentioned. The idea of a newsletter to address an audience of both environmentalists and rice producers was suggested. A broader audience for the newsletter, including the relevant water authorities and legislators was also proposed as appropriate. Some of the West Side rice producers expressed the opinion that the policy agenda should be set by lobbying groups (e.g., Texas Rice Legislature Group), whereas the role of Texas R.I.C.E. ought to be information-gathering and dissemination. On the other hand, the viewpoint was expressed that since environmentalists are already lobbyists, it would be detrimental to ask

them not to lobby on the rice producer's behalf. The suggestion was raised that environmentalists and rice producers could lobby together, but no consensus was reached about whether this is an appropriate role for the coalition. The notion that lobbying is a form of educating legislators was raised. "Green payments" were proposed as a possible focal point for Texas R.I.C.E. lobbying, without any concrete suggestions about how the green payments should be structured. One member of the group summed up the discussion with a "bottom-line" point: uncoordinated lobbying by either environmentalists and/or rice producers could be a problem.

When the mission statement for a recently-announced national program, the Rice Producers Waterfowl Habitat Program, was presented, the West Side rice producers agreed that local issues need to take precedence for Texas R.I.C.E. Legislation brings with it the risk that conservation will be shoved down producers' throats. Participation that was once voluntary is already becoming more mandatory. One West Side producer commented that he did not see how they could do more for waterfowl without killing their pocketbooks. Thus, the suggestions were for more promotion of what is already being done.

The session concluded with each focus group participant stating his opinion about the most pressing environmental issue facing Texas agriculture and what can be done about it:

- Worker protection: Historically there were no major problems. New regulations are too extreme, not workable, expensive, and time-consuming. These regulations may be needed for fruit and vegetable production, but are inappropriate for rice producers.
- One-size-fits-all regulations are a problem. Farmers are our own worst enemy. Increased regulations are a response to past misuse and mistakes which have been made.
- Surface water and groundwater.
- Endangered species.

- Environmentalists who have too much time on their hands, including actors and actresses on bandwagons. Environmentalists are not well-informed.
- Politically, there is a strong urban bias — too many urban residents have no idea where bacon comes from (this ignorance extends to both children and adults). Houston is surrounded by farms, yet we are losing out in Austin and Dallas/Fort Worth. Educational efforts should be the business of the U.S.A. Rice Council, however, rather than Texas R.I.C.E. Environmentalists have been involved with public education curriculum and perhaps we (rice producers) should be as well.
- Property rights are implicit in what has been discussed, for example, regarding “green payments.” More and more, the general public, through legislation, is dictating to property owners what they can, must, and cannot do with their property.

East Side Rice Producers Focus Group

June 21, 1995 - Winnie, Texas

Six rice producers from Chambers, Jefferson, and Liberty counties participated in this focus group. Several producers consider the price squeeze (costs of production exceeding market prices for rice) the most pressing issue affecting the profitability of their rice operations. “Hidden costs” (compliance with an array of regulations), which increase the cost of farm services, were also emphasized as a factor in their continued financial viability. Several concerns about the cost of government regulations were mentioned. Too much paperwork is a problem, and the ASCS (now FSA) regulations were mentioned specifically. Wetlands and endangered species issues are pertinent, although there have been no problems with East Side rice production and endangered species. The loss of control with respect to how worker’s compensation is implemented on farms was mentioned, although the Texas Employment Commission has helped somewhat with that problem. Regulations imposed by the Texas Department of Transportation (e.g., licensing and fees levied to trucks and drivers) are cumbersome. Pesticide application

training and certification is time-consuming and expensive. Worries about the cost of registering new herbicides were also mentioned as a factor likely to affect future profitability. The Delaney Clause (a zero-risk standard) was mentioned as problematic; as an alternative, the concept of “negligible risk” was suggested, along with the weighing of economic costs associated with producers losing the right to use certain pesticides. Some pesticides which are used in other countries are banned in the United States, resulting in an “unlevel playing field.”

Many environmental concerns were listed as key factors affecting profitability, and the list was extended when the question posed was, “What are the most pressing environmental issues facing East Side rice producers?” Nonpoint source pollution (runoff) was mentioned; in particular, what share does agriculture contribute? There is no conclusive evidence linking pollution with its sources. Pursuit of research, following up on Garry McCauley’s water quality work, was suggested, with the purpose being to document the extent to which water quality is better coming out of rice fields than it is going into rice fields. Water scarcity was also discussed (i.e., “without water, rice is dead”), but east of Houston, producers are blessed with lots of water. Competition from cities for water is a key concern, as well as industrial uses which are concentrated east of Houston. Up to now, agriculture and industry have been able to get along.

Considerable frustration was expressed regarding the general public’s knowledge of and interest in agriculture. As long as there are groceries on the shelf, 75% of the public (particularly, the younger generation) doesn’t understand the role of the agricultural sector.

Land use is another issue of concern to rice producers. Urban sprawl is claiming potentially valuable land resources which could be employed in rice production. As farms are pushed off more productive land, they move into more marginal land. Wetland legislation is also a threat to cropland uses of some of the East Side acreage; i.e., the requirement that cropland be converted back to wetlands would affect rice production. Currently, producers risk losing their eligibility to participate in farm programs if they harvest trees (e.g., tallows) from wetlands.

The East Side producers moved naturally into a discussion of the 1995 Farm Bill. One viewpoint was that rice is currently being farmed for the government — there is no market. Given “a level playing field,” there would be a more efficient international and domestic market and U.S. rice producers would be more competitive. The directed discussion about doing conservation-oriented work to get “green payments” began with the idea that without farm programs, there would be no rice grown in East Side. The concept is fine, but it being administered from Washington is problematic. Even across a fence row, rice producers’ circumstances differ. The same legislation does not fit everyone, so flexibility is needed. The producers indicated there has never been a Conservation Reserve Program for rice producers. They have maintained set-aside acreage and provided waterfowl benefits without a payment up to now. Much of what has been done in the rice industry has been conservation, but the deficiency payments are not considered “green payments.”

Regarding performing conservation-oriented work to enhance public perceptions of the rice industry in Texas, the East Side group expressed sincere concern that rice producers are being viewed as guys with black hats, as poor stewards of the land taking handouts, with the public focused on the image of airplanes applying pesticides. One perception expressed was, “If the public had the option to cut us out, they would.” Farmers represent only one percent of the population; most of the public does not understand agriculture, nor do they wish to learn. They do care, however, about the availability of cheap food. The wildlife conservation benefits of rice production were discussed, with recognition directed toward the interests of Ducks Unlimited and bird-watchers. One producer expressed concern that the general public does not think about conservation behavior in conjunction with rice production; without rice fields, there would be fewer birds. In contrast, consider Mobil Oil — they have a focused effort to raise local support for their company. What makes that work is money; public relations efforts are expensive and must be orchestrated. Rice producers do not have the financial backing to raise awareness concerning “good stewardship” the way that Mobil Oil does.

Several participants in the East Side focus group were familiar with Texas R.I.C.E., but three of the producers had not heard of Texas R.I.C.E. The fact that the idea came out of the strategic-planning Texas Rice Task Force was raised. The notion of Texas R.I.C.E. taking a proactive approach on current and future environmental issues was emphasized. One producer said that the group has some direction, but also is undecided as to a definitive course of action. The perception has been, up to now, that these people (environmentalists) are our enemies — they want to shut rice producers down. For the most part, however, environmentalists are intelligent and influential. They can influence our industry — they can put us out of business if they want to. What Texas R.I.C.E. is doing was described as a process of “feeling them out,” with environmentalists having been and continuing to be educated a considerable amount. Marketing opportunities were mentioned — bird-watchers are willing to pay to be entertained! Collaborative efforts with environmentalists could be an excellent vehicle for education. One rice producer saw the key role for Texas R.I.C.E. being education and communication to the public. Currently, rice producers are only talking to themselves. There is a need for media coverage. If people knew what rice producers were doing to prevent damage to the environment, they would be surprised. Language matters; for example, describing pesticide use as “crop protection” projects a different image from the prevailing concept of “poison.” The California model for collaboration with environmentalists was mentioned as a positive factor in protecting water rights to rice producers, as well as in discussions on air quality (e.g., the response to concerns about smoke from burning rice stubble).

When asked pointedly about environmental issues or activities which ought to take high priority for Texas R.I.C.E., the discussion started with water quality. One producer mentioned an operation raising both crawfish and rice, and possible problems associated with water turbidity. Another expressed a diametrically different viewpoint — the environmental groups are dominated by radicals and are just looking for ways to get farmers. The point was also made that since agrichemical companies now do not have financial incentives to develop and register new pesticides, Texas R.I.C.E. could play an educational role in depicting the problems associated with losing crop protection options and perhaps change the registration process.

There was agreement that education is important, but no consensus was reached on the targeting of education. Some indicated educational campaigns should target the general public as well as environmentalists. The opinion also was expressed that children today do not have relatives on farms, so they need more and different education. On the other hand, children do not have voting power. Another viewpoint was that education is needed for those who control the purse strings. Again, the example of oil companies was raised. They advertise during the Super Bowl and demonstrate what they do, using their advertisements to raise awareness. Finally, the environmentalists' model was presented. They put out newsletters and magazines where they back up their positions and opinions with scientific data. It would be useful to counter the media's focus on "bad actors."

Some skepticism was voiced about the loss of control which could arise from collaboration between rice producers and environmentalists. The opinion that rice producers need to be "gun shy" was expressed; e.g., "Environmentalists are radical people, just looking for anything. If rice producers open the gates to their farms, what else will the environmentalists see and complain about?"

There was a lively discussion of lobbying. On one hand, a coalition between rice producers and environmentalists could be more effective than either group functioning separately. On the other hand, the opinion was expressed that "Texas R.I.C.E. cannot be a lobbying group. You're in with adversaries!" The respective roles of Texas R.I.C.E., the Texas Rice Legislative Group, and the U.S.A. Rice Federation were discussed. The general opinion was that Texas R.I.C.E. should not be a lobbying group — avenues for such action already exist. Lobbying and education are incompatible — "If you lobby, then you hurt yourself and are less effective [in education]." However, if Texas R.I.C.E. does such a great job of educating that the environmentalists want to lobby, then the role of Texas R.I.C.E. should be to report information to the lobbying groups on either side (e.g., the Texas Rice Legislative Group and the Sierra Club). The members of the coalition should use each other as resources. Otherwise, there are simply too many hands in the pie. At the end of this discussion, an opinion was raised that the

rice industry has capable leaders who are intelligent, but that environmentalists are more intelligent and have more political savvy. “B.S. will only get you so far.” Environmentalists are well-funded and they ask pointed questions. They want specific answers, supported by data. The producers noted that an obvious weakness of the rice industry is in responding to such queries. A better knowledge base and more polished response mechanism is needed.

When the mission statement for a recently-announced national program, the Rice Producers Waterfowl Habitat Program, was presented, East Side producers remarked on the apparent overlap in missions, i.e., the Texas and federal programs’ objectives are similar and complimentary. Both are similar in their concerns about waterfowl, so the initiatives can work hand in hand. The same Texas producers are likely to be involved in both. Having a national program can enhance the state’s program. Texas R.I.C.E. was seen as being ahead of the national program. One rice producer joked that he would not mind turning his whole farm into waterfowl habitat, but not for free! A more serious discussion of this need then ensued. “Green payments” and conservation requirements cannot be tied to or used as substitutes for existing farm programs. The government must offer incentives which supplement the existing programs. In conclusion, the East Side producers agreed that Texas R.I.C.E. needs to maintain its identity and to address local, Texas-specific issues.

Officers of Environmental Organizations Focus Group

June 20, 1995 - Houston

This group was comprised of two officers of the Houston chapter of the Sierra Club, two officers of the Houston chapter of the Audubon Society, one officer of Houston’s Park People group, and one individual who operates a hunting business on the Katy Prairie.

Each participant had a good idea of where rice is grown in Texas and knew that Texas rice production is declining. They knew that there are approximately 350,000 acres of rice in Texas.

Water usage and water quality were the first issues raised in their discussion of the environmental effects from rice farming. In particular, they were concerned about chemical runoff, e.g., pesticides and fertilizer. They acknowledged a positive aspect of rice production in that it provides food and habitat for migratory birds. They discussed collaboration between rice producers and environmentalists to increase habitat by increasing the amount of water and the amount of time the rice fields are flooded. The group understood a trade-off involved in enhancing waterfowl habitat due to water scarcity issues. Although their perception was that water consumption is significant in rice production, rice production cleans the water, recharges groundwater, and gives wildlife habitat. There was recognition that Houston draws more water than rice farmers on the Katy Prairie.

The group discussed the implications of wetland policy on rice production and on continuing urban development. The group discussed how protecting larger tracts of wetlands (including created wetlands, like rice fields) will have more positive effects than establishing several smaller tracts. They were concerned about the change in government policy. For example, farmers used to be told that they could fill in wetlands, but now they are not allowed to farm wetlands. There are both positive and negative aspects of such changes in government policy which need to be considered before new policy is implemented.

This group was very concerned about the hedgerows being destroyed in the Katy Prairie. The reason that hedgerows are being removed (with USDA sponsorship) is to control blackbird predation. They were concerned about the loss of positive benefits of hedgerows as habitat for other birds.

Laser leveling was discussed in detail. The participant most familiar with rice farming explained how water is a nuisance in the winter and discussed the importance of the timing of filling and draining fields. Management is challenging and complex, but there is an increase in wildlife habitat with good management.

The viewpoint was articulated that if we lose rice farming, what will replace it is a big brushy forest, and therefore fewer waterfowl. One participant had very specific information about likely successional plants if rice production were to decline. She talked about tallow forests (a non-native plant) being likely to fill in the rice fields. She mentioned that it would take many years for native wildlife to start using a tallow forest as habitat. Moreover, tallow trees are big water-users. However, one participant “wouldn’t automatically buy into there being more wildlife (birds) in current rice fields than without farming.”

When asked about the effect of rice farming on wildlife, the focus group participants talked about waterfowl as well as other kinds of birds (e.g., hawks and eagles which benefit from rodents). Regarding wildlife habitat, the group talked about there being some negative effects of rice production. When rice fields are flooded, some animals lose their habitat. On the other hand, they appreciated that rice farms serve as a buffer to development on the western edge of Houston. The focus group discussed encroaching development, sprawling out of Houston. They are paving more arable land and spreading out the tax base for Houston. That jeopardizes environmental quality. “If it’s homes, it’s not bird sanctuaries!” Moreover, rice farms will have more wildlife than other kinds of farming.

When asked about who should pay to help promote positive benefits from rice production, the focus group participants expressed the viewpoint that everyone should help pay, particularly users. Birders are realizing more and more that they are “consumers,” and that they should help with the costs.

The group recognized that without farm subsidies, the cost of food would go up. One participant was adamant that as taxpayers, we should either cut all subsidies to all industries or to none of them. She sees it as being unfair to make cuts piecemeal. Since so many industries are getting governmental assistance, why pick on rice farmers? The point was made that farm subsidies benefit more than just farmers, e.g., hunting businesses, hunters, consumers of cheap food, etc.

These environmentalists had a positive impression of the idea of Texas R.I.C.E. They recognized that rice farmers feel a need to identify common ground and show what's good about rice farming. They also characterized hunters as urban residents but environmentally friendly.

The viewpoint was expressed that it would be nice if environmentalists shared these sentiments. "I wish I felt that we [environmentalists] were an effective voice." They recognized rice farmers as giving us something, and one participant asked, "How can we give back? How can we help?" About Texas R.I.C.E., they said, "This is positive. We need more of it. We have to meet with these people [rice producers] — we need more forums."

They offered specific ideas about meetings between rice producers and environmentalists, e.g., tours of rice farms, a fajita lunch for a charge, and an event "friendly to hunters." One participant articulated a common goal — both producers and environmentalists are in favor of wildlife promotion.

Producers' and ranchers' fear of the Sierra Club (and other environmental groups) was acknowledged. The focus group participants see this "problem" getting worse all the time and sometimes do not admit their affiliations. In West Texas, environmentalists "wear bullet-proof vests!" The participants came up short on ideas about what can be done to rectify this phenomenon.

The notion of population being the source of many environmental dilemmas was raised. They acknowledged that people in the city take water and food for granted. Another opinion stated was that hunting is less detrimental to the environment than ranching or farming.

The focus group participants suggested the need for massive education. Newspapers were named as an important outlet. They discussed how students being educated today are more conservative than in the past. One participant mentioned explicitly a desire for Texas A&M University to educate the urban public on what farming and ranching is about.

There is also a need for research. Specifically mentioned was the need to know exactly how many acres on the Katy Prairie ought to be protected. Moreover, better information on what destroying wetlands will do to the food chain is urgently needed. Economic analysis would be of interest. In particular, what happens over the long run when land is put into conservation uses versus when it goes into urban/suburban development? This is urgent because development is happening quickly.

Members of Environmental Organizations Focus Group

June 21, 1995 - Houston

This group was comprised of two members of the Houston chapter of the Audubon Society, one veterinarian, one real estate appraiser, and one lawyer (who was also a self-professed hunter).

They had a good idea of where rice is grown in Texas and knew that Texas rice production is declining. They knew that there are more than 100,000 acres of rice in Texas and indicated that water scarcity is a key problem facing rice production. They recognized that the rice industry is small relative to other farm sectors in Texas. They believe that soybeans and sorghum are important crops, as well as cotton and cattle.

Major concerns about the environmental effects from rice production (positive and negative) were water usage and water quality, chemical runoff, food and habitat for migratory birds, and tradeoffs concerning wetlands (rice fields are a sort of wetland, yet laser leveling changes their nature). They see rice production making a positive contribution to waterfowl habitat, if managed properly. Rice fields provide excellent wetland-like areas if they are left wet, but if they are drained, then they will no longer serve as natural wetlands and/or hold water as they did previous to rice production (due to laser leveling).

The environmentalists talked about rice production filtering out the contaminants in water, thus improving water quality. They speculated about advantages associated with groundwater recharge, but predicted that mostly surface water and downstream estuaries were likely to be affected (in a positive way) by water discharged from rice fields. The caveat was the possibility of fertilizer and pesticides contaminating ground and surface water. Pesticides in particular can have adverse secondary effects. Excess fertilizer can feed micro-organisms, causing possible “blooms,” e.g., red tide, brown tide. They speculated that rice in Texas uses about half groundwater and half surface water.

They named the composting of rice hulls as an environmental positive. Overall, they have a sense that most of the by-products from rice production are being used.

These environmentalists were aware of organizations like Ducks Unlimited and WHAT Ducks (Wetland Habitat Alliance of Texas) working in tandem with rice producers to promote conservation. They recognized rice production as providing good habitat for geese. Geese feel safe from predators in such habitat and are attracted to the water. They stated that if land is put into rice, it has been taken out of forest or hedgerows. They recognized that not much new land is going into rice. It has been developed prior to now, rather than current rice production destroying wildlife habitat. One participant stated that rice farms are poor wildlife habitat, except for birds. Other than tadpoles and frogs, they believed that birds are the main wildlife using rice fields. They recognized that geese are attracted to rice fields as a feeding ground — “they come to eat vittles which are there.”

When asked about organic rice production, one respondent replied “it almost is anyway; I mean, rice is almost 100% organically produced.” They said they would be willing to pay 2% more for organically-grown rice. “It needs to be a better product than ‘regularly-produced rice’ rather than just be ‘organic.’” When asked how much rice they eat, the answers ranged from two to three times per week, to once in two to three weeks, to regularly when eating out, to children eating it five times per week and parents twice per week.

On paying for the positive benefits from rice production, this group felt that consumptive users should be paying for the benefits along with some support from taxpayers, i.e., there should be a combination of effort and support. It is positive to urge producers to maintain water in their fields to enhance waterfowl habitat, but more rice production should not be encouraged — there are already ample supplies of this commodity.

They recognized that right now there is no incentive for a rice farmer to reconfigure his operation to enhance wildlife habitat. It was acknowledged that for rice producers to do more to promote wildlife habitat, there must be an economic incentive. One environmentalist (a lawyer) said that if we tell a farmer what to do with a pothole, that's a "taking" of private property.

The opinion was expressed that if rice farming is supported by the government, then other private businesses ought to be subsidized. Rice subsidies already exist, but they should not be increased. There is, however, an argument in favor of compensation if something is being taken away ("personal property rights"). While these producers don't want to pay more taxes, such compensation for takings is important. They were concerned, however, about subsidies interfering with market forces. If there is a temporary problem with prices and costs of production, then subsidies are justifiable. However, comparative advantage should govern the level of subsidies.

This group named waterfowl habitat conservation as the highest priority for Texas R.I.C.E. They see problems with Furadan being addressed at the federal level by the Environmental Protection Agency. Some other groups will deal with pesticide issues, and therefore Texas R.I.C.E. need not concern itself.

Their opinion was that education of the environmental community and the general public is Texas R.I.C.E.'s greatest opportunity. Education can be two-way. Farmers are aware of mutual benefits from working with environmentalists.

One focus group participant felt “pretty plugged in” to the idea of Texas R.I.C.E. Another had seen the acronym but knew nothing about it. Another mentioned Jim Blackburn’s involvement with Texas R.I.C.E. The comment was made that some environmentalists perceive property owners as enemies, so it is very positive to bring these sides together to dispel ignorance.

The group discussed the negative aspects of farmers being told what to do. They acknowledged that farmers actually fear environmentalists. They suggested that Texas R.I.C.E. should deal with whatever is giving the Texas rice industry the most heat. In particular, water was suggested as a focus for educational work. It is an area with some positive lessons, and there is lots of ignorance about the environmental benefits of rice production with respect to water quality.

They suggested that Texas R.I.C.E. could sponsor workshops to give biologists a forum to present their research results. They are interested in the old ways of producing rice being compared with new techniques. A specific issue of concern is, “What does it do to the land to hold water on it over an extended period?” Experts should be given the opportunity to discuss both the good and bad environmental ramifications of rice production. They would like farmers who have done interesting things to have a chance to describe their rice farming.

Another topic of interest is the complexity of government issues with respect to rice farming. There needs to be clarification to members of Texas R.I.C.E. and affiliated environmental groups about what they should support, and more information about the context for policy choices.

One focus group participant suggested that Texas R.I.C.E. needs to clearly specify its goals, which would help to keep the group smaller and allow it to produce a recognizable product. There is a need for a more detailed mission statement, i.e., an implementation plan with

measurable goals. The suggestion was made that a baseline should be developed and then the education process should be expanded.

Support was offered for developing public bird-watching sites.

It would be a good idea to package Texas rice with “environmentally friendly” labels, perhaps with ducks.

Thinking on a broader scale than rice production, the focus group participants discussed environmental issues facing Texas agriculture. Fire ants were mentioned first. Urban sprawl was identified as a problem, with the suggestion that old urban neighborhoods ought to be renovated rather than converting cropland into new neighborhoods. They expressed concern about urban sprawl taking over abandoned rice fields. The importance of biodegradable pesticides and herbicides was suggested. The loss of wetlands was mentioned.

One group member talked about being especially interested in ways that business and agriculture can “work together to do something bigger and better.” The Nature Conservancy and some projects sponsored by the Audubon Society were mentioned as examples. The concept of cooperative efforts are not new, but previously the focus has been development and protection of wildlife habitat. The issues on the table, however, are broader than habitat.

Unaffiliated Public Citizens of Houston Focus Group

June 22, 1995 - Houston

Eight citizens of Houston participated in this focus group, including four women and four men, and an ethnic representation of four whites, two blacks, and two Hispanics. Without any introduction, several photographs of rice fields were displayed, and the participants were asked to identify the crop. Some of the participants thought it was wheat. Within two minutes, however, someone correctly identified it as rice. When asked where rice is grown in Texas, different

members of the group volunteered mostly West Side production areas (e.g., Katy, Brazoria County) as well as Alvin. The group had difficulty agreeing on how many acres of rice are produced in Texas: some said millions, some said 1,000 to 1,500. When asked about the role of rice-farming in Texas agriculture, the group believed there was more cotton grown in Texas than rice. One person guessed that rice production had been going on for many years (e.g., “20 years or more”), while another said at least 30 years, remembering the Rice Festival in Katy. They recognized that rice production in Texas is declining and attributed this phenomenon to imports and higher costs of production in Texas relative to international costs of production.

In an open-ended discussion about their perceptions of rice production in Texas, the notion surfaced that the government pays rice producers to grow only a fixed amount of rice. Foreign competition was explained as being driven by low-cost labor in other countries. Reacting to photographs of flooded rice fields, someone described irrigation on rice as being more than on wheat or corn crops, thus explaining why rice is produced near the coast. Another participant ventured the opinion that on some swampy land, rice is all that could be grown. This individual could not imagine crops other than rice being grown on some of the swampy land on the East Side. One participant, who grew up in California, talked about clear water being a by-product of rice production. He remembered swimming in canals. He emphasized that rice production has a good effect on water, i.e., it is purified. As a child, he remembers drinking water from the canals bordering rice fields.

The role of pesticides was seen as keeping insects down, particularly mosquitos. They acknowledged that American farmers are trying to get away from pesticides because of their side-effects. Human cancer was mentioned as a worrisome side effect from pesticides. Two of the focus group participants said they were not concerned about pesticides and rice. Someone mentioned that imported rice has bugs. She said that she does not want bugs in her rice, nor does she want chemicals. Four participants said they do not think about pesticides and rice, but they are somewhat worried. One participant brought up the processing of rice in big dryers making it “fairly safe.” Given an option, all would prefer to buy Texas rice.

The participants' willingness to pay for organic rice was mixed. Given a choice between Texas rice and organic rice, one participant would pay 50 cents more for the organic rice, two would pay \$1.00 more, and another would pay \$1.50 more. The remaining four would buy whatever is cheapest. Given a choice between organic rice from Texas and regular rice from Thailand, three would be willing to pay 50 cents more for the organic Texas rice, three would be willing to pay \$1.00 more, and one would pay \$1.50 more. One would buy whichever is cheapest.

A black male participant reported eating rice three or four times per week. He eats it on Sundays for breakfast with eggs, butter, sausage and biscuits. The other black man said he eats rice every day with meat and potatoes or with vegetables, and sometimes in pudding for breakfast. A Hispanic man reported eating rice every day because it is easy to make, has no fat, and is cheap. Two white women reported eating rice four times per week, usually for dinner. The other Hispanic man reported eating rice three to four times per week, occasionally for breakfast and often for lunch or dinner. The other two white women reported eating rice twice per week and three times per month, respectively.

One white woman reported buying Uncle Ben's rice. Another white woman reported that her kids like Minute Rice, and she also buys the Mahatma and Adolphus brands. Another white woman buys Minute Rice. Another white woman buys either Minute Rice or Uncle Ben's. All four men mentioned buying Adolphus rice. Two of them sometimes buy Uncle Ben's, one sometimes buys Minute Rice, and the other only buys Adolphus.

About organic rice, they understood organic to mean "produced without chemicals." None have tried it. None have seen it, but "it is of interest." For three focus group participants, "organic says it all." The other five found the label "organic" to be somewhat misleading. They would like to know if it is true. They would like to know the results of testing. They would like to know there are no chemicals used in processing or in production, with data to back it up. They

would like the Texas Department of Agriculture to produce an “info-mercial” on organic rice production.

Pollution from planting and harvesting was discussed. One participant said he was not concerned about pollution because new machines use diesel and propane engines. There was speculation that processing might generate some kind of pollution, however. It is an energy-intensive activity. There might be dangers to the employees of processing plants, similar to the explosions which have happened in grain storage facilities.

Regarding environmental effects from rice farming, the discussion started with the notion that there is less wildlife in rice fields than elsewhere because there are no trees. There are fewer birds in places without trees. Someone countered this proposition with his experience that ducks use the rice fields, and that many people enjoy hunting near rice habitat. He said that ducks are in rice fields all year long. Someone else mentioned that if land is cleared for cropland, then rabbits and other animals are run off. There is perceived to be a trade-off between land and water animals.

When asked specifically about the effect of rice production on wildlife, they emphasized the presence of more insects, especially mosquitos. In the final stages, they expected there would be minnows, tadpoles, and fish present in rice fields. Someone added that migratory birds also use rice fields, in the fall and early spring.

About hunting, the viewpoint was expressed that it is okay if it occurs remotely from people. There was support for a limit on hunting (just like fishing is limited). Regarding bird-watching, the focus group participants expected to see sea gulls, cow birds, egrets, and sparrows. Hawks and eagles were also mentioned.

On water use, one felt that agriculture and ranches use the most water in Texas while another said industry. Four believed that urban uses were high. One said the combination of

urban and industrial uses exceeded other uses. Urban users were seen as paying the most for water, due to the cost of purification. Other groups were seen as paying the same amount, with recreation paying more. The group believed that water for rice production came from both groundwater (“from wells with big pumps”) and surface water (piped from lakes and rivers). There were various estimates of the cost of pumping — \$50 for 100 gallons, \$1 per gallon, \$25 for 100 gallons. Another participant said the estimate of \$1 per gallon was high.

In response to a question about positive environmental benefits associated with rice farming and who should pay to promote such benefits, someone said that taxpayers are already paying (through farm programs — “government quotas”). Rice growers should pay, as well as bird watchers who capture beauty but “don’t take anything off.” Another participant said of bird-watching that people who just drive by should not necessarily have to pay. Some might be willing to pay a nominal fee to get out into the rice fields, however.

In response to the question, “If there are negative environmental effects from rice farming, how should farmers help to bear the costs?”, the first response was fines. Someone observed that rice farmers are barely making it now. A member of the group distinguished between “known harm” and “an accident.” The perceived appropriate roles for farmers ranged from the farmer apologizing, to the farmer being held responsible for clean-up, to insurance. A lawsuit was not viewed as a good idea, yet the farmer is liable. The group distinguished between medical problems caused by negative environmental effects and nuisance problems only. That is, medical problems are of a more serious nature and should be attended to, while nuisance problems are of lesser severity, particularly if “the farmer was the first!”

A question was posed about this group’s willingness to pay for a food supply produced with no chemicals. Specifically, if they currently spend \$100 per week on groceries, how much more would they be willing to pay for a “safe” food supply (i.e., “no chemicals”)? Someone was willing to pay \$150 per week. Someone else countered that it might not cost as much as they say, and offered \$110 to \$120 per week. No specific parameters for measuring “safe” or “no

chemicals” were given. A baseline of \$100 per week was offered, but the increments of \$150 and \$110-\$120 were responses to an open-ended question.

In response to a question about federal government programs to support rice farming, the general notion was expressed that “subsidies are great for domestic consumption, but not for exports.” Someone offered, “We support worse things!”

This group of Houston citizens liked the idea of a coalition between rice producers and environmentalists. They suggested that this sort of initiative should be tried in more industries in addition to the rice industry. They would like to see seminars, newspaper articles, and television coverage on Texas R.I.C.E. One participant expressed some skepticism about the positive potential for such an effort, noting that some environmentalists are “hard core.” He related his experience with a neighbor watching him change his oil and antifreeze — “They watch and look, waiting to spot a ‘problem.’” However, they all acknowledge the most likely participants in Texas R.I.C.E. would be “concerned” individuals who would attempt to work together.

Concerning priorities for Texas R.I.C.E., the group was presented with the task of allocating \$1000 among several alternatives. They suggested \$250 should be spent on wildlife, \$500 on water, and \$250 on education of adults. If the question was phrased as splitting the funds between monitoring/research and education, three participants suggested spending 75% on monitoring and research and 25% on education. Five participants suggested spending 75% on education and 25% on monitoring and research. The focal points for monitoring and research efforts should be “ways to help rather than harm the environment.” The EPA was portrayed as being responsible for monitoring water quality, but “the coalition could help.” Education was also seen as important, and Texas A&M University was mentioned as a good source of information.

In responding to a final question regarding environmental issues facing Texas today, extending beyond rice production, the participants listed seven issues:

- Pollution from refineries, especially carbon monoxide. Research linking this pollution with brain cancer was mentioned;
- Ozone layer;
- Air pollution (two votes);
- Water waste;
- Tearing trees down;
- Contamination of groundwater; and
- Noise pollution.

Participants in this focus group said they enjoyed talking about agriculture and specifically rice production. Several have participated in other focus groups for market research, and they said they liked learning about rice. Rice recipes and free samples of organic rice were sent to the participants in this focus group.

Children Focus Group

June 22, 1995

The children in this group are from the Clear Lake area and surrounding suburbs. The group consisted of a dozen children ages 6-14. When asked what they want to be when they grow up, the responses included; pediatrician (2), paleontologist, doctor, commercial artist, astronaut, district attorney, teacher (2), and archeologist.

The children were asked to name their favorite foods. Three favored fruit, three favored pizza, one liked lasagne, another liked pasta, another liked macaroni and cheese, one liked nachos, another liked seafood, and another liked ice cream. None named rice. When asked about their preferences on where food comes from, one mentioned liking tomatoes from Texas. In response to a question about what percent of their family's income is spent on food, responses ranged from 50% to 85%. About their consumption of rice, three said they do not eat it often. One eats it every day. Another doesn't like rice. Another never eats it. One eats rice once a week, another twice a week. Another mentioned specifically eating rice with Mexican food.

When asked, "What is the environment?" one child responded that it's the area that surrounds us. Another added "the natural resources around us (including man)." These children described environmentalists as people who study the environment, who go out and work in it. They do not see their parents nor themselves as environmentalists.

Regarding factors that affect environmental quality, the children started with the notion that garbage is bad. They worry about the "pollution we're giving off — we're messing everything up!" They see pollution coming from people and from factories. The children said that everyone is responsible for environmental protection. When asked about who is responsible for mistakes (or pollution), they responded "the person who did it." When asked to name some positive factors, the children mentioned people planting flowers and plants. They talked about recycling as well as reducing the amount of trash bought and thrown out.

When queried about the environmental effects of farming, they started with the idea that farmers cut down the rain forest. They talked about spraying pesticides as being bad because it poisons other animals. It gets into water. Pesticides kill animals and hurt fish. However, they recognized that killing bad bugs makes better crops. If farmers mess up the environment in the process of growing food, they are responsible. The children said they are willing to pay "as much more as it costs" to have safe food.

The children were then asked what a farm is and what farmers do. One child responded with, “They grow the food and raise crops.” Another said, “They grow vegetables and crops to make a profit.”

About their experiences visiting farms, one child mentioned a farm in Huckabee with cows. Another visits her grandmother in Eagle Lake frequently. Two children had been to a farm in Louisiana one time. (One specifically mentioned crawfish being raised). Another goes once per year to a cattle farm in Missouri. Another goes twice a year to a farm with rabbits and horses. Another said she had once visited a farm in Kansas. Another’s grandmother lives in Kansas and they visit six times a year. Another has grandparents in Tyler. One child has visited a farm in Livingston with cattle and tomatoes.

When asked what farmers plant, the children said it depends on what is in season and on the weather. They realized that chemicals are used to kill bugs and to fertilize plants. The children thought that farmers decided what chemicals to use depending on what kinds of bugs are present and how many. When asked where rice grows in Texas and other countries, the children mentioned Columbus, Beaumont, China, India, Japan, Mexico, and the Philippines. They knew that there is more cotton than rice grown in Texas. They believe that rice production is growing because it is healthy, but one child mentioned the problem of there being more buildings, resulting in less space for farming.

The children were then asked what affects the number of acres planted. Responses ranged from the soil, to how much rain you’ve been getting, to what month it is. When asked how long it takes to grow rice, they said a month. They said that the right time to plant rice was when it was raining, or in April.

Regarding wildlife associated with rice production, the children specifically mentioned rabbits but they are not sure whether there are more or fewer rabbits in rice fields than elsewhere. Another child suggested that rice fields are good habitat for mice because of shelter and food. However, they wondered whether mice could handle flooded fields. They saw rice fields being good habitat for snakes, for eagles and hawks (eating mice), and for birds, generally speaking. When asked specifically about geese and ducks, they said they did not see rice fields being good habitat for these waterfowl.

The children then discussed uses for water. They listed farmers, cities, swimming pools, and the ocean as competitors for water. When asked where farmers could get water to irrigate their fields, they said that farmers could get water from the cities. They also mentioned rivers, lakes, and streams. They thought that the water that comes out of rice fields would be dirty, because it cleans all the dirt off of the rice. The general consensus was that water quality of water coming out of rice fields would be worse than when it entered the fields.

The children viewed two films about rice production, one produced by the U.S.A. Rice Council and the other produced by the Lower Colorado River Authority and Haskell Simon. The films were favorably received, and the children said they would like to learn more about rice production, either in their science classes or in their social studies classes.

Conclusions

The six focus groups each provided insightful information regarding possible directions and focal areas for Texas R.I.C.E. The results have been communicated to Texas R.I.C.E. leaders via a preliminary draft of this paper and several presentations and informal discussions.

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APPENDIX A

Memorandum to Collaborators

June 2, 1995

MEMORANDUM

**TO: Kelby Boldt
Brad Hutton
James Engbrock
James Stansel**

Glenn Avriett
Johnny Cosper
Marvin Lesikar

FROM: Ed Rister
Amy Thurow

PC: Dale Fritz
Bill Dishman, Jr.
Don Steinbach
Art Gerlow
Roland Smith
John Nichols

Lin Wilson
Steve Balas
Will Cohen
Larry Falconer
Gene Nelson
Ed Smith

SUBJECT: Rice Producer Focus Groups

Thanks to each of you for your willingness to assist us in identifying and inviting rice producers to participate later this month in focus group discussions concerned with rice production and environmental concerns. The West Side meeting will be conducted on Tuesday, June 20, and the East Side meeting will occur on Wednesday, June 21. Our current thinking is the meetings will each begin at 10:30 a.m., and following an approximately two hour dialogue, we will have lunch and the meeting will be concluded. The exact meeting places are yet to be defined, but we should have that information identified and to you by Wednesday [June 14] of next week.

Attached are a few items for your background information and for your use in communicating with the producer(s) you are inviting. As Ed mentioned during his telephone conversations with you, we wish to avoid explicitly mentioning Texas R.I.C.E. during the invitation stage as one of the issues of interest is how aware Texas rice producers are of this organization and its purpose. Attachment A is a brief “Statement of Purpose” you are encouraged to use in discussing the meeting with those you are inviting. It is preferable you use

this information as a resource reference and avoid distributing it to the producer(s) you invite. The rationale behind that preference is that we want the producers to respond with spontaneity to a range of questions, without much prior preparation. Our style of facilitating the meeting will be such that a set of very simple open-ended questions will prompt more in-depth probing as the meeting proceeds. That is, one can not prepare for the meeting nor do we want “canned,” possibly biased, responses. If you feel compelled to having to give your producer(s) something, please constrain that material to the first page of Attachment A.

Attachment B is a “Producer Profile” we want you to complete for each invited participant to facilitate our communicating with them as well as to assist us in assembling a diversified group of producers. Once a producer commits to participating, please consult with him/her in completing a copy of Attachment B. In regards to a deadline, receiving a completed copy of Attachment B from you for each invited producer on Tuesday, June 6, or by noon, Wednesday, June 7 is desirable. Meeting this deadline will allow Ed to work with Steve Balas and Bill Dishman, Jr. during the latter part of the week to complete the respective groups. **Fax completed copies to Ed at 409/845-4582.**

As Ed mentioned during his telephone conversation with you, there are no specific individuals we want to include nor are there any specific, “right” answers we are seeking. Rather, we are attempting to assemble a group of rice producers with varied attributes to assure broad representation and awareness of issues. Our objective in conducting these focus groups is to identify the relevant issues and some thought as to the magnitude of each issue’s importance. We are not seeking a consensus nor do we anticipate these groups’ input being the final word on the topic of integrating rice production and environmental concerns. We will keep you informed on the results and plans for subsequent meetings, efforts, etc. We will attempt to schedule a meeting with you toward the end of the summer to that effect.

Thanks again for your assistance. Ed will be talking to each of you next week. **When you have contacted a producer and received his/her willingness to participate, please complete Attachment B and fax a copy back to Ed (409/845-4582).** Best regards.

Attachments

Attachment A to Collaborators' Memorandum
Attachment A
Purpose and Objectives
Rice/Environment Producer Focus Groups
June, 1995

Objectives of Focus Group Interviews — To Be used in Inviting Producers

The purposes of these focus groups are to assess Texas rice farmers' perceptions and/or attitudes in regards to:

- ✓ forming of a coalition between rice producers and environmentalists;
- ✓ the effect of such a coalition on the continued economic viability of the Texas rice industry;
- ✓ conservation work for "green payments";
- ✓ conservation work to enhance public perceptions of the rice industry; and
- ✓ what environmental issues are impacting their operations' profitability [and how].

Resulting information will be used by Texas rice industry leaders in formulating a policy-oriented agenda towards the enhancement of rice producers' continued viability.

Groups' Identity, Invitation Protocol, and Sites

Both an East-of-Houston and a West-of-Houston producer focus group will be conducted, due to perceived major differences in rice production conditions and current and anticipated problems affecting economic viability. Each group will have 8-9 participants.

Within each rice producer focus group, attention will be directed toward securing representation of producers with a diverse set of attributes [selected producers will be targeted

for invitation per the subsequent discussion, taking into consideration these attributes and those already selected for inclusion]. These attributes are designated in no particular order of importance, but rather identify producers' characteristics which may contribute to different perspectives {which are desirable for the focus groups' discussions}.

Land tenure —	landowner, tenant producer
Crop rotation —	rice only, multiple crop
Livestock —	no cattle, some cattle
Age —	<= 45 years old, over 45
Farm size —	“small,” “large”
Leadership —	active in rice organizations, rank-and-file [or non-member]
Water —	surface water, groundwater
Ratoon crop —	yes, no
Environment —	active in conservation programs, “non-active”
“Clientele” —	traditional TAEX audience, lean toward TAES sources

The invitation protocol will be three-phased for each focus group, using the following procedure:

- ☛ **Extension contacts.** Dale Fritz on the “East Side” and Dale and Lin Wilson on the “West Side” have been contacted prior to discussions with three select County Agents in each region to identify three rice producers [one per county] to target for invitation. Ed Rister is working with Dale, Lin, and the county agents. The county agents have been requested to make the direct invitations. Attention will be aimed towards obtaining diversity according to the above-designated attributes as well as any others identified to be of importance.
- ☛ **Research contacts.** Jim Stansel at the Beaumont TAREC has been contacted to identify two-three producers who are active consumers of TAES rice research

products, with no more than one in each region to be a member of any of the following producer boards: TRRF, TRIA, or TRPB [some leadership representation is acceptable, but broader input is sought, recognizing that most of the mentioned boards' members views have several venues for being expressed]. Ed Rister is working with Jim, with Jim to make the direct contacts.

☛ **Producer contacts.** Bill Dishman, Jr. on the East Side and Steve Balas on the West Side have been contacted regarding completing the selection process, taking into account those producers selected through the previously two phases. Again, diversity of representation is the goal. Ed Rister is working with Bill and Steve, with them to make the direct invitations to producers.

So far as sites for the focus group interviews, Bill Dishman, Jr. and Steve Balas are responsible for selecting locations, with a meeting room to be arranged.

Attachment B to Collaborators' Memorandum

Attachment B
Rice Producer Profile

Rice/Environment Producer Focus Group

June, 1995

Focus Group —	East Side	West Side
Selector [your name] —	_____	_____
Selector's # [your #]—	_____	_____
Producer Name —	_____	_____
Mailing address —	_____	_____
	_____	_____
☎ numbers —	<u>Home</u> _____	
	<u>Office</u> _____	
	<u>Fax</u> _____	

ATTRIBUTES:

Land tenure —	landowner, tenant producer _____
Crop rotation —	rice only, multiple crop _____
Livestock —	no cattle, some cattle _____
Age —	<= 45 years old, over 45 _____
Farm size —	“small,” “large” _____
Leadership —	active in rice organizations, rank-and-file [or non-member] _____
Water —	surface water, groundwater _____
Ratoon crop —	yes (%), no _____
Environment —	active in conservation programs, “non-active” _____
“Clientele” —	traditional TAEX, lean toward TAES for rice info _____

East Side Rice Producers' Letter of Invitation

June 12, 1995

FIELD (Name, Address)

Dear FIELD (Name),

Thank you for agreeing to participate in a rice producer focus group session concerned with critical issues affecting the future viability of the Texas rice industry. We will be meeting at Al T's in Winnie (local map attached) on Wednesday, June 21, 10:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. During the last hour of the session, we will have lunch.

There is no homework or background research you need to do prior to this meeting. Please come prepared to respond, in an open-dialogue, discussion-oriented forum, to a series of questions directed towards identifying issues affecting the Texas rice industry's future. Particular emphasis will be directed towards possible advantages and disadvantages of forging a coalition between the rice industry and those with environmental interests. We will also discuss, to some degree, existing and future government policies and regulations.

Again, thanks for agreeing to participate in this focus group session. Your views, ideas, and input are very important and we appreciate your willingness to share them with us. If you have any questions, give Ed a call (O: 409/845-3801; H: 409/690-0180).

Best regards.

Ed Rister

Amy Thurow

Professor-Farm Management
and Production Economics

Assistant Research Scientist—
Natural Resources and Policy

West Side Rice Producers' Letter of Invitation

June 12, 1995

FIELD (Name, Address)

Dear FIELD (Name),

Thank you for agreeing to participate in a rice producer focus group session concerned with critical issues affecting the future viability of the Texas rice industry. We will be meeting at the El Campo Country Club (local map attached) on Wednesday, June 21, 10:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. During the last hour of the session, we will have lunch.

There is no homework or background research you need to do prior to this meeting. Please come prepared to respond, in an open-dialogue, discussion-oriented forum, to a series of questions directed towards identifying issues affecting the Texas rice industry's future. Particular emphasis will be directed towards possible advantages and disadvantages of forging a coalition between the rice industry and those with environmental interests. We will also discuss, to some degree, existing and future government policies and regulations.

Again, thanks for agreeing to participate in this focus group session. Your views, ideas, and input are very important and we appreciate your willingness to share them with us. If you have any questions, give Ed a call (O: 409/845-3801; H: 409/690-0180).

Best regards.

Ed Rister

Amy Thurow

Professor-Farm Management
and Production Economics

Assistant Research Scientist—
Natural Resources and Policy

**Focus Group With Rice Producers—
Notes by Amy Thurow**

1. Objective and ground rules:

The goal today is not to come out agreeing — rather it is to brainstorm as many dimensions of the issue as possible.

Moderator's role: to make sure everyone gets heard and to make sure we allocate the time fairly (egg timer)

2. Most pressing environmental issue affecting profitability:

Go around the table. Make sure each respondent answers both questions and feels heard.

3. Reactions to the general concept of a coalition

Write down each contribution as a pro or con — some will be both. Get as much brainstorming as possible before we get specific about R.I.C.E.

4. Effect on economic viability of rice in Texas

Probe this dimension, building on what was said above.

5. Green payments, public perceptions —> motivators for R.I.C.E.

Probe these dimensions, building on what was said above.

6. R.I.C.E. mission statement

Spend enough time so participants know what the organization is about.

7. Highest priority for R.I.C.E.:

Go around the room — get everyone's "vote"

8. Goal of national Waterfowl Habitat Program

Spend enough time so participants know what the organization is about.

9. Reactions to national initiative

Go around the room — get everyone's "vote"

10. Biodiversity

Reactions, not in-depth probing

11. Endangered Species Act, Coastal Zone management

Reactions, not in-depth probing

12. Most important issue facing ag

Go around the room — get everyone's "vote"

An opportunity to discuss
RICE PRODUCTION & the ENVIRONMENT

Today's objective:

To get this group's ideas on the relationship between rice production in Texas and environmental quality.

Ground rules:

(1) Everyone's opinion gets heard.

Let's try to get all ideas on the table.

It is not necessary that everyone agree.

(2) Differences are important and valuable.

Let's try to listen to everyone's opinion.

Let's try not to debate and argue.

— page break — ³

³

Indicates end of this overhead and beginning of next overhead. Individual overheads consolidated herein to conserve space.

What is the most pressing issue affecting the profitability of your rice operation?

How are you feeling the effects?

— page break —

What is the most pressing environmental issue affecting the profitability of your rice operation?

How are you feeling the effects?

— page break —

What do you think about doing conservation oriented work on your rice farm in order to get “green payments”?

— page break —

What do you think about doing conservation-oriented work on your rice farm in order to enhance public perceptions of the rice industry in Texas?

— page break —

What do you think about the idea of a coalition between rice producers and environmentalists?

Pros:

Cons:

— page break —

What have you heard of the Texas Rice Industry Coalition for the Environment (Texas R.I.C.E.)?

— page break —

Rice Industry Coalition for the Environment

Mission Statement: to build a coalition of interests to foster and strengthen relationships between the rice industry and the natural resources of our rice-producing area in Texas.

- **LEARNING**: identifying major issues of concern impacting the rice industry in Texas, the environment, and the public.
- **RESPONDING**: researching and developing solutions to these issues while continually seeking ways to improve our understanding of the interaction between the rice industry and the environment.
- **COMMUNICATING**: communicating these solutions to all stakeholders, from school children to public officials, about the mutuality of the Texas rice industry and the natural resources of our state.

— page break —

What effect might a coalition between environmentalists and rice producers have on the continued economic viability of the Texas rice industry?

— page break —

What environmental issues or activities do you see as being the highest priority for the Texas Rice Industry Coalition for the Environment (Texas R.I.C.E.)?

— page break —

Rice Producers Waterfowl Habitat Program: A National Initiative

Goal: To promote and expand a partnership between rice producers and the wildlife conservation community and the wildlife conservation community that integrated the conservation and management of migratory birds and other wildlife with economically productive agriculture.

1. Provide information to rice producers on the economic and environmental benefits of rice production practices that provide habitat for migratory waterfowl, shore birds and wading birds.
2. Contribute to the habitat objectives of the NAWMP by encouraging voluntary management practices by rice producers to incorporate habitat management with rice production on one million acres, while maintaining or expanding rice acreage.
3. Demonstrate to the conservation community and the public at large the positive relationship that exists between rice and the conservation and management of migratory birds and other wildlife.
4. Achieve mutual support by all partners for local and national programs that are beneficial to agriculture and/or migratory bird conservation and other wildlife.

— page break —

Advantages and disadvantages:

- Texas R.I.C.E.
- Rice Producers Waterfowl Habitat Program:
A National Initiative

Can these coalition efforts work together?

What is best for Texas rice producers?

— page break —

“BIODIVERSITY”

- What does this concept mean?
- How important is it?
- How can “biodiversity protection” be accomplished? What are the trade-offs?

— page break —

POLICIES AIMED AT PROTECTING ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

The Endangered Species Act of 1973

A Coastal Zone Management plan for Texas

— page break —

Thinking broader than rice production —

What do you see as the most pressing
environmental issue facing Texas agriculture today?

What can be done?

— End of Overheads —

ATTACHMENT B

Questions for Environmental Interests and General Public

An opportunity to discuss RICE PRODUCTION & the ENVIRONMENT

Today's objective:

To get this group's ideas on the relationship between rice production in Texas and environmental quality.

Ground rules:

- (1) Everyone's opinion gets heard.
Let's try to get all ideas on the table.
It is not necessary that everyone agree.

- (2) Differences are important and valuable.
Let's try to listen to everyone's opinion.
Let's try not to debate and argue.

— page break —⁴

⁴

Indicates end of this overhead and beginning of next overhead. Individual overheads consolidated herein to conserve space.

RICE IN TEXAS

Where is it grown?

How many acres?

What is the role of rice-farming in Texas agriculture?

— page break —

RICE-FARMING AND WILDLIFE

In your opinion, what is the effect of rice production on wildlife?

On wildlife habitat?

— page break —

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS FROM RICE FARMING

Water:

Pesticides:

Other:

— page break —

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS FROM RICE FARMING

If there are positive benefits, how can the public help promote rice production?

Who should pay?

- Taxpayers
- Recreationists: users of the benefits

If there are negative effects, how should farmers help to bear the costs?

What is your opinion about federal government programs to support rice-farming?

— page break —

Rice Industry Coalition for the Environment

Mission Statement: to build a coalition of interests to foster and strengthen relationships between the rice industry and the natural resources of our rice-producing area in Texas.

- **LEARNING**: identifying major issues of concern impacting the rice industry in Texas, the environment, and the public.
- **RESPONDING**: researching and developing solutions to these issues while continually seeking ways to improve our understanding of the interaction between the rice industry and the environment.
- **COMMUNICATING**: communicating these solutions to all stakeholders, from school children to public officials, about the mutuality of the Texas rice industry and the natural resources of our state.

What environmental issues and/or activities do you see as being the highest Coalition for the Environment (Texas R.I.C.E.)?

— page break —

“BIODIVERSITY”

- What does this concept mean?
- How important is it?
- How can “biodiversity protection” be accomplished? What are the trade-offs?

— page break —

POLICIES AIMED AT PROTECTING ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

The Endangered Species Act of 1973

A Coastal Zone Management plan for Texas

— page break —

Thinking broader than rice production—

What do you see as the most pressing environmental issue facing Texas agriculture today?

What can be done?

—End of Overheads—

Follow-up Thank You Letter to Environmentalists

July 18, 1995

<FNAME> <LNAME>

<ADD1>

<ADD2>

<ADD3>

<CITY>, <STATE> <ZIP>

DEAR <FNAME>,

We appreciate your participation during June in a round-table discussion concerning potential issues affecting the development of a coalition between Texas rice producers and environmentalists. Your comments and insights will be useful to Texas rice producers and the environmentalists who are working together to improve the coexistence of agriculture and the environment.

We conducted two sessions with rice producers (one on the East Side and the other on the West Side), two sessions with environmentalists (in Houston), one session with a randomly drawn sample of the general public (from the Clear Lake and Texas City areas), and another session with a group of 8-14 year olds from the Clear Lake area. Each session was a success, with many issues common across the sessions, but with participants in each session also providing at least one or more unique ideas/issues to be considered. We are in the process of developing a rough draft of the forum results, with intentions of being ready for limited distribution of a "less rough" draft in early August. We will send you a copy of the report as soon as we are comfortable we have captured the essential elements of what we heard and observed during the forums.

We would not have been able to conduct the forums with as broad a group of representation without your input. Beyond the immediate use by Texas R.I.C.E., we envision the results being useful to us and others in the framing and development of research and education programming at Texas A&M. Thanks again for your assistance. Best regards.

Sincerely,

Amy Thurow
Assistant Research Scientist

M. Edward Rister
Professor-Farm Management

Follow-up Thank You Letter to General Public

July 18, 1995

<FNAME> <LNAME>

<ADD1>

<ADD2>

<ADD3>

<CITY>, <STATE> <ZIP>

DEAR <FNAME>,

We appreciate your participation during June in a round-table discussion concerning potential issues affecting the development of a coalition between Texas rice producers and environmentalists. Your comments and insights will be useful to Texas rice producers and the environmentalists who are working together to improve the coexistence of agriculture and the environment.

We conducted two sessions with rice producers (one on the East Side and the other on the West Side), two sessions with environmentalists (in Houston), one session with a randomly drawn sample of the general public (from the Clear Lake and Texas City areas), and another session with a group of 8-14 year olds from the Clear Lake area. Each session was a success, with many issues common across the sessions, but with participants in each session also providing at least one or more unique ideas/issues to be considered. We are in the process of developing a rough draft of the forum results, with intentions of being ready for limited distribution of a "less rough" draft in early August. We will send you a copy of the report as soon as we are comfortable we have captured the essential elements of what we heard and observed during the forums.

Enclosed are a sample of Texas organic rice and several rice recipes. These items are provided for you by Lowell Farms of El Campo and the USA Rice Council of Houston. Enjoy!

We would not have been able to conduct the forums with as broad a group of representation without your input. We envision the results being useful to us and others in the framing and development of research and education programming at Texas A&M. Thanks again for your assistance. Best regards.

Sincerely,

Amy Thurow
Assistant Research Scientist

M. Edward Rister
Professor-Farm Management

APPENDIX C

Questions for Children

What do you want to do when “you grow up?”

What are your favorite foods?

Where do the ingredients for these foods come from?

Who produces them?

Where are they produced?

How are they produced?

What % of your family’s income is spent on food?

What % of your meals are eaten at home versus restaurants? B L D/S

How often do you eat rice?

Think about where your food comes from — do you have a preference for it to be produced in

Texas
the U.S.
other countries

What is the environment?

What is an environmentalist?

What affects the environment — good & bad?

How does farming affect the environment?

Who is responsible for maintaining/improving the environment?

When the environment is “damaged,” who should pay to correct the problem — those who did the damage, those who benefitted, taxpayers,...?

If it costs more to produce food when “environmentally safe” are used to farm, are you willing to pay the extra costs?

What is a farm? What do farmers do?

How often, if at all, have you been on a farm during the last year?

How do farmers decide what to grow and how to grow it? Why do farmers use chemicals?

What crops are grown in Texas?

What crops are grown between Clear Lake &

- Victoria

- Beaumont

- College Station

Let's look at one particular crop — rice

Where is it grown in Texas?

How much is grown — are there other crops with more acres?

Is Texas rice production increasing or decreasing?

What affects the number of acres of rice planted in Texas each year?

Think particularly about rice farming — how does it positively/negatively affect the environment?

Think about each of the following — how are they impacted by rice farming

- rabbits
- mice
- snakes
- eagles, hawks
- coyotes
- deer
- blue jays, cardinals
- geese and ducks
- water quantity
- water quality

Let's watch some films -

What are your impression — do you want to change any of your previous answers?

During school, do you ever address any of the issues we have discussed today?

If so, which classes?

Either way, are you interested in learning more?
How?