

## **FSN FORUM DISCUSSION**

### **IMPROVING RICE PRODUCTION IN AFRICA**

There is an interesting debate about rice in Africa, prompted by the Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) partnership with the Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) initiative currently being rolled out.

This initiative relies mainly on the NERICA rice variety, devised by crossing Asian and African native rice strains. NERICA is not a genetically engineered rice variety but while it has some distinct agronomic advantages, including higher yield, better control of weeds etc, it also has some downsides such as promoting this practice while neglecting or sidelining other varieties of crop or practices of agronomy that may also offer future advantages in feeding Africa. Nevertheless NERICA has already shown some notable successes in several West African nations, where most of the continents' rice is grown.

There are other initiatives which should also be investigated and experimented with in the region. One such is the SRI, or system of rice intensification, devised by a Jesuit priest in Madagascar in the 1970s and 80s. This system has increased rice yield from around 2 tonne per hectare to around 8 tonnes per hectare in various climate zones, all while reducing water demand. There is more on SRI at these addresses - <http://ciifad.cornell.edu/SRI/origins.html> and <http://www.springerlink.com/content/vg37m54225284510/>

It would be irresponsible for researchers to concentrate on methods of food production that hold as yet unquantified risks while failing to investigate and perhaps incorporate other equally fecund opportunities in developing the agricultural potential of Africa and elsewhere.

Best

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