



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – December 6, 2011

CONTACT: Stacy Fitzgerald-Redd, (703) 236-1458, sfitzgerald-redd@usarice.com

USA Rice Federation Statement on Arsenic in Rice

ARLINGTON, VA -- U.S.-grown rice is safe to eat.

Recent media stories based on prior studies looking at arsenic content in rice are once again unnecessarily increasing public concern. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration continually monitors the U.S. food supply through their Total Diet Study including rice and rice products to assure food is safe. Current science points to rice as a healthy and nutritious food that contributes only a minor amount of arsenic to the human diet.

Arsenic is an element that is naturally present in the environment in soil water, air and food and humans have been exposed to trace levels of it in their foods for thousands of years. Assertions about high levels of arsenic in U.S. rice are not new, nor are they accurate.

There are no scientific studies that have linked U.S. rice consumption to adverse health effects, nor have arsenic-related health effects been reported among populations with high rice consumption, such as in Japan, where the average consumer eats five times the amount of rice that Americans consume annually.

The majority of the arsenic found in rice is the naturally occurring organic type, which is of less concern. A recent study claiming that pregnant women who ate one-half cup rice daily consumed arsenic at levels comparable to drinking four and a quarter cups of water a day (approximately 1 liter/day) containing arsenic at the maximum allowable level set by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), is misleading. The study does not detail that the arsenic found in water is 100 percent inorganic, which is harmful when ingested in large amounts, whereas the majority of the arsenic in rice is the organic type. Arsenic exposure from rice is considerably less than from drinking water at the federal standard of 10 parts per billion (ppb) based on 2 liters per day. Additionally, though the drinking water standard for arsenic has been lowered from 50 ppb to 10 ppb, this action was not based on evidence of ill health effects in U.S. populations consuming water with greater than 10 ppb arsenic. Moreover, unlike some other metals, arsenic at lower doses has not been associated with adverse effects to unborn children. Therefore, implications that arsenic exposures below the drinking water standard are a concern for unborn children are misleading and groundless.

Rice is a nutritious food that is fortified with folic acid, which has helped contribute to a reduction in some birth defects in infants. It is a basic staple in the diet around the world and for many American consumers. In addition, U.S. rice has been produced and consumed in the United States for more than 300 years and has never been linked to adverse health effects. The safety of U.S.-grown rice remains a top priority for the U.S. rice industry. USA Rice Federation supports FDA efforts to provide clarity to this situation.

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The USA Rice Federation is the global advocate for all segments of the U.S. rice industry with a mission to promote and protect the interests of producers, millers, merchants and allied businesses.

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