



## Rice in Piedmont

More than half of the land and volume of Italy's rice production is in Piedmont. The region holds the EU record, with a concentration of rice paddies around Vercelli and Novara extending into the territories of Biella, the Casale area of Monferrato and even Turin and Cuneo. People passing through the rice growing area in spring months cannot fail to be fascinated by the expanse of water reflecting the villages in the lowlands. In summer the scene changes: the bright green of young rice shoots dominate the summer days in the countryside. Then in September the colour changes again: by then the ears have ripened and form immense expanses of warm, golden colours.

This cereal is not only important economically in Piedmont but also from a historical, environmental and scenic standpoint. In terms of production, 76 thousand hectares were dedicated to rice growing in 1959, when Italy's statistical office first conducted a crop survey and by the time of the 5th census of agriculture in 2000 the figure had risen to over 110 thousand. Provisional data for the 2005/2006, season shown in the chart below report a regional total of more than 116 thousand hectares.

With over three hundred million kilos of rice cultivated, harvested and transformed, Vercelli is Europe's most important rice market. So it will come as no surprise that there has been a Commodities Market specialised in rice from 1974 in Vercelli.

Provisional data for the 2005/2006 agricultural season		
Province	Crop surface (hectares)	Number of producers
Vercelli	71,854	1,280
Alessandria	7,736	192
Turin	185	10
Cuneo	220	16
Biella	3,917	90
Novara	32,564	650
Average yield in Piedmont is 6,800 kilos per hectare		

### ***Some information about rice***

Rice is a cereal: an annual herbaceous – not woody – plant belonging to the graminacee family. The fruit of rice is a caryopsis and is rich in starch and protein. The caryopsis is dry and doesn't split open spontaneously when ripe. It has one seed wrapped in a thin, dry sheath. The nutritional value of rice depends on the variety (Baldo, Carnaroli, Lido, etc.), the environment in which it grows and the way it is processed. Apart from its primary function as a noble foodstuff from a nutritional standpoint, as a product it has other outstanding features. For instance, it remains compact when cooked and can be accompanied by a variety

of condiments. It plays an important role in Italy's gastronomic heritage – 'risotto' is a basic rice dish made together with greens, cheese, or animal and vegetable condiments, a balanced dish and rightly considered part of a healthy diet.

### ***Varieties of rice***

The various varieties of rice are classified on the basis of a number of variables. Generally speaking the different varieties can be grouped into four large families based on the length and shape of the grains of rice.

- Basic or Common rice: particularly suitable for preparing minestrone and desserts.
  - Grains: small and round.
  - Varieties: Balilla, Originario, etc.
- Semi-fine rice: particularly suitable for preparing boiled rice and starters.
  - Grains: medium length and rounded.
  - Varieties: Padano, Rosa Marchetti, Vialone Nano, etc.
- Fine rice: particularly suitable for preparing risotto and as a side dish.
  - Grains: long and slim.
  - Varieties: Europa, S. Andrea, etc.
- Super-fine rice: particularly suitable for preparing risotto and as a side dish.
  - Grains: large and very long.
  - Varieties: Baldo, Carnaroli, Roma, etc.

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