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State of art and perspectives of development of the rice production in Bulgaria

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The production of rice in the country has its traditions of many years, but due to different objective reasons (climate, limited areas of appropriate soils- good for growing of rice) and also subjective ones (continuous reorganization, changes in ownership, etc.) the areas under rice during the last years have decreased and now about less than 20 per cent of the existing 24 700 ha are being used in fact.

Table 1. Size and structure of the rice production meliorative systems in Bulgaria

Areas	ha	%	fit to ha	use %
Plovdiv	17 600	71,26	15 000	71,40
Pazardzik	5 500	22,27	4 670	22,20
Stara Zagora	1 000	4,04	850	4,04
Yambol	600	2,43	500	2,36
Total	24 700	100,00	21 000	100,00

It was found from the studies carried out that at the present stage about 85 per cent of the established rice production irrigation systems can be used. According to the developed prognoses about 13-14 th. ha should every year be cropped for meeting the country's needs of rice. It is known that growing of rice alternately with other crops is a preferable practice and the crop- rotations are very important in the existing technology. The rice share in the crop- rotations used under our conditions is ranging from 65 to 70 per cent, or Bulgaria has all the areas available necessary for realizing its self-sufficiency.

Because of the rice crop particular requirements regarding the water and heat regime, the production of rice is concentrated in South Bulgaria, especially along the valley of Maritza, Stryama, Topolitza and other rivers, i.e. in the Plovdiv and Haskovo regions.

Table 2. Areas, Production and average yields of rice by regions

Regions	Average for the period 1985-1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Areas- ha								
Total including:	13290	8203	4525	3119	827	1700	3690	4701
Plovdiv								
Haskovo	12090	7310	4525	3119	827	1700	3490	4321
	1290	893	-	-	-	-	200	380
Production-tons								
Total including:	47240	20800	14500	10900	3100	6400	16774	21041
Plovdiv								
Haskovo	43501	19100	14500	10900	3100	6400	15914	19445
	3739	1700	-	-	-	-	860	1596
Average yields- kg/ha								
Total including:	3 555	2 536	3 204	3 495	3 748	3 765	4 545	4 480
Plovdiv								
Haskovo	3 598	2 613	3 204	3 495	3 748	3 765	4 560	4 500
	2 898	1 904	-	-	-	-	4 300	4 200

The average size of the areas is 13 000 ha for the period 1985-1990. After 1990 the areas under rice decrease considerably to 827 ha in 1994, or 6.22 per cent towards the period 1985-1990. The production of rice decreases from 47 000 to 3 000 tons with almost unchanged average yields. Since 1990 up to now it has not been registered such a low level of production.

These consequences are resulting from a complex of factors, the most important of which are:

- ❑ Most of the areas which are good for rice growing are given back to their owners, who have no available the necessary funds and resources and also the due knowledge and experience in the field of agriculture for the put these land under rice;
- ❑ It is too costly to maintain the paddy- fields in good condition, which is almost impossible under the present economy and financial situation in the country;
- ❑ Using the paddy- fields is adjusted to large sized farms;
- ❑ As a result of a long time unutilization, the paddy cells, as well as the meliorative and draining systems of canals are too neglected and their reconstruction would entail considerable funds;
- ❑ It could be observed a considerable dislevelling in the paddy cells;
- ❑ Some important links of the rice growing technology are also being broken (a wrong crop-rotation, inappropriate already degraded varieties, a lack of specialized machinery, etc.);
- ❑ The low purchase prices and the high cost price, which is first of all due to the higher price of water, are also factors of considerable importance (about 35-40 per cent of the rice cost price fall to the water consumption);
- ❑ Inadequate import- export balance.

The figures for the last three years in Table 2 show an evident change. The areas under crop during 1997 were 5 times more as compared to 1994. It might be as well this favourable trend to keep moving from the present level, for the production of rice, which has always been a more profitable sector as compared to the rest cereal crops to start gradually picking up.

The analysis of the Bulgarian rice production state of art suggests relatively good prospects of its further development. This statement is based on the positive, even though insignificant trends of picking up the growing of this profitable crop.

The market demand and the consumers' preferences to the traditionally high quality rice produced in Bulgaria are factors which are stimulating the material incentive to production of rice.

The introduction of new modern high-yielding early varieties which with observing the due technological requirements are giving high-quality and competitive on the home and foreign markets production will lead to picking up the rice production in Bulgaria and to bringing it to a level close to that of other European countries.

In the country there are opportunities of expanding the production of rice through enlarging the areas, and also through increasing the average yields.