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# BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

## 6 Minute English

### Should we eat less rice?



This is not a word-for-word transcript.

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**Neil**

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

**Beth**

And I'm Beth. Neil, what type of foods do you often eat?

**Neil**

Well, basic things that fill me up – that's sort of bread, potatoes.

**Beth**

Well, food like this, which is regularly eaten by many people, is known as a staple. In Britain, bread is a popular staple, but for large parts of the world there's another food which is number one: rice.

**Neil**

That's right. Over half the world's population eats rice as the staple food, especially in Asia. But rice is a very 'thirsty' crop which needs lots of water to grow, and this is becoming a problem because of droughts and flooding caused by climate change.

**Beth**

In this programme, we'll be hearing about a pioneering new technique helping farmers to grow rice in the face of a changing climate. As usual, we'll be learning some useful new words and phrases, and remember you can find all the vocabulary from this programme on our website, [bbclearningenglish.com](http://bbclearningenglish.com).

**Neil**

But first I have a question for you, Beth. Just now I mentioned that rice is a very 'thirsty' crop – so how much water is needed to grow one kilogram of rice? Is it:

- a) 1,000 to 3,000 litres?
- b) 3,000 to 5,000 litres? or,
- c) 5,000 to 7,000 litres?

**Beth**

I'm going to say c) 5,000 to 7,000 litres.

**Neil**

Well, we'll find out the correct answer at the end of the programme. Dr Yvonne Pinto is Director General of the International Rice Research Institute, or IRRI for short, based in the Philippines. Here she explains more about the global popularity of rice to BBC World Service programme, The Food Chain:

**Dr Yvonne Pinto**

Between 50 and 56 percent of the world's population rely on rice as the principal staple. Now, that's roughly about four billion people, and it is one of those **commodities** that is grown really extensively, particularly in South Asia and Southeast Asia. But increasingly the **appetite** for it is growing in continents like Africa, and of course there are also Latin American and European rice **varieties**.

**Beth**

Rice is a **commodity**, a produce that can be bought and sold. Like other crops, rice has varieties – different types, for example brown rice, long-grained rice or basmati. Much of the research into rice today is focused on making new **varieties** that can adapt to the changing environment and grow in conditions of either too much or too little water.

**Neil**

Over half the world's population eats rice and there's a growing demand in Africa and Europe too, so clearly there's an **appetite**, a strong desire, for rice worldwide.

**Beth**

So, is it possible to grow rice in a more eco-friendly way? Jean-Philippe Laborde, director of rice company, Tilda, thinks the answer lies in a new growing technique called Alternate Wet Drying, or AWD for short.

### Neil

To grow rice, farmers go through cycles of flooding their fields, or paddies, which then dry out and need to be flooded again. With AWD, measuring pipes are placed 15cm underground so that farmers can check water levels at any part of the field. Normally, rice needs 25 cycles of flooding and drying out to grow, but using AWD this is reduced to 20 cycles, saving farmers water and reducing methane emissions. Here's Jean-Philippe Laborde, telling Ruth Alexander, presenter of BBC World Service's, The Food Chain, how he began his AWD experiment with farmers in India:

### Jean-Philippe Laborde

We've **got**, last year, 1,268 farmers **on board** applying this AWD technique to reduce the overall methane emission.

### Ruth Alexander

And how did you persuade those farmers to **give it a go**?

### Jean-Philippe Laborde

That was quite challenging because obviously the main challenge is, for farmers, the apprehension to lose revenues. They need to see **tangible** results at the end of the crop... that they're getting obviously something better.

### Neil

Many Indian farmers **got on board** with Jean-Phillipe's experiment. If you **get on board** with something, you agree to a plan of action and get involved. In other words, you **give it a go** – you try doing something to see if it works.

### Beth

As it turned out, the new technique produced **tangible** results, results which are real and measurable. Using AWD, the amounts of water and electricity needed to grow rice decreased, methane gas emissions reduced, and on top of that, the

amount of rice yielded increased... Right, Neil, isn't it time you revealed the answer to your question?

**Neil**

I asked how many litres of water are needed to grow just 1 kilogram of rice, and the answer was 3,000 to 5,000 litres so thirsty, but not as thirsty as you thought.

OK, let's recap the vocabulary we've learned in this programme, starting with **commodity**, a product, like rice, that can be bought and sold.

**Beth**

**Varieties** of something are different types of it.

**Neil**

If there's an **appetite** for something, there's a strong desire or demand for it.

**Beth**

If you **get on board** with an idea or a plan, you agree to do something and get involved with doing it.

**Neil**

To **give it a go** means to try doing something.

**Beth**

And finally, the adjective **tangible** means real and measurable. Once again our six minutes are up. If you've enjoyed this programme, why not try practising the new vocabulary you've learned with our worksheet – it's available to download now from our website, [bbclearningenglish.com](http://bbclearningenglish.com)... and you could also try out the quiz while you're there! Goodbye for now!

**Neil**

Bye!

## **VOCABULARY**

### **commodity**

a raw product that can be bought and sold

### **varieties**

different types of one thing

### **appetite**

strong desire or demand

### **get on board**

agree to do something and get involved with doing it

### **give it a go**

try doing something

### **tangible**

real and measurable; not imaginary