FAQs

The Sustainable Rice Platform

Helping smallholders, protecting the environment

Sustainable Rice Platform

Rice plays a critical role in global food security and provides livelihoods for over 140 million smallholders in developing countries.

1 Why was the SRP created?

More than 3.5 billion people depend on rice for their staple; for hundreds of millions of smallholder farmers in developing countries, rice is their only protection against penury and starvation. While sustainable production and trade have been addressed for a number of higher-value commodities, until recently rice has been neglected, despite its critical importance for global food security and climate change. Over the last 50 years demand has grown at 2.3% p.a . Together, rising per capita consumption and a growing population have more than trebled global rice consumption over this period.

However, with demand for rice set to grow significantly by 2050, supply growth is lagging and cannot keep pace with an expanding global population. Urbanization and industrialization add further to the pressure to grow more from a declining agricultural resource base. This expected supply shortfall poses serious challenges to food security at global as well as national levels.

At the same time, environmental concerns underscore the need for action to enhance resource efficiency and reduce the environmental footprint of rice systems. Rice production uses more than 30% of the world's irrigation water and is responsible for 5 - 10% of global methane emissions.

Clearly, ensuring economic, environmental and social sustainability both on the farm and throughout the rice value chain, presents critical development challenges. What can we do to enhance productivity and efficiency not only at farm level, but for all rice value chain actors, at the same time protecting our environment and enhancing smallholder livelihoods?

The Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP) was launched to promote adoption of sustainable climate-smart best practices, while protecting the environment by boosting the use efficiency of resources such as water and agrochemicals. As a global multi-stakeholder alliance among private, public, civil society, research and producer organizations, SRP and its members are collaborating to drive a transformation toward a more viable global rice sector- improving smallholder livelihoods, reducing environmental/ climate change impacts and enhancing food security.

2 Who initiated SRP?

The SRP (www.sustainablerice.org) was co-convened by United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP; www.unep.org) and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI; www.irri.org) and launched in December 2011 as a global multi-stakeholder partnership open to governments, international agencies and development partners, the private sector, research institutes, non-profits and producer groups. Today, the SRP has 30 institutional members, including UNEP, IRRI, government agencies, private-sector actors, research institutions, and not-for profit organizations. The SRP Secretariat is hosted in Bangkok by UNEP's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

3 What are the SRP's mission and objectives?

The SRP pursues public policy development and voluntary market transformation initiatives to provide private, nonprofit and public actors in the global rice sector with sustainable production standards, indicators, capacity building and outreach mechanisms. These mechanisms contribute to increasing the global supply of affordable rice, improved livelihoods for rice producers, and reduced environmental impact of rice production. The mission is as follows:

"to promote resource efficiency and sustainability in the global rice sector through an alliance that links research, production, policy making, trade, and consumption."

The SRP promotes resource-use efficiency and climate-change resilience in rice systems, both on-farm and throughout the value chains. SRP's overall objective is to promote a more viable rice sector with high impact on poverty reduction and food security and a reduced environmental footprint. Its three specific objectives are to:

- develop a context-dependent modular standard for sustainable rice production and processing (including decision-making tools and quantitative-impact indicators).
- leverage supply chain mechanisms and public policy development to develop and promote outreach models that foster large-scale adoption of sustainable best practices.
- establish a global knowledge hub to promote sustainability in the rice sector, with broad participation from value chain actors, public and private sectors, as well as research and non-profit organizations.

4 What is SRP's governance structure?

The SRP's activities are coordinated by a Secretariat, currently hosted by UNEP's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok, and overseen by an Advisory Committee chaired by UNEP and co-chaired by IRRI. The organization meets in plenary on an annual basis to elect Advisory Committee members, review progress and approve annual programmes and budgets.

Organizations are invited to participate in the SRP by committing themselves to comply with the guiding principles and associated practices, and to contribute actively to the SRP's activities, either financially or in-kind.

5 How is the SRP funded?

The SRP's core activities are funded through annual membership dues levied on corporate members. Dues are waived for public sector, research and not-for-profit organizations. However, in-kind contributions are expected from all members in lieu of cash contributions.

Project activities are funded partly from funds raised by member subscriptions, and also from institutional project funding via bilateral institutions and governments. The SRP is currently planning a significant upscaling to drive wide-scale adoption.

6 Why do we need a rice sustainability standard?

The SRP Standard supports two objectives:

To promote improvement: The SRP recognizes that improving sustainability performance is a journey that itself deserves recognition. However, improvement must be ongoing in order to maintain a claim of improvement.

To define what is sustainable: In addition to allowing users to claim that rice is "sustainably cultivated, the Standard offers a clear definition of sustainability in line with international norms. It can be the basis for enhanced assurance in supply chains and most importantly, as a benchmark for policy making.

7 What is the standard?

The SRP has articulated the critical need to address sustainability challenges in the rice sector, and has established a science-based foundation for action. The SRP Standard for Sustainable Rice Cultivation is the world's first voluntary sustainability standard for rice. The Standard allows objective assessment and benchmarking of the level of compliance of any rice production system, enabling field and policy interventions to be focused and tailored to local needs. The Standard's 46 requirements are structured under 8 themes, each aimed at achieving a desired impact (see Table below).

Requirements in the Standard	Impacts (SRP Guiding Principles)
Productivity	Improve livelihoods of current and future generations of rice growers
Food safety	Meet consumer needs for food security, food safety, and quality of rice and rice products
Water, nutrients, pesticides	Manage natural resources efficiently
Biodiversity	Protect the natural environment from disruptive effects
Community	Protect neighboring communities from disruptive effects and contribute to their development
Greenhouse gas emissions	Mitigate emissions and adapt production systems to a changing climate
Health and safety, labor rights, child labor	Respect labor rights and promote the well-being of workers
Not applicable	Conduct business with integrity and transparency

By incorporating a scoring system, the Standard also allows for stepwise improvement in order to encourage and reward progress toward full compliance. Most requirements within the Standard have several possible levels of performance to allow its use for both assessment and as a directional improvement tool to encourage and reward adoption by farmers. Following field validation, the Standard will serve as a basis for verification in supply chain governance and as an input for policymaking.

8 What are the performance indicators?

The Standard is supplemented by a set of 12 quantitative Performance Indicators:

Profitability: net income from rice	Nutrient-use efficiency: P
Labor productivity	Pesticide-use efficiency
Productivity: grain yield	Greenhouse gas emissions
Food safety	Health and safety
Water-use efficiency: total water productivity	Child labor
Nutrient-use efficiency: N	Women's empowerment.

The indicators enable objective evaluation of the sustainability of any rice system. By establishing a benchmark, the indicators allow us to monitor the effect of adoption of recommended best practices promoted under the Standard, as well as the effects of other interventions such as farmer training.

Following field validation, the Indicators will offer a foundation for building an evidence base to measure the effectiveness of recommended practices, and also as a basis to develop sector-wide benchmarks.

9 Who are the target groups and how will they benefit?

The Standard and Indicators have been designed for use by policymakers, extension agencies, farmer organizations, supply-chain actors and development practitioners, as well as by researchers, to promote widespread farm-level adoption of climate-smart sustainable best practices. By promoting compliance among producers, supply-chain actors benefit from reduced supply risks and market confidence. The Standard also offers companies a route to meeting corporate commitments to sustainable sourcing.

Ultimately, farmers will benefit directly through reduced input costs, improved stability of production, greater market access, and enhanced livelihoods. By improving management of farm chemicals, compliance will also contribute to public health, diversity and integrity of agroecosystems and environmental health. Finally improved water management in irrigated rice can make a significant contribution to mitigating climate change.

10 What incentives can encourage farmers to adopt best practices?

The ongoing field validation work will help us understand the benefits to farmers, and the economic value they derive from adoption of sustainable best practice. By taking guidance from the standard, farmers can optimize input efficiency while maintaining yield and net profits. Other incentives will be explored depending on local policy and market contexts.

11 How will it drive sustainability at all levels of production?

The standard offers an objective means of benchmarking and comparing the sustainability of any rice production system. It allows farmers, managers, researchers and extension workers to focus field interventions and training more effectively and to tailor them to actual needs.

12 How will SRP scale up production?

As well as serving as a basis for certified value chains, the Standard provides a definition of sustainability, which can be used to support policy-making. In its capacity as Chair of the SRP, UNEP also supports several national-level proposals to scale up climate-smart rice production using the Standard. These are funded through the Global Environment Facility.

13 How is the standard being validated in the field?

The current Standard is intended as a practice-based instrument that will be validated through an extensive multi-country programme of farmer field trials. So far, pilots are planned in Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Thailand, Vietnam, and Uganda. There is also interest from Latin America. Some of the pilots are already operational; the rest will commence in early 2016. The findings of the validation programme will be used to revise the Standard and Indicators. It is anticipated that the revised Standard will stipulate targets and voluntary and mandatory levels of compliance for each requirement.

14 What about crop protection and GMOs?

The SRP Standard seeks to address issues of immediate and practical concern to smallholders in developing countries, such as productivity, food safety, resource use efficiency, social conditions and biodiversity. The eight themes of the SRP Standard were prioritized through extensive stakeholder consultation to address prevailing farm practice among rice smallholders.

Guideline 19 of the Standard covers crop protection. The Standard recommends adoption of integrated management practices, combining chemical and non-chemical methods to effectively control weeds, pests, and diseases while minimizing health and environmental risks. This approach allows farmers to use modern tools of crop protection and also provides careful guidelines for when and how these tools can be used. Additional provisions on genetic modification are not currently needed since GM rice has not been released commercially anywhere in the world. SRP will regularly review and update all requirements of the Standard in light of technological innovations.

15 Who are the main actors involved in developing the standard and indicators?

The Standard and Indicators were developed collaboratively by SRP members, led by UTZ Certified, Aidenvironment and IRRI, following broad stakeholder consultation, both internal and external, and draws lessons from global experience in establishing other sustainable commodity initiatives such as cotton, coffee, and palm oil.

16 What's next?

The SRP aims to offer the global rice supply chain a proven system of modular sustainability standards, technology packages, tools, and impact indicators as well as innovative incentive mechanisms to drive wide-scale smallholder adoption of sustainable best practices in key rice-producing countries. The final Standard is intended to serve both as a basis for supply chain governance and as input for policymaking and farmer extension programmes.

17 Where can I find the standard and indicators documents?

The standard and indicators documents are publicly available through the SRP website:

www.sustainablerice.org

For further information or to participate in the SRP's work, contact:

Wyn Ellis
UNEP / SRP Coordinator
Tel: + (66 2) 288 1801
Email: Secretariat@sustainablerice.org
Web: www.sustainablerice.org

James Lomax
Programme Officer (food systems and agriculture)
UNEP DTIE
Tel: + (33 1) 44 37 14 37
Email: James.Lomax@unep.org

Satwant Kaur
Regional Information Officer
UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
Tel: + (66 2) 2882127
Mobile: + (66 8) 1 700 1376
Email: satwant.kaur@unep.org

Rona Azucena
Communication Specialist
International Rice Research Institute
Laguna, Philippines
E-mail: r.azucena@irri.org
Tel: + (63 2) 580 5600 or + (63 49) 5362701 (ext 2359)

www.sustainablerice.org