



SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION OF ORGANIC AND FAIRTRADE RICE IN INDIA AND THAILAND

A model for sustainable development in collaboration with the private sector – benefiting people and planet!

Coop, Reismühle Brunnen, Helvetas and their partners support smallholders in India and Thailand to convert their rice-based production systems to sustainable organic farming. Farmers can improve and diversify their incomes while managing natural resources in a more sustainable way. They receive fair prices for their products and are enabled to invest in their future development. The project also strengthens local capacities, quality management and infrastructure.



This project is supported by the
Coop Sustainability Fund.



HELVETAS
Swiss Intercooperation

THE PROJECT AT A GLANCE

Organic production and fair trade of basmati rice enables smallholder farmers to improve their livelihoods while safeguarding the environment. Coop, the second largest retailer in Switzerland, launched an innovative project to support 4'500 family farms in India and Thailand to convert to organic farming and to sell their produce at fair trade conditions. The project already helped farmers to optimize production methods based on the System of Rice Intensification (see box) thus increasing profitability and reducing water consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. Farmers receive support to diversify their production systems and to sell their rotation crops in domestic and international markets. After a successful first phase (2011–2014) the remarkable achievements shall be enhanced and institutional sustainability ensured in a consolidation phase (2015–2017).

HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation implements the project in close collaboration with Reismühle Brunnen, Intercooperation Social Development India and local producer organizations and companies. The involvement of the private sector allows fast progress and ensures that the value chain continues once the project is over. The innovative project set-up creates a win-win-win situation for farmers, businesses and the environment. Consumers get an attractive product with proven positive impact at production level.



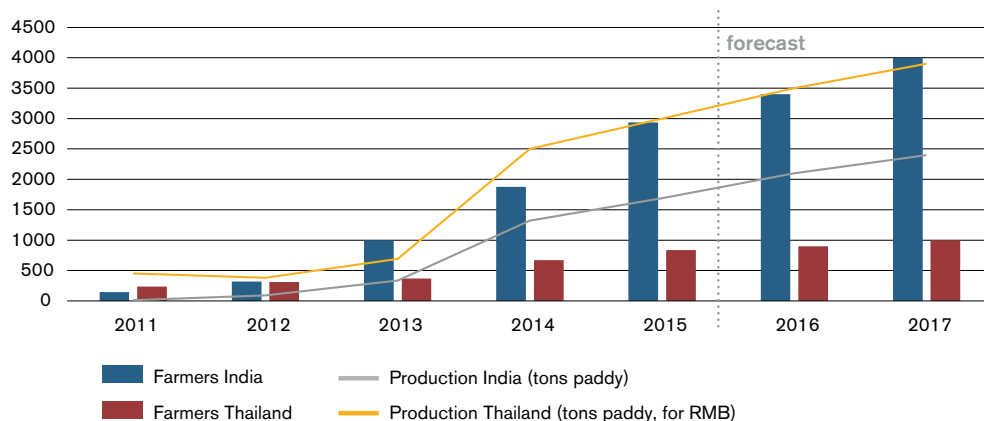
System of Rice Intensification (SRI)

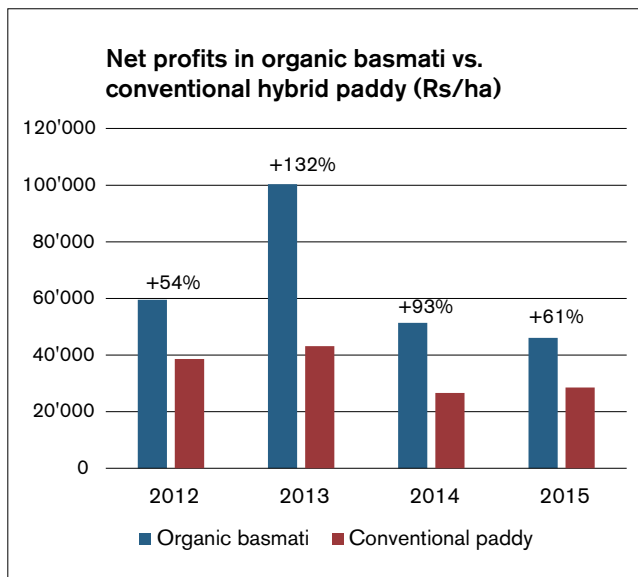
- Single seedlings transplanted at earlier stage with wider spacing
- Alternate wetting and drying instead of continuous flooding
- Mechanic weeding with simple tool

Results:

- More sturdy plants with more tillers, higher yield
- Less damage by pests and diseases, less lodging
- Less costs for seeds and weeding
- Better grain quality, higher milling turnout

Developments in organic rice project in India and Thailand 2011–2015 and prospects 2016–2017





FAIR & GOOD – FOR THE PEOPLE AND

THE PLANET!

The project already achieved significant results at production level (see table). Plot trials at farmer fields and research stations show that the improved production techniques based on the System of Rice Intensification increase yields by 20–30%. At the same time they reduce greenhouse gas emissions and allow more efficient use of the available water. Since 2014 a research project lead by the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in collaboration with GB Pant University of Agriculture and Technology measures greenhouse gas emissions, water use efficiency and nutrient flows in the Indian part of the project.

ORGANIC FARMING AND FAIR TRADE

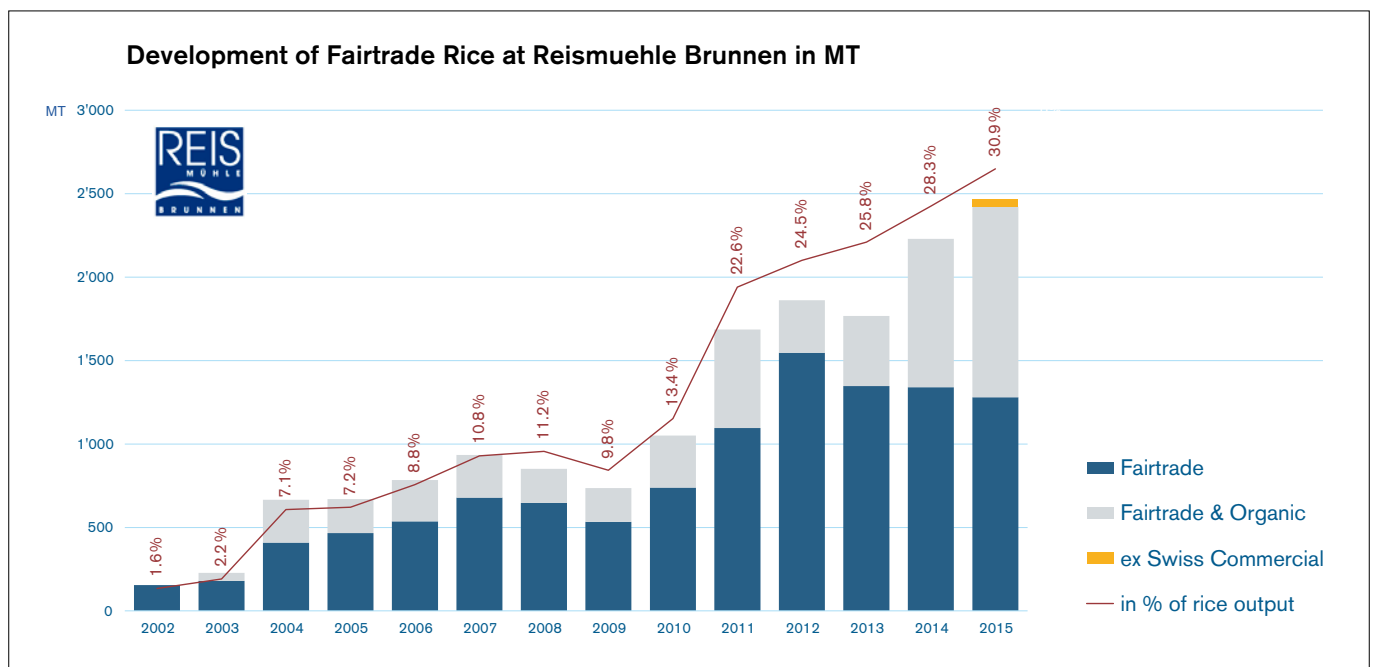
IMPROVE LIVELIHOODS

Lower production costs and higher product prices ensure that farmers who participate in the project earn substantially more than before. Every year the project collects data from representative samples of organic and conventional farms in order to compare their economic performance. The data consistently show that organic farmers gain 30–50% higher net incomes from rice and main rotation crops than their conventional peers do. They diversified their cropping patterns, which has reduced their vulnerability to weather and market price fluctuations. An external evaluation confirmed in 2015 that due to its market-oriented approach the project has successfully established a system of sustainable production and trade while improving the livelihoods of farmers.

Key aspect	Main achievements
Income of farmers	Net profit from rice cultivation 30–50% higher Overall farm income increased by 20–30%
Diversity	More diverse crop rotation improves agro-ecosystems and reduces risks
Sustainable land management	Entire farms managed without chemical pesticides & fertilizers Certified organic (BIO SUISSE standard)
Efficient water use (India)	Water footprint reduced by 30% Higher productivity with the available water
Climate change	Greenhouse gas emissions reduced by 20–30% (in SRI) Improved resilience to adverse weather conditions
Cooperation among farmers	Capacities of farmer organisations strengthened Improved production and water management
Community development	Fairtrade premium used to improve infrastructure and to develop new income opportunities

A VIABLE BUSINESS MODEL

Motivated by the success of the project many farmers are eager to join – more than the project can absorb! One can already observe that conventional farmers increasingly follow the example of their neighbours and adopt organic production techniques. The chosen approach also proved viable for the involved cooperatives and companies. Their turnovers grew considerably which enables them to buy more produce from more farmers. Reismühle Brunnen has become the main supplier of organic and fairtrade rice in the European market and continuously widens its client base.



OBJECTIVES FOR THE CONSOLIDATION PHASE

During the consolidation phase (2015–2017) the project focuses on the following objectives:

- Upscale and consolidate the results of the first phase
- Optimize quality management and business planning processes
- Improve production and market linkages for rotation crops
- Strengthen producer organisations
- Further improve water management
- Support farmers in building biogas plants
- Document and share the experience

MORE INFORMATION

- Helvetas rice project description: www.helvetas.org/rice_project
- www.coop.ch/sustainability
- www.reismuehle.ch
- www.intercooperation.org.in