

Introduction

Download the LearnEnglish Themes podcast. You'll find more information on this page:
<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-podcasts-themes.htm>

This support pack contains the following materials:

- The article that you can listen to in the podcast
- An optional comprehension activity based on the article
- Links to other activities on the LearnEnglish website on this theme (staple foods).

Read the article

Feeding the world – why we need rice

by Claire Powell

Rice is low-fat and high in energy, and you can mix it with just about anything to make a wide variety of tasty nutritious dishes. Ask anyone from any country in the world to tell you their favourite rice recipe and you will get a wide selection, ranging from sushi in Japan to risottos in northern Italy.

Rice is closely connected to the culture of many societies. Hindu and Buddhist religions use rice as a religious offering. Burmese folklore uses rice as a central part of their creation story; the gods gave the first people of Burma rice seeds and directed them to Burma, where the rice would grow well. A Chinese proverb says that 'precious things are not pearls and jade but the five grains, of which rice is the finest.' Chinese myth tells how, after severe floods, there was nothing to eat and the people were starving. One day they saw a dog coming across the fields, and hanging onto the dog's tail were bunches of long yellow seeds. The seeds grew into rice and the people survived.

The origins of rice are uncertain, because rice has been grown for so many thousands of years. In several Asian languages, the words for food and rice, or for rice and agriculture, are the same, one of the facts that points to Asia as the origin of rice. It is certain, however, that rice cultivation is one of the most important developments in history, for rice has fed more people over a longer period of time than any other crop.

The demand for rice is growing steadily, with consumption stretching beyond the traditional rice growing areas in Asia. You can find rice fields in Europe, Latin America and Australia. However, Asia is still the biggest rice producer, accounting

for 90% of the world's production and consumption of rice.

Rice is a staple food for many countries. In parts of Africa and Asia, many poorer urban families get over half their daily calories from rice. As the world population increases, can rice keep up? To meet growing demands, rice production has to be raised by at least 70% over the next three decades. The area devoted to rice cultivation cannot grow, so much international research is being done to find ways of growing rice on less land.

Rice needs a good water supply to grow. Water is wasted daily all over the world and estimates suggest that most Asian countries will have severe water problems by 2025. It takes 5000 litres of water to grow a kilo of rice, yet many rice growing areas in Asia and Africa are drought-prone. Scientists need to develop varieties of rice that can withstand sudden heavy rains and compete with weeds.

Worryingly, rice production is affected by global climate changes. Global warming is caused by toxic gas emissions in developing countries. The rise in global temperature cuts rice-growing time, and ultra violet light radiation from the sun reduces tolerance to disease. Methane gas, one of the culprits of global warming, is, ironically, a by-product of wet lowland rice cultivation. Methane-producing bacteria thrive in wet rice fields and the plants themselves send the gas into the atmosphere. Water management could reduce methane emissions, but practical methods that do not reduce rice yields still have to be found.

After reading**Exercise 1**

For each of the 7 questions below choose the best answer, depending on the information in the text above.

1. Rice is produced
 - a) all over the world
 - b) only in Asia and Africa
 - c) only in China and Japan

2. In Chinese myth, people were saved from starvation by
 - a) a dog carrying rice in its' mouth
 - b) a dog carrying rice seeds on its' tail
 - c) a dog carrying rice on its' tail

3. According to a Chinese saying, rice is
 - a) more important than other grains but less important than pearls and jade
 - b) less important than other grains but more important than pearls and jade
 - c) more important than other grains and more important than pearls and jade

4. 90% of rice is
 - a) eaten in Asia
 - b) eaten and produced in Asia
 - c) produced in Asia.

5. Rice production must increase by 70%
 - a) in the next three years
 - b) in the next thirty years
 - c) in the next three hundred years

6. A by-product of rice production is methane which
 - a) has no effect on global warming
 - b) helps global warming to increase
 - c) stops global warming

7. Global warming means changes in the earths temperatures which
 - a) increases the amount of time rice can grow
 - b) decreases the amount of time rice can grow
 - c) has no effect on the amount of time rice can grow

More activities on this topic

You'll find links to all the following activities connected to the theme of staple foods at:

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-themes-staple-foods.htm>

- **Word games: Staple foods:** Match the names of different types of staple foods to pictures of them.
- **Stories: Rice Bowl Wishes.** A "fabulous, original" Chinese children's story of traditional values with a very strong message.
- **Trivia:** Everything you (n)ever wanted to know about staple foods.
- There is also a staple-foods-related cartoon, and carefully selected external links.

Answers to comprehension activity: 1. a); 2. b); 3. c); 4. b); 5. b); 6. b); 7. b)