



<http://www.agribusinessweek.com/rice-organic-renaissance/>

## Rice : Organic Renaissance

There's another kind of rice that's starting to create waves in urban markets and farmers from the North and South are cashing in on the bandwagon.

Legends tell of ancient grains exclusively served on tables of royalty. Today, these grains are known as heirloom rice in the United States and other parts of the world. Most heirloom rice production is in remote parts of Asia, including Bhutan, Bengal, and the mountain regions of the Philippines. Here, they are simply called, red rice.

### **The rise of the reds**

Red rice is considered to be exotic in America and Europe for their taste, texture and nutritional value. It has a nutty, earthy flavor, and is chewier than the usual white rice. It has a beautiful rosy, russet color.

Red rice should not be confused with brown rice. While almost similar in appearance, brown rice is simply unmilled or partly milled rice. Any white rice can be brown rice, whether they are sticky, long-grain or short grain. On the other hand, red rice is more popularly known as mountain red wild rice because it primarily grows in the uplands and in organic conditions. Conditions that are abundant in Luzon, both in the Northern and Southern provinces.

The province of Kalinga produces the upland rice Unoy, on its scenic rice terraces. Unoy rice is farmed on the indigenous villages of the province where the irrigation system is dependent on rainfall. Unoy rice is purely organic, and is not suffocated by pesticides or inorganic fertilizers. The production for this grain is environmentally friendly as farming conditions are not manmade, wherein farmers follow the wet and dry season cycles in planting Unoy rice.

Unoy rice is harvested and sun-dried manually. The villagers producing Unoy rice follow the Bayanihan tradition of working. Unoy is hand pound, using mortar and pestle that is inherited by the locals from generation to generation.

Traditionally, the red Unoy is always served during festivals and ceremonies to please the Kalinga God "Kabunyan".

Kalinga Organic Unoy Rice Farmers Multi-Purpose Cooperative Chairman Illuminada Calbuyao tells us that farmers of the cooperative harvest Unoy twice a year, at two to three tons of produce per harvest. Aplan farmers harvest in December, and rice terraces farmers harvest in May.

There are over 60 varieties of Unoy rice, but as the influx of hybrid penetrated the region, only eight varieties have been retrieved from remote areas for farming. Locals from the area primarily plant these varieties for their family's consumption and are hesitant to sell the grains as seeds, which would be able to propagate more of the variety.

RICE, Inc executive director Vicky Garcia saw the export potential of Unoy rice. Ms. Garcia invited interested farmers of the Kalinga cooperative and initiated the export of Unoy rice to the United States. At present, the Kalinga cooperative exports to Montana, USA.

Unoy rice is only available in the Philippines in trade fairs and in the Kalinga region as the cooperative farmers are unable to transport the produce to the mainstream market in Metro Manila.

There is an ever-growing demand, and Ms. Calbuyao says that the cooperative needs support to produce the volume necessary to fill the demand-from retrieval of lost varieties to storage to transport, and even in research for the nutritional content of Unoy.

Ms. Calbuyao iterates that Unoy has 16% protein, but that is as far as Montana, USA would divulge from their private research. However, she confidently states that Unoy's anti-aging properties contribute to the strength of the Kalinga native elderly even in their mature age of 90.

### **Forbidden and wild**

In the Southern regions of Luzon, organic farmer Ludwig Weber has been in organic agriculture for 16 years, mainly producing Manchurian Wild Rice, known internationally as Forbidden rice.

Like Unoy farming, Mr. Weber and his farmers follow strict organic principles in their wild rice production. Manchurian wild rice is abundantly farmed in the mountain regions of Bicol. Currently, Mr. Weber, along with his farmers and Bicol's rich soil, produces 40 to 70 tons of Forbidden rice per year from two planting seasons.

"We make our own fertilizers. We believe that we should leave nature on its own. If it's a pest, leave it alone," he says, trusting that the rules of nature will eliminate the weak seeds, garnering a produce that is most beneficial for the farmers and the consumers who expend their produce.

With the sprawling agricultural land and bountiful natural resources, he says, “Ever since I got into agriculture, I learned to love our country.

### **Organic Rice Quick Facts**

Forbidden rice or Manchurian Wild rice is grown in Bicol.

“Only the Philippines has Red rice,” says organic farmer Ludwig Weber. The Kanoros variety is light brown in color.

Mimis is the darker-colored variety of Unoy.

Inowayan is the native name for Unoy malagkit, in white and black and white varieties.

Posted on August 27th, 2008 under [Organic](#), [Rice](#). [RSS 2.0](#) feed. [Leave a response](#), or [trackback](#).

Copyright © 2009 [Agriculture Business Week](#) - All Rights Reserved