



**Rural Weekly - Central Queensland**  
**Friday 22/05/2015**

Page: 5  
Section: General News  
Region: Rockhampton, AU  
Circulation: 29641  
Type: Regional  
Size: 206.00 sq.cms.



**slice**  
CUT STRAIGHT TO YOUR NEWS

press clip

## RICE FARMING NOW A REALISTIC OPTION FOR GROWERS IN REGION

WHILE Mackay's first commercial rice crop is about ready to harvest, Andrew Barfield has trialled different rice varieties for the past seven years.

But it was not until after the Burdekin rice mill was sold to SunRice last year, that the prospect of rice farming became realistically economic for Mackay growers.

"SunRice made a big push for (rice growing). They've provided back-up and advice and been really hands on," he said.

"I've been contracted to research different varieties. I might have up to 10 different ones growing at a time.

"I've tried over 200.

"But very few of them fit the requirements to grow in North Queensland."

Since SunRice bought the mill, rice farming has become popular again in the Burdekin area.

"They used to grow rice a lot in the area until 1991. Sugar cane won out that time, but the balance has almost gone the other way now," Mr Barfield said.

"Farmers have got to stay in the game and rice makes a viable alternative."

The four-month crop would work well in a sugar cane rotation but Mr Barfield warned it would require a new farming skillset.

"People will have to develop a few skills," he said.

"Rice is fertilised at

different times and it has its own special diseases.

"It requires very different management to sugar cane."

But the main contributing factor to a successful outcome would be water.

"The biggest hurdle for farmers would be the irrigation," he said.

"They would have to have good irrigation infrastructure.

"The ground has to be kept wet."

Mr Barfield recommended the low-GI rice to be grown as Mackay's first commercial rice crop because of its consistency.

"It has good reliable tonnage. We are lucky to have a variety that suits the area so well," he said.

The niche market also makes the variety more worthwhile for producers, and Mr Barfield is still trialling different varieties for their suitability.

"I don't think rice will ever dominate the Mackay area, but it will offer opportunity to some growers," he said.

**Rice makes a viable alternative.**

**– ANDREW BARFIELD**



**Rural Weekly - Central Queensland**  
**Friday 22/05/2015**

Page: 5  
Section: General News  
Region: Rockhampton, AU  
Circulation: 29641  
Type: Regional  
Size: 206.00 sq.cms.



**slice**  
CUT STRAIGHT TO YOUR NEWS

press clip



■ TRIAL AND ERROR: Andrew Barfield researches different rice varieties. PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

press clip



Rural Weekly - Central Queensland

Friday 22/05/2015

Page: 5  
Section: General News  
Region: Rockhampton, AU  
Circulation: 29641  
Type: Regional  
Size: 433.00 sq.cms.



slice  
CUT STRAIGHT TO YOUR NEWS

# RICE EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS

## CHINA MARKET OPPORTUNITY

Emily Smith

emily.smith@dailymercury.com.au

NICHE rice markets in China could hold potential for Mackay cane growers.

The region's first commercial rice crop will be harvested as soon as the weather dries up, and agronomist Natalie Fiocco said it had already exceeded expectations.

Both economically and physically, it would make it a viable rotational crop for sugarcane farmers.

"It only has a four-month growing time and it's grown aerobically, not in a paddy system," she said.

"So instead of leaving the paddock fallow for that period, farmers could grow a rice crop instead."

Rice has traditionally been grown in flooded paddies around the world, but it has a shorter growing time and is easier to water when grown aerobically.

The crop introduces silica to the soil and while it will not boost its nutrient levels the way legumes will, it also will not leech a large amount of nitrogen.

"It will need nutrition and herbicide, but they will be made up of a different chemistry of the herbicide used for cane," Ms Fiocco said.

"The stubble (of the rice crop) is silica-rich – that would be good for the soil

structure."

The agronomist said heavier soils were preferable to sandy soils for growing rice because they retained all-important water for the crop.

"Water is what drives the yield, so it is going to need irrigation," she said.

But although the weather was less than ideal for Mackay's first crop due to the dry season, Ms Fiocco was optimistic about rice's potential.

"We think we are going to harvest seven tonnes to the hectare. We needed five tonnes to the hectare to break even," she said.

"So economically it has stacked up, even when we have had a lot of things go wrong."

After it is harvested it will be transported to the Burdekin rice mill and then shipped to China.

Transport to the Burdekin mill will be one of the biggest costs farmers will have to bear.

"But it has a lower harvesting cost compared to sugarcane, so it balances out," Ms Fiocco said.

Although the Walkerston-Homebush Rd crop was Mackay's first commercial rice crop, it has already got other cane farmers thinking.

At a field day recently Ms Fiocco said about 20 farmers showed an interest in

producing the niche rice varieties.

"China holds a lot of potential for niche markets," she said.

"The variety that grows well here is a low-GI variety called Doongara. We couldn't compete with other (more common) varieties.

"We are also looking at fragrant rice varieties, especially one called Topaz. They are becoming really popular in Asia."



## Rural Weekly - Central Queensland

Friday 22/05/2015

Page: 5  
Section: General News  
Region: Rockhampton, AU  
Circulation: 29641  
Type: Regional  
Size: 433.00 sq.cms.



**slice**  
CUT STRAIGHT TO YOUR NEWS

press clip



■ HIGH POTENTIAL: Agronomist Natalie Fiocco inspects rice grain from Mackay's first commercial rice crop, set to be harvested in the next week.

PHOTO: EMILY SMITH



**broadcast clip**

<b>Station :</b>	ABC Tropical North	<b>Program :</b>	06:30 News
<b>Location :</b>	Mackay	<b>Producer :</b>	Mr Jonathan Hair
<b>Aired On :</b>	21/05/2015 6:33:25 AM	<b>Duration :</b>	0 mins 37 secs
<b>Compere :</b>	Colin Wilson	<b>Summary ID :</b>	V00061794301
<b>Demographics :</b>	Male 16+      2600	Female 16+      2800	
<b>Interviewees :</b>	John Markley, Managing Director, Farmacist		

Mackay's first commercial rice crop has been harvested at a cane property west of Mackay. John Markley, Managing Director, Farmacist, hopes the crop will give sugarcane growers in the area a new source of income.





**broadcast clip**

<b>Station :</b>	ABC Tropical North	<b>Program :</b>	08:30 News
<b>Location :</b>	Mackay	<b>Producer :</b>	Mr Jonathan Hair
<b>Aired On :</b>	21/05/2015 8:33:39 AM	<b>Duration :</b>	0 mins 30 secs
<b>Compere :</b>	Colin Wilson	<b>Summary ID :</b>	V00061795938
<b>Demographics :</b>	Male 16+      1000	Female 16+      1400	
<b>Interviewees :</b>	John Markley, Managing Director, Farmacist		

Mackay's first commercial rice crop has been harvested from a cane property west of Mackay. John Markley, Managing Director, Farmacist, hopes the crop will give sugarcane growers in the area a new source of income.



**broadcast clip**

<b>Station :</b>	ABC Southern Queensland	<b>Program :</b>	Qld Country Hour
<b>Location :</b>	Toowoomba	<b>Producer :</b>	
<b>Aired On :</b>	21/05/2015 12:22:01 PM	<b>Duration :</b>	3 mins 21 secs
<b>Compere :</b>	Craig Zonca	<b>Summary ID :</b>	V00061801151
<b>Demographics :</b>	Male 16+      1500	Female 16+      800	
<b>Interviewees :</b>	John Markley, Managing Director, Farmacist		

Zonca says harvesting has begun on the Mackay region's first-ever commercial rice crop. He says the crop is a project by Farmacist who say will give canegrowers in the region a new source of income. John Markley, Managing Director, Farmacist, says the harvest was part of a steep learning curve. He says the harvested rice is going to be transported to a SunRice processing mill in the Burdekin. He says they will plant again in late July or early August.