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Guyana: Rice Production Trends

by Barbara Khol

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In the 1980s, foreign exchange shortages and government price and export controls on rice led many farmers to switch from rice cultivation to cattle raising. Area planted in rice declined from 52,600 ha. in 1981 to 42,500 in 1985, and continued to decline in the late 1980s. Rice output dropped from 165,000 metric tons in 1981 to 85,000 MT in 1990. In 1991, many farmers returned to rice production in response to an economic deregulation program dictated by the International Monetary Fund. Planted area increased to 48,560 ha., and output surpassed 150,000 MT, the highest since 1986. Guyana resumed rice exports last year to Jamaica (10,000 MT), and to other Caribbean nations, including Trinidad and Tobago, St. Lucia and St. Vincent, and the Grenadines. Private rice milling companies, now allowed to export independently of the state-owned Guyana Rice Marketing and Milling Agency (GRMMA), stepped up shipments to the Netherlands and other European nations. Rice ranks as Guyana's fourth most important export, after bauxite, sugar and gold. Revenue from rice exports in 1991 totaled an estimated US\$16 million. At least four of Guyana's largest rice mills have been privatized in the past 12 months. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) contributed to increased output by providing nearly US\$30 million in loans for the purchase of spare parts and machinery. The loan monies were disbursed to private farmers to rehabilitate several run-down smaller mills. A new rice variety has been introduced this year, and is expected to double the average yield. The new variety, IR44624, was developed by local scientists with funding from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI). Officials hope seed production will be adequate for country-wide distribution by next spring. According to Agriculture Minister Vibart Parvattan, at least 8,500 more hectares will be planted in rice, two-thirds on fertile land in the Corentyne region, located near the border with Suriname. (Basic data from Inter Press Service, 01/28/92)

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