

# Fair Trade Rice Slideshow

Below you will find text to accompany the Fair Trade Rice PowerPoint Presentation. Please use it as a guide and not an exact script. Read it over, familiarize yourself with the arguments, make flash cards of statistics if necessary. Feel free to add or remove sections to fit your interests and audience. Time your finalized presentation so that you can tell people how long it will be. During your presentation, try to look at the audience instead of reading from a piece of paper. Engaging your audience in this way will increase their interest in the presentation and make it more powerful.

## **To plan the slideshow presentation:**

### **Set up an event.**

Find a community space (a church, a classroom at school, outside a grocer, your house, etc.) to hold the slideshow or connect it with another event (an Asian cultural night, an abroad program convention, etc.). Try to make the location and time as accessible as possible. For example, hold in near a university cafeteria during a heavy lunch time and allow people to eat while watching.

### **Advertise for the event.**

Create fliers with the date, time, and location of the slideshow. Put ads in local newspapers, bulletin boards, or internet sites. If at a university, tell professors so they can get the word out in their classes.

### **Practice presenting the slide show.**

Review the slide show and text. Change or add things as you see fit to make it your own.

Figure out how you will give the presentation. Do you have hookups for your television from your computer? Do you have a projector? Can you order these things? Can you use just your computer?

### **Table at the event.**

Bring campaign materials and distribute them at the event.

Have a sign-up sheet for people to sign-in with their contact information, asking them if they want to be a part of the Fair Trade Rice Campaign. Use this to set up meetings and hold events in the future.

### **Write letters.**

Before people leave, get them to write letters to national supermarkets.

### **Encourage audience to purchase Fair Trade rice.**

If there are local stores selling Fair Trade rice, be sure to let the audience know and encourage them to buy it in the future. Tell people to ask for Fair Trade rice in the stores that are not selling it.

**Have fun! Let us know how the presentation goes by emailing [fairtraderice@engagetheworld.org](mailto:fairtraderice@engagetheworld.org).**

# The Stories Behind Our Food: Fair Trade Rice from Thailand Presentation Text

## Introduction

**(Slide 1)** This is a presentation about food, the most fundamental component of our every day lives. Most of us usually eat three times a day but it is rare that we take the time to really think about what we are eating, where our food comes from, or who produced it. Take this plate of food **(Slide 2)**, can you guess where each of the ingredients come from? Actually understanding the ingredients in this single plate of food could take us on a journey to over 10 or 20 different regions or countries. This presentation is one of those journeys and in this journey we will look at that rice.

**(Slide 3)** Rice is one of the most fundamental food sources for the population of the world. The UN reports that rice makes up 20% of the world's dietary supply and **(Slide 4)** over 1 billion households worldwide depend on rice production as a source of income. Here in the US, we consume approximately 7 billion pounds of rice a year.

**(Slide 5)** This presentation is specifically about Thailand, the world's biggest exporter of rice, and about Thai rice farmers. I became interested in this topic when/because\_\_\_\_\_.

**(Slide 6)** In Thailand rice is traditionally eaten in every meal and is so fundamental to the and the culture that saying "Lets eat" in Thai translates directly to "Lets eat rice."

**(Slide 7)** This presentation takes the example of Thai rice and the many issues surrounding the trade of Thai rice to explore the questions raised by our food supply. **(Slide 8)** Where does the food we eat come from? Furthermore, who are the people who produce our food and what are their lives like? Lastly, what options do we have as consumers and/or producers to restore understanding and justice into the food we eat?

**(Slide 9)** First we will look at the situation facing Thai rice farmers and then discuss the larger trade issues creating current injustices in the food supply. The last section will detail the alternative of Fair Trade rice and how you can be involved in creating an ethical and sustainable system of trade.

**(Pause)**

## **(Slide 10) Understanding the Source: Background of Rice Farming in Thailand**

To understand the stories behind our food, first we must understand the source; farming. **(Slide 11)** About 80% of rice imported to the US comes from Thailand. Most of these imports are of Jasmine rice, **(Slide 12)** a grain known around the world for its soft texture and sweet smell. Jasmine rice comes from the unique soil and climactic conditions of the northeast of Thailand, known as Isaan. **(Slide 13)** About 68% of agriculture land is used for rice production and over 70% of the population is in agriculture. Farms are small scale and have been passed down for generations.

**(Slide 14)** In Isaan, rice is traditionally cultivated once a year during the rainy season where rice fields flood and then dry out signaling the beginning of harvest **(Slide 15)**. Traditional methods of growing rice in Isaan are low-technology **(Slide 16)** manual planting of indigenous rice varieties and harvesting by hand **(Slide 17)**. Rice has been harvested here for at least 6,000 years making it an integral part of Thai culture, religion, and language. **(Slide 18)** Farmers remember the year of important events, like the birth of their child, by recalling the harvest conditions and offerings are made to the rice g-dess.

**(Slide 19)** Yet much changed during Thailand's period of Agricultural development, known as the Green Revolution. The Green Revolution was initiated by the First National Economic and Development Plan of Thailand in 1961, much of which was taken directly from the advice of the World Bank in a report urging the development of Thailand written in 1959.

**(Slide 20)** The Green Revolution stressed the use of western agricultural technologies- chemical fertilizers and pesticides, modern agricultural machinery like tractors and mechanized harvesters, **(Slide 21)** and the use of high-yielding seed varieties grown in monocrops.

**(Slide 22)** Initially, Thai farmers were given herbicides, pesticides and chemical fertilizers for free with little information about their potential consequences. These new technologies and chemicals doubled world rice production between 1961 and 1990, but didn't provide the promised benefits to small-scale farmers.

Adopting Green Revolution farming techniques requires heavy financial investment from farmers to pay for fertilizers, pesticides, seeds, and new technologies. **(Slide 23)** Meanwhile, the use of these chemical inputs causes the soil to degrade over time meaning that each year's crop requires more inputs to maintain yields. To pay for these extra inputs, farmers take out loans. But because farmers are faced with falling prices for their harvest, many are unable to repay those loans. This creates a cycle of debt. **(Slide 24)** In fact, 61% of landholders in Northeast Thailand are in debt. This debt is about \$700 more than the average income.

In addition to the financial burden caused by the usage of chemicals, **(Slide 25)** water has become polluted and land rendered useless. Also, the widespread use and application of chemical fertilizers and pesticides have led to many farmers developing serious health problems. In fact, **(Slide 26)** the incidence of pesticide poisoning grew over 251 percent a year from 1971-1998.

**(Slide 27)** What we are seeing is the demise of small-scale farming, and the lifestyle it sustains. This disintegration has many widespread social consequences. **(Slide 28)** The debt facing farmers, breaks up Thai families as working-age people migrate to cities to find jobs in construction, **(Slide 29)** factories with sweatshop-like working conditions, **(Slide 30)** and the commercial sex industry. Not only does this strain the cities, it also brings instability and insecurity to rural communities. **(Slide 31)** If you visit a rural village in Thailand you will clearly see these effects because most of the population is elderly and young children. **(Slide 32)** Farming, once the basis of Thai culture and rural life, is falling apart

**(Pause)**

Yet how can this be? Isn't Thailand the world's #1 exporter of rice? Yes. Isn't Thailand one of the emerging "Asian Tiger" economies? Yes. How can the situation for rice farmers in Thailand be so bleak? To answer these questions we have to take the next leap in exploring how the food we eat gets on our plate, we must look at trade. **(Slide 33)**

## **The Global Rice Trade: Un-Fair Trade and Western Hypocrisy**

**(Slide 34 – no images for this section. Talk over white page)**

The global trade of food has drastically changed the way food is produced and consumed throughout the world. Global trade in food has surged in the past 50 years, and we are now able to get food from all over the world, Global trade in food enables us to get things as common to the American diet as coffee and bananas, and as foreign as rambutan, camembert cheese, and hearts of palm. Trade has expanded the global food supply and made it much more complicated.

If we're talking about trade, we might as well start by looking at free trade. Government officials, economics professors, and businesses have been telling us of the supposed benefits of "free trade" for years. Yet when we look at it closely what we see is that free trade is not free and that the international trading system, cloaked in the rhetoric of free trade, is very harmful to people and the environment throughout the world.

According to free trade thinking, governments should get rid of their barriers to trade allowing producers to compete, driving down costs for consumers. Instead what happens is rich countries demand that poor countries get rid of their trade barriers, while rich countries maintain their own trade barriers through massive subsidies to large-scale farmers. This enables rich countries to dump food on poorer countries at artificially low prices that put local farmers out of business.

Let's look at the case of rice. Each year the US spends \$1.3bn in rice subsidies to support a US rice crop that costs \$1.8 billion to grow. These subsidies allow the US to dump 4.7 million tones of rice on world markets at 34% below production cost. These US subsidies put rice farmers in Haiti, Ghana and Honduras out of business, while driving down the cost that rice farmers receive in Thailand. Yet the US government calls this "aid", as much of this dumping occurs through US "food aid" programs.

Furthermore, current trade laws allow rich nations to use their advantages in global research and technology to seize and patent the natural resources of countries in the global south. For example, 70% of the patents granted for genetically modified versions of rice, wheat, maize, soybeans, and sorghum food were held by six corporations headquartered in developed countries. The sovereignty of Thailand's most prized crop, Jasmine rice, is under threat as researchers in the west attempt to invent a high-yielding strain of Jasmine rice which can be grown in the United States.

In 1995, Dr. Chris Deren, a University of Florida researcher, started a research project funded by the USDA to create a Jasmine rice strain suited for US growing and harvesting conditions. This research uses hybridization and gamma ray bombardment to alter Thailand's Jasmine rice.

Current patenting laws are determined by the World Trade Organization's Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights or TRIPS agreement of 1994. It states that plant varieties can be patented after technological alterations have been made. The WTO then recognizes the resulting seed variety as a creation and therefore rightful possession of the creator. However, farmers who have spent generations selectively saving the best seeds from their crops and cross-pollinating different strains cannot claim patent rights to these varieties because they are considered a "natural" species.

So Chris Deren could patent American Jasmine without sharing any benefits with Thai farmers or receiving prior consent, but Thai farmers have no rights over the seeds they have bred for centuries. Moreover, if Jasmine rice was patented by any genetic engineer or business, Thai rice farmers could be forced to buy the seeds they have been cultivating freely for generations. In this way, international trade rules clearly favor richer nations with economic and technological resources.

Even the names of our food are the subject of international trade posturing and power politics. One way for Thailand to prevent the biopiracy of Jasmine rice would be to secure Geographical Indicator status, which declares a species and its name as a unique result of its geographical conditions. For example, for sparkling white wine to be sold as Champagne it has to come from a specific region of France. However, Jasmine rice is currently denied such a status because the US ruled that the name Jasmine is generic and does not relate to a specific aromatic rice strain. So companies like RiceTec sell rice labeled "Jasmati" for the U.S. market. What rice varieties does this name make you think of? (Wait for response) That's what more than half of American consumers buying it thought, but actually it is a mix of American and Italian rice. Putting it on the shelves as "Jasmati" confuses consumers into thinking they are getting a product related to the popular aromatic rice strains from Asia.

Since aromatics are the only growing rice market in the United States, companies are using bioengineering research and deceptive naming practices to co-opt the traditional grains that small-scale farmers in Thailand and India rely on. The Indian government estimates that it has lost \$200 million annually because of the sale of "Basmati" rice grown in America.

It's not that the US is against all Geographic Indication. In fact, it supports such laws when they protect our own products, but opposes them when they would protect other countries' products. For example, the US is claiming that Thailand cannot sell any fish products that use the name "catfish" because "catfish" refers to a species that only comes from the US.

Even if companies don't apply for patents, as Chris Deren promises, all efforts to take over the Thai Jasmine rice market threaten the livelihood of rice farmers who depend on that crop for survival.

Yet the efforts I have talked about today are encouraged by international trade laws set out in the WTO. Currently trade policies are being extended and expanded through bilateral free trade agreements, like the Thai-U.S. Free Trade Agreement or FTA, which will create new laws governing trade between Thailand and the U.S.

Farmers in Thailand have been protesting the past few rounds of Thai-US free trade agreement negotiations because of the devastating impacts it will have on their livelihoods. The Thai-U.S. FTA extends corporate patents of seeds and pressures Thailand to accept Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) while also flooding the Thai market with cheap imports from the US. These policies will worsen the situation for Thai farmers, many of whom are already struggling to support their families. In this context that prompted Thai farmer activist Ubon Yuwa to proclaim, "Government officials are exchanging benefits for their own corporate interests, but what they are using to exchange are the lives of the people."

Trade agreements like the WTO and Thai-US FTA are not living up to their free trade rhetoric, and are instead forums where countries engage in power politics to strategically ensure their economic gains. That means that rich countries like

the US, EU, and Japan use free trade agreements to maintain their economic dominance at the expense of poorer countries throughout the global south like Thailand. These free trade agreements certainly aren't free nor are they fair.

Unfortunately, the situation facing Thai rice farmers is not unique to Thailand or to rice. Free trade policies and practices similarly devastate small-scale farmer livelihoods around the globe. The North American Free Trade Agreement, signed by Canada, the U.S. and Mexico, forces an estimated 600 peasant farmers in Mexico off their land every day. This situation has caused some farmers to take their own lives both in desperation and as drastic signs of protest. Shouting "WTO kills farmers", Korean rice farmer Lee Kyung-hae committed suicide by stabbing himself in the chest with a Swiss Army pocket knife outside WTO trade talks in Cancun, Mexico on September 10, 2003.

**(Pause)**

[say with humor] Yet most of us Americans just keep on eating, disconnected from the stories behind our food and the consequences of our actions. But we do have options. We do have choices about what kind of food we eat, we do have healthy, sustainable, food options where the farmers who grow our food are guaranteed a living wage and fair treatment, we just have to educate ourselves and claim them. The next part of this story is about one of those alternatives: Fair Trade. And for that we have to go back to the Northeast of Thailand.

### **(Slide35) The Fair Trade Alternative**

**(Slide 36)** About ten years ago a few groups of farmers, fed up with fluctuating rice prices, destructive chemical fertilizers, continually mounting debt, and the disintegration of their communities, came together to seek an alternative type of agriculture an alternative livelihood. **(Slide 37)** The farmers decided to stop using chemical inputs and go back to farming the way their ancestors had long before the Green Revolution invaded Thailand, to grow organically. And instead of being at the mercy of corrupt middlemen, the farmers entered into a Fair Trade partnership **(Slide 38)** where they cooperatively run their own mill and sell to conscious consumers domestically and in Europe.

What is Fair Trade? How is it different? **(Slide 39)** Fair Trade is an alternative form of trade based on direct trading partnerships, premium prices for farmers, and environmental sustainability. **(Slide 40)** Fair Trade creates a floor price and social premium that enables farmers to generate more income. **(Slide 41)** The Fair Trade premium allows farmers to pay off debt, send their children to school, and pay for medical treatment.

**(Slide 42)** With Fair Trade, farmers cooperatively run rice mills to process and package their rice for export. Through these cooperatives farmers have more control over their products and more fully understand their markets. **(Slide 43)** In addition, each producer group has a savings fund which the groups can use for whatever purposes they desire, **(Slide 44)** from emergency relief for members, to farmer trainings, educational events and community development.

Not only are farmers able to make a better living with Fair Trade rice they are also improving the environment. **(Slide 45)** All farmers in the network are either already certified organic or in the three year process of converting their fields to receive organic status. Organic production helps farmers lower their input costs therefore decreasing debts, and it also helps farmers improve the fertility of their soil. **(Slide 46)** Going Organic means less chemical fertilizers and pesticides, lowering chemical runoff in surrounding rivers and lakes leading to more biodiversity.

**(Slide 47)** Here are some things Fair Trade farmers in Surin had to say about Fair Trade:  
(Slides 50-68 to be shown during this section while reading quotes)

**(Slide 48)** "I was in debt tens of thousands of baht the year I made the transition from chemical farming to organic farming. I have done organic farming with the Fair Trade network for six years, but my debt was gone in two years. **(Slide 49)** The debt was from the fertilizer and the pesticides. Now we don't use fertilizers or pesticides. **(Slide 50)** We raise animals and use that manure in the fields."  
-Dhamma Sungali

**(Slide 51)** "Since we've changed to organic production for the Fair Trade network we started to be happier as a family. We get along better. Debt caused a lot of stress. **(Slide 52)** If the kids wanted to go to school further, then we would have to borrow more money. But by doing organic, we have more money left and can pay for things like sending our children to school. **(Slide 53)** The whole family can sit down and talk with each other about what we are doing. If we can talk and find understanding within our own family, that's happiness."  
-Wattanasak Sitsungneung

(Slide 54) “Producing organically is safe both for the producer and the consumer, and it conserves the environment in every way. (Slide 55) We can find that natural balance for our fields again. The sustainability of our system goes if we use a lot of chemicals. If we grow organically, we become sustainable.”  
-Paw Thong-Ma

(Slide 56) “If you look back at what our ancestors have done. They didn’t have any inputs. Why wouldn’t we be able to do what our parents have done. The further we did it [farmed like our ancestors], the more we could see the environment got better. I could see clearly my fields became more fertile. (Slide 57) Trees began to grow, frogs returned to the fields, there were more plants to collect to eat and it was more safe for us too. We didn’t have to depend on buying things outside.”  
-Wattanasak Sitsungneng

(Slide 58) “If you just bought Fair Trade organic food for your health and the health of your family, you should know you are getting more than that because you are helping people to construct another world, an alternative for living.”  
-Phakphum Inpaen

(Slide 59-65 extra ones in here but just go through them slowly these are all quality images. Maybe ad lib a little something about how these are all images of Fair Trade farmers, how you were lucky enough to visit these people and learn from there way of life....)

(Slide 66) “If we are able to expand the Fair Trade network, we would be a country that is able to place emphasis on community. We could place more importance on producers and consumers throughout the world.”  
-Dhamma Sungsalı a farmer from the Fair Trade network

**(Pause)**

(Slide 67) That last quote is an important one because it brings it back to us. (Slide 68) Fair Trade Jasmine, coral, and red rice from Thailand and Fair Trade white and brown Basmati rice from India are the newest Fair Trade product available for purchase in the US. Expanding to the US will enable more farmers to reap the benefits of Fair Trade.

But the success of Fair Trade rice is up to people like us making informed and concerned choices about the food we eat. To make Fair Trade rice available to our community, we need to go to our local food markets and demand that they carry more Fair Trade products like Fair Trade rice. We also need to educate others on the powerful alternative they support when buying Fair Trade rice. We need to understand that the food we eat cannot be separated from the lives of the people who produce it.

(Slide 69 Blank) For Fair Trade rice to be a success in the US, farmers need our support not our sympathy. We invite you to join with us and exercise our rights as consumers to make informed decisions which ensure sustainable food for us and dignity, respect, and justice for farmers.

I am part of a network called ENGAGE (the Educational Network for Global and Grassroots Exchange) a network of past and present study abroad students who are bringing development issues they’ve studied abroad back home in order to raise awareness and take action. ENGAGE is currently doing a national educational campaign about Fair Trade rice and the lives of Thai Farmers. (Slide 70) We invite you to join us, here’s how you can bring Fair Trade rice to your community:

- 1) Get universities and institutions to serve Fair Trade rice.
- 2) Ask local stores to stock Fair Trade rice.
- 3) Write a letter to the editor about Fair Trade rice.
- 4) Educate your friends and family about the Fair Trade rice alternative.
- 5) Make a monetary contribution to ENGAGE’s campaign

For more information about ENGAGE’s Fair Trade Rice campaign contact [fairtraderice@engagetheworld.org](mailto:fairtraderice@engagetheworld.org) or visit the ENGAGE website at [www.engagetheworld.org](http://www.engagetheworld.org)

(Ask those who are very interested to stay after the presentation and brainstorm events, co-ops to talk to, etc. and arrange for another meeting)