

Rice

Rice production is considered one of Georgia's oldest staple industries. Although production of the crop now has shifted west to Louisiana, Arkansas and Texas, rice played a major role in the history of Georgia agriculture.

There are many legends of how rice was introduced to the southern coast. One popular account claims that in the late 1600's, an African ship took refuge in the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina. Before sailing, the ship's captain presented a gift of seed rice to the colony's governor. South Carolina growers, in turn, shared their new found knowledge of rice production with coastal Georgians.

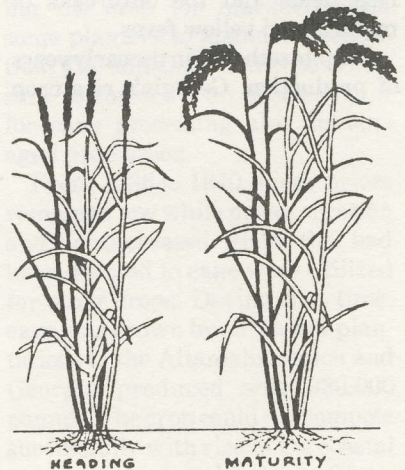
When the lucrative silk industry failed in the state, coastal settlers turned to rice production as an alternative crop. Because of the crop's cultural requirements, production was confined to the planters on the coast. There they utilized the ebb and flow of the ocean tides to alternately flood and drain fields with salt-free river water.

Successful rice production demanded skillful management and considerable cash outlay. An estimated 200 acres of suitable swampland was needed to produce a profitable crop. This enterprise was labor intensive requiring an estimated 40 laborers to work the crop. Tools and equipment for processing and cleaning also were needed.

In Georgia, the rice crop was planted in late March, usually during the full or new moon. This was done to take advantage of high tides flooding the fields as soon as plant-

ing was completed. Initial hoeing of the crop was started about the first of May after the plants sprouted and had started to grow.

After hoeing, the field was flooded to a depth of three or four inches. Water was kept on the field for about 17 days and then allowed to slowly leak off. After drying for several days, the second hoeing began. Around the first of July, the third hoeing was done in preparation of the second flooding, which was left on the field until harvest.



Rice Plant