

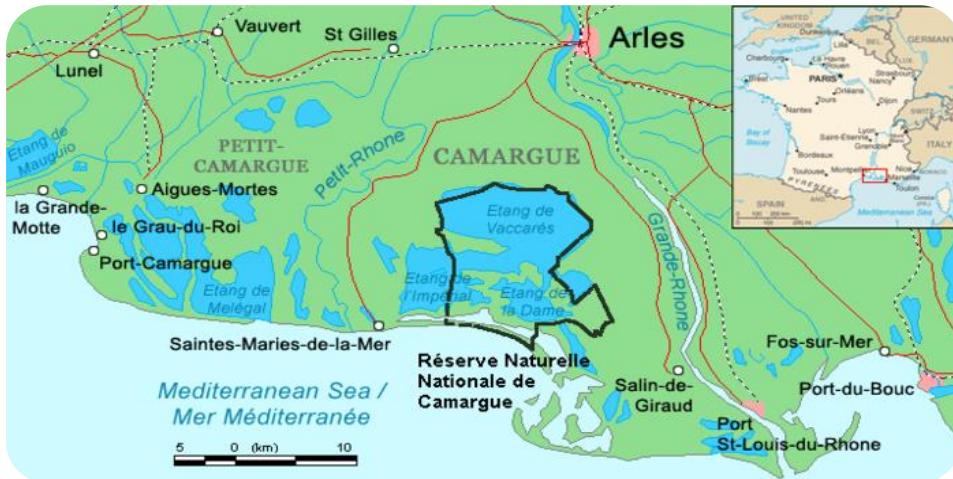


Rice, 2012. © A. Labeyrie

The Camargue is a natural region located south of Arles, France, which covers the Rhône river delta. As the Western Europe's largest river delta, it was designated a Ramsar site as a "Wetland of International Importance" on 1st December 1986. Officially established as a regional park and nature reserve in 1970, the *Parc Naturel Régional de Camargue* covers 820 km². It is a vast plain comprising large brine lagoons or ponds (a third of the area), cut off from the sea by sandbars and encircled by reed-covered marshes.

Humans have lived in the Camargue for centuries, greatly rearranging it with drainage schemes, dykes, rice paddies and salt pans. Much of the outer Camargue has been drained for agricultural purposes. Rice is grown in France almost exclusively here, representing a cultivated surface of 14 900 hectares and a production of 86 000 tones of paddy (Data of 2014, *Note de conjoncture de FranceAgriMer n°57, Février-Mars 2015*). It is grown under an irrigated system based on direct seeding on wet land. The occurrence of cold periods throughout the crop cycle (April-May to September-October), the risk of soil salinization, and the weed competition are the most important growing constraints. Moreover yield is subject to large significant annual and spatial variations, depending on the climate, as well as paddy field characteristics and cultivation practices.

Rice growers are represented by the *Syndicat des Riziculteurs de France et Filière* (SRFF, <http://www.rizdecamargue.com/>). *Riz de Camargue* is a Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) since the 6th June 2000. It guarantees the origin, quality and traceability of the rice production. Rice organic farming (*label Agriculture Biologique*) is representing 12 % of the PGI production area. The *Centre Français du Riz* (CFR, <http://www.centrefrancaisduriz.fr/>) is the French technical institute created in 1985 whose aim is to conduct research and extension work on rice. It is headed by a committee composed of farmers, rice industrials and scientists. It has close links with both upstream and downstream sectors: rice growers, rice industries, food companies, CIRAD and INRA. It employs 8 people working on several programs: agronomy and environment, crop protection, breeding, grain quality. Since 1988, CFR and its partner CIRAD have been implementing a rice breeding program for the Camargue, registering so far 32 new rice varieties in the European Official Catalogue. CFR also contributes in communication to the public, through the organization of a farmers' field day, named *Les Prémices du Riz*, the annual reports to the rice farmers named *Bilan de Campagne*, and to the scientific community.



RICÉ CULTIVATION IN CAMARGUE



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