

# Rice flower information kit

Reprint – information current in 1997



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- Organisation names—most government agencies referred to in this publication have had name changes. Contact the Business Information Centre on 13 25 23 or the industry organisation to find out the current name and contact details for these agencies.
- Additional information—many other sources of information are now available for each crop. Contact an agronomist, Business Information Centre on 13 25 23 or the industry organisation for other suggested reading.

Even with these limitations we believe this information kit provides important and valuable information for intending and existing growers.

**This publication was last revised in 1997. The information is not current and the accuracy of the information cannot be guaranteed by the State of Queensland.**

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# **Rice flower**

## **Integrating production and marketing**

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Information contained in this publication is provided as general advice only. For application to specific circumstances, professional advice should be sought.

The Department of Primary Industries (DPI), Queensland has taken all reasonable steps to ensure that the information contained in this book is accurate at the time of publication. Readers should make appropriate inquiries to determine whether new information is available on particular subject matter.

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# Contents

Tables	v
Figures	v
Acknowledgments	vi
Key issues	vii
1. Introduction	1
Market-driven production	1
Cost containment	2
Rice flower as a crop	2
Rice flower as a product	3
2. Australian production of rice flower	4
Localities	4
Total yield estimates	5
3. Basic market requirements	6
Product standards	7
Rice flower industry standards	9
4. Export requirements for rice flower	14
For all four markets	14
For exports to Japan	14
For exports to the United States	15
For exports to Taiwan	16
For exports to Hong Kong	17
5. The marketing chain in export markets	19
Distribution channels in Japan	19
Distribution channels in the United States	20
6. Logistics of exporting	22
Introduction	22
Finding the right exporter	22
Methods of sale	22

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Risk in export	23
Australian departure points	27
Paperwork, phytosanitary certificates and federal export licences	28
7. Supporting your exporter	29
What exporters want from growers	29
8. Potential competitors	31
9. The Australian domestic market	34
General characteristics	34
Rice flower in Australian markets	34
Product qualities and availability	35
Packaging	35
Naming	36
Business relationships	36
Promotion	37
Summary	37
10. Budgets	38
Capital investment	38
Cash flow budget	38
Sensitivity analysis for different mortality rates and prices	40
Conclusion	41
Appendix 1	43
Contacts	43
Appendix 2	45
Resources	45
Appendix 3	47
Assumptions used for the figures presented in Table 7	47

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## Tables

Table 1: Some sample perspectives within an export marketing chain	7
Table 2: General standards for Australian export cutflowers	8
Table 3: Industry standard for rice flower (modified draft)	9
Table 4: Desirable and undesirable varietal characteristics	12
Table 5: Crop management factors which affect quality	13
Table 6: Cost of exporting—example for 100 rice flower stems in a 7 kg box to Japan	26
Table 7: Effect of sale price and exchange rate on net return to grower—example for a box of 100 stems of rice flower 90 cm in length	27
Table 8: Cash flow budget for one hectare of rice flower (4000 plants) in south-east Queensland assuming a medium mortality rate	39
Table 9: Sensitivity analysis—cumulative cash flow (excluding capital costs) of rice flower cash flow budgets for different mortality rates and export prices in years one to five	41

## Figures

Figure 1: Distribution of Australian rice flower growers	4
Figure 2: Simplified marketing chains for rice flower	6
Figure 3: Distribution channels for fresh cutflowers in Japan	19
Figure 4: Distribution channels for fresh cutflowers in the United States	20
Figure 5: Standards for growers: a trilogy	29

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# Key issues

Rice flower, a native of the east coast of Australia, is cultivated for its cut flowers in all states of Australia. In 1996 half a million stems were harvested for export to Japan, other Asian markets and the United States. Australia's volumes are well short of the quantity needed for major exports, and the opportunity exists to extend the production season, particularly to take advantage of lucrative markets in November and December in Japan. Australia currently lacks competitors in the August to October supply period to the northern hemisphere.

However, Australian growers need to consider other countries with the potential to export rice flower. Some of these have relative advantages such as proximity to markets, low labour costs or superior technology and/or marketing skills. Chile and Peru are of particular concern in the United States market and Israel and New Zealand in the Japanese market.

Farming rice flower, or any other wildflower, requires a combination of crop management skills, business acumen and consumer focus. Production choices need to be driven by the needs of the market. Choosing and building on good business relationships is crucial to market success.

In Japan, the main market, rice flower is seen as a novel and interesting focal filler flower, with a pleasing shape, texture and colour. Japanese buyers can be prepared to pay high prices for quality long stems. Other overseas markets are more price sensitive and rice flower competes with a diverse range of fillers in Hong Kong, Taiwan and the United States.

For all export markets rice flower must be harvested at the correct stage of maturity, graded to an Australian standard, packed correctly, cooled with forced air cooling and kept refrigerated through subsequent handling procedures. Achieving the standard involves varietal selection, good crop management, correct timing of harvest maturity and proper postharvest handling.

Profitability can be enhanced by containing costs, adhering to product standards and using sound and sustainable production techniques. An example budget demonstrates that a staged planting of rice flower on a four year rotation could average a net return of \$10 244 per hectare per year. Cumulative cash flows improve with lowered plant deaths and high average net market prices, but only if these can be achieved without escalating costs.

On the Australian market rice flower is regarded as a low priced filler flower, competing in spring with a plethora of other flowers. The Australian market is small and the greatest potential for volume sales is through export.

Overseas markets present a special challenge, as prospects for good returns go hand in hand with higher levels of risk. Transaction risks, product spoilage, low returns for product and wild card risks can be encountered. The marketing chain consists of multiple 'customers', all with their own perspective; satisfying their individual needs is made more difficult by increased geographic and cultural separation. Growers with a genuine concern for the performance of their flowers at the consumer level need to take a whole systems approach, monitoring not only the product and the market, but what is happening in the distribution chain. A concern for product quality, customer service and attention to administrative details distinguishes business-like growers from others.



