

The Amberwaves Commemoration

Edward Esko, co-founder of Amberwaves, is a macrobiotic author and teacher. Contemporary Macrobiotics, a compilation of over fifty of his essays, can be ordered online at www.1stbooks.com.

On behalf of the ten thousand friends and supporters of Amberwaves, Edward read the following statement honoring America's first rice farmers at a special gathering in Charleston, S.C. on July 28, 2002. Copies were also given to the Rice Museum in Georgetown

(Photos)

Stay in the field
Stay in the field
Stay in the field till
The war been end!

Traditional song of the Carolina rice farmers

Over 300 years ago, enslaved Africans brought knowledge of rice farming to the Carolinas and the American rice industry was born. Based on a sophisticated technology developed over millennia in West Africa, rice quickly became the foundation of the Southern economy and a mainstay in the American diet. When rice stocks were depleted after the American Revolution, Thomas Jefferson, the Ambassador to France, went to Italy, smuggled precious rice seeds out of the country, and sent them back to South Carolina.

This afternoon we commemorate the African bondsmen and their descendents who introduced rice to this country. Uprooted from their homeland, torn from their families, and subject to cruel and inhuman conditions, they contributed priceless seeds, agricultural wisdom, and a highly developed culinary heritage to the colonial South and the infant Republic. The prosperity of this nation is intimately related to their efforts. We remember their tears, their sacrifice, and their dream of freedom and justice.

Their plight was recently dramatized in the film, *Amistad*, the true story of a rebellion on a slave ship in the 1850's. Most of the Africans aboard the *Amistad* were rice farmers who had been abducted from their fields or marketplaces. At their trial, former president John Quincy Adams eloquently defended their rights and highly developed cultural and spiritual traditions. In one of its most noble verdicts, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the rice farmers freedom and allowed them to return peacefully to Africa.

Rice farming eventually spread to the Louisiana Territory, Texas, and other regions of the continent. Following the end of slavery and decline of rice farming on the East Coast,

Chinese and later Japanese immigrants developed rice farming in California.

Over the last generation, scientific and medical associations have promoted the benefits of whole grain rice as part of a healthy diet. The U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans (the booklet accompanying the Food Guide Pyramid) calls upon the American people to Eat foods made from a variety of whole grains such as . . . brown rice . . . every day. The consumption of rice has soared 250% in the last two decades and now stands at about 30 lbs. per capita yearly.

Today, genetically modified (GM) rice is on the horizon. Whole grains are the foundation of human existence, the traditional staff of life. The introduction of new GM seeds and crops threatens millions of years of natural evolution and poses an unprecedented threat to the survival of our species and its diverse civilizations and cultures.

Across the country, GM pollen is contaminating ordinary crops, causing farmers and environmentalists to warn that non-GM and organic harvests face extinction. In addition, the patenting of seeds, plants, and animals and the ownership and control of human DNA represents a new form of slavery. Millions of farmers and their families around the world face losing their crops, their land, and their livelihood to new patented seeds and biotech crops.

On behalf of the nation, we express our heartfelt gratitude to America's earliest rice farmers, field hands, and cooks (such as James Hemings, the brother of Sally Hemings, at Monticello) and salute their contributions, courage, and indomitable spirit.

We resolve to preserve heirloom rice, wheat, and other essential foods bequeathed to us by our ancestors from East and West. We dedicate ourselves to awakening the American people to this imminent peril and safeguarding beautiful amber waves of grain from sea to shining sea for our children, grandchildren and future generations.

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