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## **THE GRAIN ATTRACTION**

### **Aromatic Rice Sales Soar as They Play a Leading Role on the Culinary Stage**

Houston – Like the perfect little black dress, its versatility is unsurpassed. It can be accessorized in a number of ways, but is equally stunning unadorned. Add to that a seductive fragrance, slender shape, beautiful name, world famous reputation and a hint of the exotic and it's easy to see why aromatic rice, like Thai jasmine and Indian basmati, is fast becoming the hottest ticket in town. Stepping out in high fashion, fragrant rice is quickly emerging as a culinary trendsetter. In fact, so much so, that it is becoming difficult to keep up with worldwide consumer demand.

"Aromatic rice is the fastest-growing sector of the rice category right now," says Kit Haines, Vice President of Riviana Foods Inc., one of the largest rice companies in the United States and first to market imported Thai jasmine and Indian basmati rice in mainstream supermarkets nationwide with their Mahatma<sup>®</sup>, Carolina<sup>®</sup>, and S & W<sup>®</sup> brands, as well as their new Success<sup>®</sup> Boil-in-Bag Jasmine. "Many cooks don't know how flavorful it is. They're amazed when they experience the taste difference," Haines says.

According to USDA's Economic Research Service, 2003 per capita rice consumption exceeded 27 pounds; nearly double that of the mid '80s. Though the demand for all rice has increased steadily over the past decade, aromatic rice sales have experienced a dramatic jump. According to ACNielsen's Scantrack report, aromatic rice sales have seen double-digit growth during the past year, with jasmine sales up 15 percent, and basmati sales increasing 12 percent in the most recent 52 week period. That, despite the low-carb diet craze that had many consumers banning rice and other carbohydrates from their diets.

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Thai jasmine and Indian basmati, the two most popular varieties of fragrant rice, are exploding onto the American culinary scene largely due to an increased interest in exotic, highly flavored foods, the growing influx of Asian immigrants and the enormous popularity of their cuisine. That, coupled with our desire for authentic ingredients and urge to splurge on affordable specialty food products, makes this trend one that will continue to grow in years to come.

#### What makes it so “scentsational?”

Aromatic rice, so named because of its delicate popcorn-like flavor, has a natural compound present known as 2-acetyl-pyroline that produces a pleasing scent and flavor. The compound is present throughout the plant and in all rice, but at a much higher concentration in aromatic varieties. In fact, if you were driving past a field of aromatic rice, chances are you would smell the popcorn-like fragrance in the air. Delicately flavorful, aromatic rice tastes great on its own, even without butter.

Roughly translated, basmati means “queen of fragrance.” As it ages, grains lose moisture and intensify in aroma and flavor. Aged basmati is prized for its superior flavor. Jasmine rice, on the other hand, is actually stronger in flavor when it is younger. However, like basmati, it loses moisture as it ages.

While both Thai jasmine and Indian basmati are classified as aromatic varieties, there are very distinct differences in their cooking properties. Jasmine, named after the sweet-smelling jasmine flower of Southeast Thailand, cooks soft, tender and moist, similar to Southern U.S.-grown medium grain rice. On the other hand, basmati cooks dry, light and very separate.

No doubt, America’s love affair with rice is just beginning to blossom as we learn now what much of the world has known for thousands of years: rice is anything but plain and ordinary. So go ahead, go with the grain.

For more information on aromatic rice or recipes, visit [www.rivianakitchens.com](http://www.rivianakitchens.com).

*Based in Houston, Texas, Riviana Foods Inc. is one of the largest processors, marketers and distributors of branded and private label rice products in the United States. Principal brands include Mahatma® ([www.mahatmarice.com](http://www.mahatmarice.com)), Success® ([www.successrice.com](http://www.successrice.com)), Carolina® ([www.carolinarice.com](http://www.carolinarice.com)), Water Maid® ([www.watermaidrice.com](http://www.watermaidrice.com)), River® ([www.riverrice.com](http://www.riverrice.com)), and S & W® ([www.s-and-wrice.com](http://www.s-and-wrice.com)).*