

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: Egyptian Parliament Approves the Prohibition of Rice Cultivation in Non-Designated Areas

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Report Highlights:

Amid major challenges within Egypt's water sector, the Egyptian parliament approved a new water resources and irrigation law to curb illegal rice cultivation. Article 31 of the new law demands that the allotment of rice areas are in accordance to a ministerial decree issued by the Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation in consultation with the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation. Article 124 stipulates that farmers who do not adhere to the allotted rice areas according to Article 31 will either face fines ranging between EGP 3000 – 10,000 (\$192 – \$640.20) per feddan (4,200 sqm) or receive a prison sentence not to exceed six months. The law left the court with the power to determine the penalty between a sentence or a fine for violators of rice cultivation outside specified areas set by the government.

Rice Cultivation in Egypt

Rice is a summer crop which is cultivated from April to October. Rice cultivation area in Egypt is limited to the north, east, and west parts of the Nile Delta in nine governorates set by the Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation (MWRI) before the planting season and in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation (MALR).

Over the past five calendar years (CY), rice cultivated areas set by the government ranged between 451,164 hectares (HA) to 451,920 HA annually, with the exception of CY 2018 where rice area was reduced to 304,080 HA. Rice cultivation outside the MWRI's allotment area has ranged from 210,000 HA to 309,080 HA over the past five years.

Farmers planting rice outside the government's allotment area are usually fined. Recently, the Egyptian cabinet approved the reduction of these fines for previous rice planting seasons to ensure that fines are collected, while also making it easier for the farmers to pay. According to the approved proposal, the fine will be reduced by 60 percent if paid by June 30, 2021, by 40 percent if paid between July 1 – September 30, 2021, and by 30 percent if paid between October 1 – December 31, 2021.

Regardless of fines, rice crop area harvested usually exceeds the MWRI set limit significantly. Egyptian farmers prefer to plant rice due to its easier cultivation, lower cost of production, higher profitability compared to other summer crops, and its storability for long periods of time. Rice cultivation also helps limit seawater intrusion into the northern Delta lands and prevents salinization of the soil. Moreover, it has an important socio-economic effect since many of the workforce is employed by the rice production sector.

On January 27, 2021, the MWRI re-published the Ministerial Decree No. 305 of 2020 indicating the Delta provinces that would be planting rice in CY 2021. The allotted rice cultivated area for CY 2021 is set for 1,074,200 million *feddans* (~451,164 HA) in nine governorates. This includes 304,164 HA planted with current early maturing varieties (Table 1). In addition to 84,000 HA planted with drought tolerant varieties and 63,000 HA planted with varieties tolerant to soil salinity conditions. Both drought and salt tolerant varieties will be distributed across the nine governorates.

Table 1: Governorates and Areas Allotted for Rice Cultivation of Early Maturing Varieties by MWRI in CY 2021

	Governorate	Rice Areas to be Cultivated in CY 2021 (Hectares)
1	Alexandria	840
2	Beheira	44,793
3	Gharbia	17,052
4	Kafr El Sheikh	79,716
5	Dakahlia	76,671
6	Damietta	17,640
7	Sharkia	53,697
8	Ismaelia	1,155
9	Port Said	12,600
	Total	304,164

Water and Rice Cultivation

Rice is very sensitive to water deficits. The main constraint of rice cultivation in Egypt is the limited quantity of irrigation water from the Nile River and the scarcity of water, especially in terminal canals in the North Delta. In addition, rice consumes large quantities of water during its growing season, enhanced by illegal rice plantings. Such water could be directed to planting other, less water-consuming, cash crops.

Consequently, the Agriculture Research Center (ARC) of MALR is focused on yield improvement efforts including:

- Continuing the ongoing rice breeding programs to develop additional early-maturing and high-yielding varieties, leading to increased water use efficiency and achieving high crop intensification rates. By cultivating early maturing varieties of rice (short duration), it saves about 30 percent of the irrigation water consumed every year.
- Continuing present and proposed research programs for the development of drought and salt-tolerant rice varieties in order to cope with rising temperatures and soil salinity.
- Expand the amount of certified seed distributed to farmers with the aim of covering 75 percent of the planted area.

Egyptian Parliament Approve the Banning of Illegal Rice Cultivation

According to Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation, Dr. Mohamed Abdel Ati, Egypt is facing a major water challenge in balancing between its resources and needs, especially with around 97 percent of its water resources flowing in from outside its borders. The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) amplifies the magnitude of challenges Egypt is facing in the water sector. According to a MWRI spokesperson, Egypt and Sudan will lose about 20 billion cubic meters (BCM) of their 22 BCM water quota in July and August if the GERD's second filling takes place in July unilaterally.

Cabinet figures indicate that Egypt's annual share of water is 560 cubic meters per person, placing the 100-million-plus population well below the international threshold for water scarcity. Egypt's annual need accounts for more than 110 BCM of water, yet currently has only 80 BCM, leaving a water deficit of 30 BCM. 55.5 BCM is sourced from the Nile River.

To meet the water challenge, MWRI developed a four-pronged National Water Resources Plan, running through 2037. The strategy is based on rationing water use, improving water quality, providing additional water resources, and creating a climate suitable for optimal water management.

Rice is one of the most water-consuming crops and its illegal cultivation negatively impacts the ability of the canal networks to provide the necessary water required by all beneficiaries in the summer.

On March 30, 2021, the Egyptian parliament approved Article 31 and Article 124 of the new water resources and irrigation law. Article 31 of the new law demands the allotment of rice areas according to a ministerial decree issued by the Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation and in consultation with MALR.

Article 124 stipulates that farmers who do not adhere to the areas allotted for rice according to Article 31 will face either fines ranging between EGP 3000 – 10,000 (\$192 – \$640.20) per *feddan* (4,200 sqm) or receive a prison sentence of up to six months. The law left the court with the power to determine the punishment between a sentence or a fine for violators. The penalty of paying the fine will double in the event of the re-cultivation of rice outside specified areas for a second time.

MALR and MWRI have appealed to farmers to not plant any areas of rice in violation. Applying the fines established with the removal of the violating areas is consistent with the government's efforts to improve water usage, preserve water resources, enhance water productivity, and ensure that irrigation water is delivered to all recipients in the essential quantity and at the indicated date.

Attachments:

No Attachments.