

## News about Rice and People

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# Australian Appointed to Chair world's leading rice research & training center

The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) has announced the appointment of leading Australian agricultural scientist Elizabeth Woods as the new chair of its Board of Trustees. A former Rhodes Scholar and winner of several honors in Australian agriculture, Dr. Woods is recognized as an expert in tropical and subtropical agriculture and agribusiness.

She takes over from Keiji Otsuka, a respected agricultural economist from Japan, who is stepping down officially after almost four years in the position. IRRI's independent 15-member Board of Trustees meets twice a year to set the Institute's policies and review its research agenda.

The new appointment which is effective January 1, 2008.

Dr. Woods is currently Foundation Professor of Agribusiness at the School of Natural and Rural Systems Management at the University of Queensland in Australia. Her role there is to provide leadership in the areas of agribusiness and rural management to enhance the university's service to tropical Australia and Asia. She previously chaired Australia's Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation.

Commenting on the appointment, IRRI Director General Robert S. Zeigler said the Institute was very fortunate to find a new board chair as talented, experienced, and competent as Dr. Woods. "IRRI has a long history of eminent and highly respected board chairs, and Dr. Woods is no exception," Dr. Zeigler said. "We are excited about future developments under her leadership."

Dr. Woods, who was elected to the IRRI board two years ago, takes over as chair at a time of unprecedented challenge and opportunity in rice research and production. "World food reserves, including those for rice, are low and cereal prices are high. In this context, my priorities will be to focus IRRI on its core mission – to improve the efficiency and sustainability of rice production," Dr. Woods said.

“IRRI needs to continue to further strengthen its work with all its partners in the national agricultural systems around the world, as well as with other international research centers, to maintain its impact, especially in such important areas as adapting rice production to climate change.”

Dr. Woods said she would particularly encourage IRRI to focus on the needs of rice farmers and others in the rice supply chain, including the many women who are playing increasingly important roles in their family farms and professions.

Dr. Zeigler said he also wanted to recognize the very important contributions made by the outgoing board chair: “Dr. Otsuka led the Institute through a very significant and important period that included the development and implementation of a new strategic plan and the opening of the Institute’s newest office in Africa.

“We will miss his intelligence and experience, but we are very fortunate to be able to call on someone like Dr. Woods to replace him,” Dr. Zeigler added. In one of his final duties as board chair, Dr. Otsuka joined with Dr. Zeigler in a courtesy call on Lao PDR Prime Minister Bouasone Bouphavanh and Minister of Agriculture Sitaheng Rasphone to thank them for agreeing to host the board meeting in Laos last week.

Between 1990 and 2004, rice production in Laos increased from 1.5 million to 2.5 million tons – an average annual growth rate of more than 5%, making the small underdeveloped nation one of Asia’s star performers in rice research and development.

This increase in production – largely attributed to the adoption of Lao modern varieties – has been valued at US\$8 million to \$19 million per year, with households adopting these varieties having more than tripled the cash income of households growing traditional varieties. A third of Laos’ lowland rice area is planted with these improved varieties today, pushing average rice yields up 35 percent from 2.3 tons/ha in 1989 to 3.1 tons/ha today – well above the average yields of larger neighbors such as Thailand.

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The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) is the world’s leading rice research and training center. Based in the Philippines and with offices in 10 other Asian countries, it is an autonomous, nonprofit institution focused on improving the well-being of present and future generations of rice farmers and consumers, particularly those with low incomes, while preserving natural resources. IRRI is one of 15 centers funded through the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), an association of public and private donor agencies. Please visit the CGIAR website ([www.cgiar.org](http://www.cgiar.org)) for more information.

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