

Scientists find rice 'chalk' gene, eye yield rise

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Scientists expect to soon be able to remove a chalk-like part of rice, dramatically raising global harvests amid rising demand for the staple, an international research outfit said Tuesday.

The [International Rice Research](#) Institute announced the breakthrough after a 15-year study on what makes rice chalky, which causes the loss of up to a fourth of grain content in milling, said spokeswoman Sophie Clayton.

The discovery follows a 2008 global crisis that saw the price of rice, the staple of half of the world, rise three-fold and pushing an estimated 100 million people into poverty.

"Within a few years, it might be possible to breed a chalk-free grain," Clayton told AFP in a telephone interview, citing the research team's assessment.

The chalky part of rice raises the chances of breakage during milling, cutting the amount that can be recovered and downgrading its quality, said the institute's nutrition research chief Melissa Fitzgerald.

"Until now, rice scientists did not know where in the [rice genome](#) the genes for chalkiness resided," Fitzgerald said in a statement issued by the Philippine-based institute.

She said field tests in eight countries isolated rice varieties with extremely low chalk, regardless of the growing environment, out of which major regions in the rice genome responsible for chalkiness were studied.

Rice prices shot up in 2008 after a combination of surging demand, bad weather and flattening yield gains.

The rice institute warned in May that a repeat of the global [food crisis](#) could not be ruled out amid rising prices for wheat, maize, sugar, and other farm commodities due to high demand and [bad weather](#).

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