LSU AgCenter

H. Rouse Caffey Rice Research Station

NEWSLETTER

Volume 23 Issue 2 | June 30, 2026

Upcoming Events

- **Watermelon and Okra Field Day** – Rice Research Station – July 9, 2026
- **Southern Weed Science Society Weed Contest** – Knoxville, Tennessee = August 5 – 6, 2026
- **2026 Plant Health Conference –** Providence, Rhode Island – August 1 – 4, 2026
- **Southern Extension Weed Specialist Working Group Meeting –** Washington, DC – August 10 – 13, 2026
- **2026 North American Epidemiology Workshop –** Manhattan, Kansas – September 28-30, 2026

Upcoming Station Visitors

- **LSU AgCenter's MDI Program** – September 10, 2026

New Station Personnel

- **Ricardo Tomáz** (Visiting Scholar – Pathology)
- **Mikie Badeaux** (Administrative Coordinator 3)
- **Ana Costa** (Visiting Scholar – Pathology)

2026 Rice Crop Update

It is now the final stretch of the season and harvest has begun in Calcasieu, Jeff Davis, Acadia, and Vermilion Parishes with many more fields gearing up for next week. Two of our Rice Research Verification Program fields (Vermilion and Acadia) were drained on June 19th and 22nd, respectively, and we expect these fields to be harvested the week following July 4th, provided we avoid any stretches of overcast weather. Many fields in northeast Louisiana are entering mid to late booting and are beginning to pick up leaf blast in those areas. The most recent USDA-NASS Crop Progress Report has Louisiana at 49% headed as of today, which may be below the true number by 15-20%.

The USDA Crop Acreage Survey was released on June 30th which listed Louisiana planted acres at 400k and projected harvested acres at 390k. The most recent time Louisiana harvested under 400k acres was in 2017. Now keep in mind, this crop acreage report is only based on survey data, and the final FSA acreage report will not be available until later this year. Overall, there are few signs that this crop is headed for poor yields. However, the prolonged spring conditions and inconsistent sunshine observed throughout the season temper expectations for above-average yields. Nonetheless, a lot of rice will be moving out of fields over the next couple weeks, and we'll start to get an idea of where we're at soon.

A large number of rice acres in central Louisiana were severely impacted by elements of Tropical Storm Arthur that caused many fields to be deeply submerged by flood water. Damage assessments are ongoing and its likely many hundreds, if not thousands, of acres can be lost due to flood damage.

A common trend observed throughout this season has been the tendency for some fields to be unexpectedly short-statured, especially those planted during the first half of March. We first started noticing shorter rice around green-ring in several of our earlier-planted verification fields and throughout our research station trials. Given the stretch of cool temperatures during March and several periods of cloudy weather throughout April and May, we began to wonder whether reduced solar radiation was contributing to the crop's appearance .

To investigate this, I evaluated weather data collected at the H. Rouse Caffey Rice Research Station, focusing on solar radiation (measured in calories per square centimeter – cal/cm^2) and how 2026 compared to the previous five years. The table below summarizes the weekly totals and compares them to the 2021-2025 average (Table 1.). Rather than showing a season-long shortage of sunshine, the data indicates that solar radiation was generally near average during portions of March and early April. However, several distinct periods of below-average radiation occurred from late April through early June. The most notable period occurred during the week of April 19-25, when solar radiation was 26% below the five-year average. Additional periods of substantially below-average radiation occurred during the weeks of May 3-9, May 17-23, and May 31-June 6. When we start on April 19th and calculate a 5 week and 7 week rolling window, there was a 20.2% and 19% deficiency observed across both periods, respectively. Whether these deficits affected crop growth depends largely on crop stage. Fields that were entering rapid vegetative growth, green ring, panicle differentiation, or early reproductive development during these low-radiation periods likely experienced fewer opportunities for photosynthesis and biomass accumulation than would normally be expected. While this analysis was conducted using data from Crowley, the influence of solar radiation on crop development extends well beyond our immediate area.

Solar radiation is among the environmental factors most strongly associated with biomass accumulation in rice plants because it provides the energy required for photosynthesis and carbohydrate production. Sometimes we overlook the importance of how the environment shapes crop development beyond untimely rains or hot nighttime temperatures. Although season-long solar radiation from the earliest planting date was only about 5% below the five-year average, rice planted during later planting windows accumulated radiation deficits approaching 15–17% by early June. While solar radiation is certainly not the only factor influencing crop growth, the data suggest portions of the 2026 crop developed under a radiation environment that differed substantially from recent years. Whether that difference ultimately influenced crop development, yield, or variety performance is difficult to determine, but it serves as another reminder that environmental conditions can shape crop development in ways that are not always immediately obvious.

Table 1. Total Solar Radiation (cal/cm^2) Per Week Compared to the 5-Year Average in Crowley, Louisiana

Week(s)	Date	2026 Value	5 Yr Average	Deficient (%)	z-score	Interpretation
1	Feb 16-Feb 21	1,931	1,855	4.1	0.15	Average
2	Feb 22-Feb 28	2,365	2,277	3.9	0.18	Average
3	**Mar 1-Mar 7**	**2,243**	**2,440**	**-8.1**	**-1.01**	**Notably low**
4	Mar 8-Mar 14	2,770	2,640	4.9	0.25	Average
5	Mar 15-Mar 21	3,143	2,544	23.5	1.10	Notably high
6	Mar 22-Mar 28	3,115	2,475	25.9	1.10	Notably high
7	Mar 29-Apr 4	2,556	2,476	3.3	0.12	Average
8	Apr 5-Apr 11	3,287	3,153	4.2	0.22	Average
9	Apr 12-Apr 18	2,825	2,646	6.8	0.27	Average
10	**Apr 19-Apr 25**	**2,461**	**3,342**	**-26.4**	**-3.43**	**Extremely low**
11	Apr 26-May 2	2,842	2,879	-1.3	-0.06	Average
12	**May 3-May 9**	**1,630**	**3,007**	**-45.8**	**-1.74**	**Notably low**
13	May 10-May 16	3,506	3,353	4.5	0.49	Average
14	**May 17-May 23**	**2,246**	**3,311**	**-32.2**	**-1.66**	**Notably low**
15	May 24-May 30	3,136	3,373	-7	-0.46	Average
16	**May 31-Jun 6**	**2,638**	**3,512**	**-24.9**	**-1.56**	**Notably low**
17	Jun 7-Jun 13	3,062	2,960	3.5	0.15	Average
10-14	**Apr 19-May 23**	**12,685**	**15,892**	**-20.2**	**-1.83**	**Notably low**
10-16	**Apr 19-Jun 6**	**18,459**	**22,777**	**-19**	**-1.81**	**Notably low**
Totals	**Full season**	**45,756**	**48,243**	**-5.2**	**-0.68**	**Slightly low**

Article by Tyler Musgrove (Extension Rice Specialist)

Rice Disease Status in 2026

The first crop of the 2026 rice season is moving quickly toward harvest, with a few fields already harvested in Southwest Louisiana and many more expected to be cut in the coming weeks. Although we still have a long road ahead in North Louisiana and with the second crop in South Louisiana, we can already begin to take notes on how this season may be remembered. There are many things to discuss this year, but production economics, weather, and disease are likely to be at the top of the list for most growers. Before discussing disease status this season, let's briefly review why diseases occur and what drives their intensity.

The good, the bad, and the ugly

You may have heard plant pathologists refer to the "**disease triangle**." This core concept states that plant disease occurrence and intensity depend on the interaction among the host variety, the pathogen, and the environment. Some varieties have a type of **genetic resistance** that can help prevent disease infection. Others may still become infected, but the disease intensity and its impact on yield and grain quality are lower than in more susceptible varieties. These two types of resistance are often referred to as vertical or *qualitative resistance* and horizontal or *quantitative resistance*, respectively. Examples of quantitative resistance include what we see with sheath blight or bacterial panicle blight, where some varieties are more prone to severe epidemics than others. In these cases, the disease and its impact are still present in the field, just at a smaller scale. In contrast, varieties with qualitative resistance are expected to have little to no problem with the disease for which they are resistant. This happens because the genetic resistance, often governed by a single gene, makes the interaction between the pathogen and the plant incompatible, preventing disease development. However, there is a catch. Qualitative resistance is specific to a pathogen race. In other words, changes in the pathogen population can break this resistance, and a variety that once appeared immune may develop severe symptoms. Unfortunately, during the 2026 season, we observed severe blast symptoms in some inbred and hybrid varieties that had not previously shown blast problems in Louisiana, suggesting that genetic resistance may no longer be effective for controlling the disease in parts of the region.

The **pathogen** component of the disease triangle is often one of the most complex parts of this interaction. Genetic changes in the overall pathogen population are not easily noticed until they occur on a larger scale. For example, two blast spores may look identical under the microscope and produce the same symptoms on a susceptible variety. However, their genetics may be very different, with one spore able to infect a particular variety while the other cannot, or one may be resistant to a fungicide while the other remains sensitive. Many factors can contribute to changes in pathogen populations, but everything starts with mutation. A mutation is an unexpected change in the genetic code of an organism. Mutations happen all the time, but usually at a very low rate, roughly one per billion spores produced, and most of them do not cause noticeable changes in pathogen biology or performance. However, when we consider that each lesion can produce thousands of spores, multiplied by the number of lesions per plant, plants per field, and fields in a region, it is reasonable to expect that changes in pathogen populations can occur relatively quickly. Another important aspect of the pathogen is how much inoculum is available and when it is present relative to crop development. For example, sheath blight inoculum survives in the soil, and rotations with soybeans can increase inoculum levels, raising the risk of disease outbreaks. For rotten-neck blast, infection occurs after panicle emergence from the boot. If airborne spores arrive only after grain filling, we should not expect a major impact.

Finally, the **environment** is arguably the component that gives direction to how much disease we see in any given year. Each disease has a different set of conditions needed for development. These conditions include several factors, such as fertility, plant density, and others, but weather is probably the most important component. Overall, most fungal diseases observed in Louisiana rice thrive under warm temperatures, high relative humidity, and cloudy conditions. These conditions protect spores and other pathogen structures, allowing them to infect healthy tissue and expand lesions in both size and number. Some diseases infect the plant at a particular growth stage, such as rotten-neck blast after panicle emergence, so weather during that growth stage is especially important. Other diseases, such as sheath blight, take advantage of the protection provided by the lower canopy, where the

microclimate is often very conducive to disease once the rows close. This is less common in second-crop fields and fields with very low plant density, where the lower canopy is more exposed.

Rice disease status in 2026

The 2026 rice season is already remarkable for its disease intensity. The season started strong, as favorable early-season conditions allowed many fields to be planted on time. Historically, fields planted earlier often experience less disease pressure than those planted later. However, the weather changed in May and part of June. Continuous rainy and cloudy days brought textbook conditions for disease infection and development.

At the Rice Pathology Program, we received an unprecedented number of samples, calls, and messages requesting disease diagnosis. Most samples were related to **blast**. The disease started unusually early compared with what we typically expect. For reference, most of our research field plots intended for blast research are planted in May because we often only see significant disease levels later in the season. In addition to the early disease onset, some inbred and hybrid varieties that were considered resistant to blast began to show symptoms. This is an indication that pathogen populations have changed, but we will confirm this with appropriate tests after the season ends. Correct disease identification is crucial for management because blast can develop quickly and has the potential to cause substantial yield and grain quality losses, which can economically justify chemical control. However, other diseases that can be misdiagnosed as blast, such as stackburn, do not usually have an important impact on yield or grain quality and may not justify a fungicide application.

Figure 1. Rotten neck blast impacting rice.

In addition to problems with blast, weather conditions were also very favorable for **sheath blight**. Unlike blast, however, we can anticipate, at least to some extent, how much sheath blight pressure to expect in a field based on the field history. This is because sheath blight is caused by a soilborne fungus. Fields with a history of sheath blight or fields under rice-soybean rotation are expected to have a higher risk of disease outbreaks. The disease is particularly difficult to control because varieties have limited resistance and fungicide coverage can be challenging, especially because the disease starts in the lower canopy. As the crop progresses, especially during grain filling, the plant becomes weaker and the disease often reaches the upper canopy, where it becomes more visible. At that point, there is little that can be done for the current crop, but it is a good opportunity to assess how much inoculum may be present for next season.

Figure 2. Sheath blight impacting rice.

Other diseases, such as Cercospora, kernel smut, false smut, and bacterial panicle blight, are expected to become more visible as fields move into the final stages

of development. We have observed all of these diseases in the field this season, except false smut, but it is still too early to determine whether they will also become major problems during this busy disease season. Weather over the next few weeks will play a crucial role. For now, the best thing growers can do to prevent further disease-related impact is to harvest fields as early as possible. Significant Cercospora damage has been observed in fields where harvest was delayed due to weather conditions. Finally, we are still monitoring the "new disease" in the country, **hoja blanca disease**. The disease was first reported in Texas in 2024 and has already been reported there again this year. The virus is transmitted by infected rice delphacids. Our efforts, in collaboration with Dr. Musgrove and Dr. Madison Flasco, are focused on monitoring for its presence in Louisiana. As I write this article, the disease has not been reported in our state.

Article by Felipe Dalla Lana (Rice Pathologist)

Use of Sodium Chlorate as a Harvest Aid

Timely harvest is one of the most critical factors affecting rice grain quality and profitability. In Louisiana, rice producers frequently encounter weather-related challenges during the harvest season, including rainfall, high humidity, and delayed field access, which can slow grain dry-down and increase the risk of lodging and grain quality deterioration.

Harvest aids such as sodium chlorate have become an important management tool in rice production for accelerating crop dry-down and improving harvest efficiency, particularly when adverse weather conditions delay natural field drying. Sodium chlorate acts as a desiccant by rapidly removing moisture from green plant tissue, promoting more uniform crop maturity and allowing earlier harvest operations. Research from Arkansas and other rice-producing regions has shown that sodium chlorate can effectively reduce grain moisture and facilitate timely harvest when applied at appropriate crop maturity stages. However, improper application timing or delayed harvest following application may negatively affect grain quality, especially head rice yield.

Recent studies at the LSU AgCenter H. Rouse Caffey Rice Research Station evaluated the effects of sodium chlorate application rate and harvest timing on milling quality of three rice varieties: PVL03, RT7421FP, and Titan. Results indicated that sodium chlorate application rate had little effect on milling performance. No significant differences were observed between application rates of 3 qt/A and 6 qt/A for either total milled rice or head rice yield (Figure 1). Average head rice values were nearly identical between the two rates across harvest timings, suggesting that increasing the application rate above 3 qt/A provided no measurable milling quality advantage.

In contrast, harvest timing following sodium chlorate application had a substantial effect on milling quality. Harvesting at 3 or 7 days after application maintained the highest head rice yields, averaging approximately 62% across the three varieties. Delaying harvest until 10 days after application reduced head rice by about 4–5 percentage points, with average head rice decreasing from 61–62% to approximately 56%. More severe losses occurred when harvest was delayed to 14 days after application. Head rice declined by approximately 15 percentage points in PVL03 and RT7421FP and by as much as 23 percentage points in Titan. Average head rice across varieties dropped to about 44%, indicating significant deterioration in grain quality (Figure 2).

These findings demonstrate that while sodium chlorate can be an effective harvest aid, harvest timing is considerably more important than application rate for preserving milling quality. To minimize losses in head rice yield, producers should plan to harvest treated fields within 3 to 7 days after application rather than delaying harvest for extended periods.

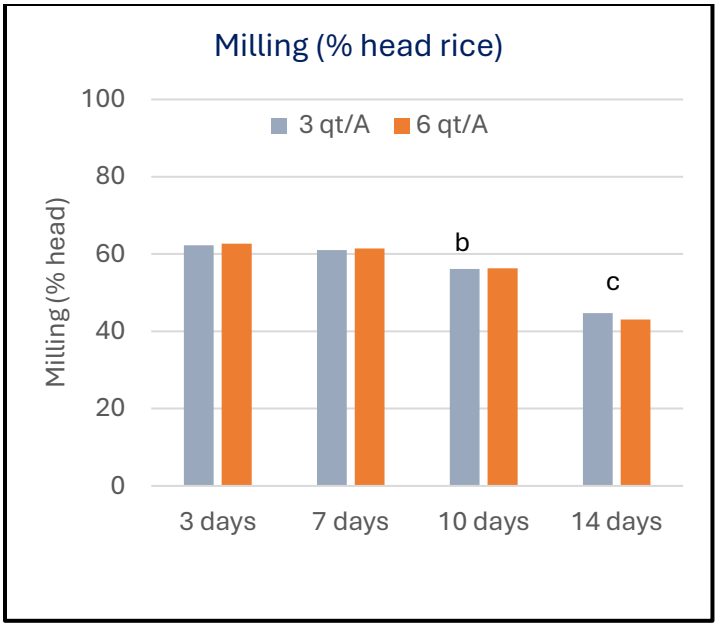

Figure 1. Effect of the rate of sodium chlorate (3 qt/ac and 6 qt/ac) on head rice percentage (%). H. Rouse Caffey Rice Research Station, 2025.

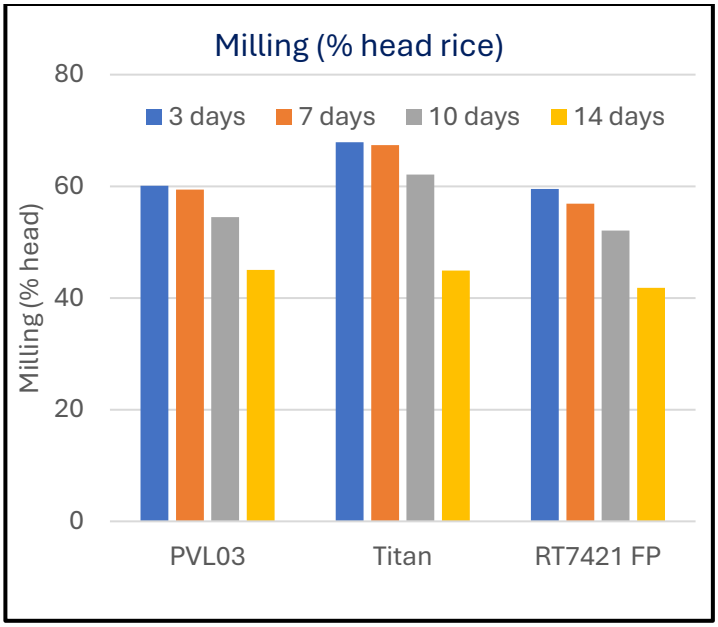

Figure 2. Effect of harvesting time after application of sodium chlorate on head rice percentage (%). H. Rouse Caffey Rice Research Station, 2025.

Article by Manoch Kongchum (Rice Agronomist)

Rice Market Outlook

On March 31, 2026, USDA's Prospective Plantings report projected U.S. rice acreage at 2.319 million acres, down 18% from 2025. The largest reduction is in long-grain rice, with intended plantings falling 22% to 1.648 million acres, the lowest level since 1983. Arkansas, the nation's largest rice-producing state, accounts for much of the decline, with long-grain acreage expected to fall by 280,000 acres to 900,000 acres. Lower rice prices and persistently high input costs, particularly fertilizer and diesel, continue to weigh on planting decisions. Medium- and short-grain acreage is also expected to decline slightly, led by reductions in California.

With fewer planted acres, U.S. long-grain rice production for 2026/27 is forecast at 122.5 million cwt, down 20% from the previous year and the lowest since 2011/12. Total U.S. rice supplies are projected at 275.8 million cwt, while exports are forecast to decline from 81 million cwt to 79 million cwt. Long-grain exports are expected to fall to 50 million cwt due to reduced production, strong competition from South American exporters, and relatively higher U.S. prices. Export demand remains sluggish, with disruptions in key markets such as Iraq and increased competition from Pakistan, Brazil, Uruguay, and Peru limiting U.S. sales. The U.S. has also seen a significant loss of market share in Mexico, where imports from Brazil and Uruguay have increased.

Medium- and short-grain exports are projected at 29 million cwt, only slightly below recent years, supported by continued demand from Northeast Asia and ongoing sales to Japan. The season-average farm price for all rice in 2025/26 was raised to $12.50 per cwt, reflecting a larger share of higher-priced medium- and short-grain rice marketings.

Table 1. Season Average Farm Prices ($/Cwt) for U.S. Rice, by Class (Source: USDA, NASS)

Class	2024/25	2025/26 May	2025/26 June	2026/27
All-rice	$15.10	$12.10	$12.50	$13.50
Long grain	$14.00	$10.40	$10.40	$12.00
Medium/short grain	$18.50	$18.50	$18.60	$17.90
California	$18.70	$20.30	$20.30	$20.00
Other States	$15.00	$14.70	$14.90	$13.50

Despite weak export demand, the long-term outlook remains constructive. Tightening acreage and the possibility that Arkansas plantings may fall below current estimates could further reduce production and provide support for prices. Cash prices have improved modestly, with Louisiana prices averaging $11.11 per cwt and Arkansas prices averaging $10.75 per cwt. September rice futures strengthened in late June, exceeding $13.26 per cwt and approaching recent highs. Global rice fundamentals are also becoming more supportive. World rice production is expected to decline while consumption increases, reducing global ending stocks. Export quotes have risen for most major exporters since May, reflecting tighter supplies and stronger demand. While the U.S. long-grain market continues to face short-term challenges from weak export demand and geopolitical uncertainty, tightening domestic and global supplies provide a stronger foundation for rice prices moving forward.

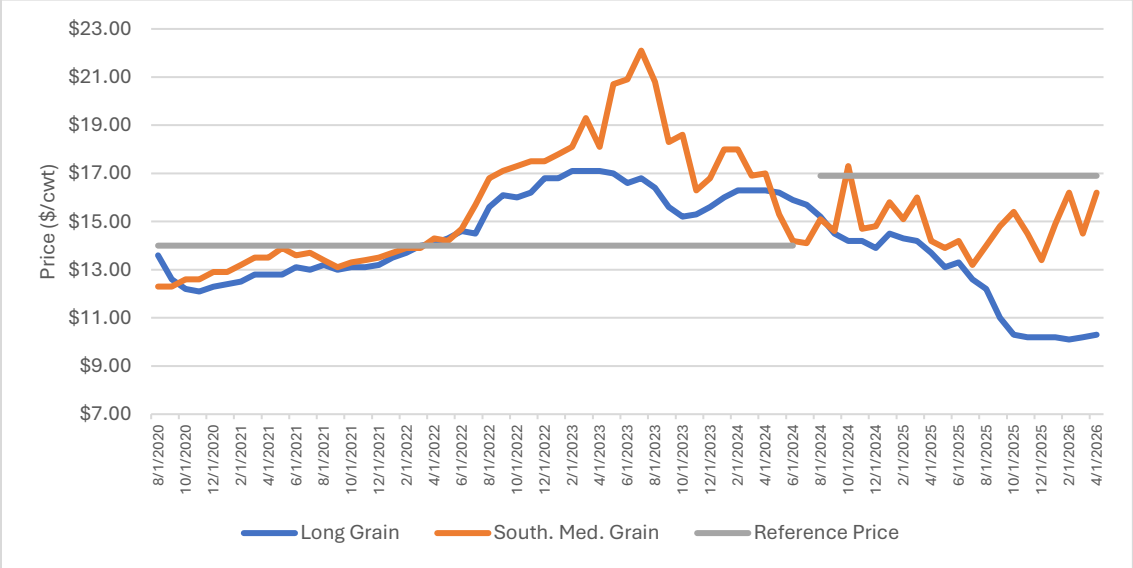

Figure 3. U.S. long grain and southern medium grain rice prices, 2020 - 2026. (Source: USDA, NASS)

Article by Michael Deliberto (Economist)

117th Annual H. Rouse Caffey Rice Research Station Field Day Draws Strong Industry Participation

The 117th Annual H. Rouse Caffey Rice Research Station Field Day was held on June 24, 2026, bringing together rice producers, industry representatives, researchers, students, and agricultural professionals from across Louisiana and beyond to learn about the latest developments in rice production and research. The event continues a long-standing tradition of connecting LSU AgCenter research with the practical needs of Louisiana's rice industry.

The day began at 7:00 a.m. with field tours that provided participants with firsthand opportunities to see current research and interact with LSU AgCenter faculty and staff. Approximately 200 participants completed the field tours, which featured updates on rice breeding and variety development, insect management and monitoring, disease monitoring and management, weed management, and fertility and agronomic practices. These tour stops highlighted the ongoing efforts of LSU AgCenter scientists to address production challenges and improve the profitability and sustainability of rice farming in Louisiana.

In addition to the field tours, attendees had the opportunity to visit a scientific poster session showcasing current rice-related research. Faculty members, graduate students, and researchers from the Rice Research Station and

LSU presented findings from projects covering a wide range of topics important to rice production and management. More than 20 research posters were registered for the event, demonstrating the breadth and depth of rice research taking place within the LSU AgCenter and university system.

Held in conjunction with the poster session was a trade show featuring more than 20 vendors and exhibitors. Agribusinesses, industry partners, and agricultural agencies displayed products, services, and technologies designed to support rice producers and the broader agricultural community. The trade show provided valuable opportunities for attendees to learn about new technologies, exchange ideas, and strengthen industry partnerships.

The field day concluded with an indoor session featuring updates from key agricultural and rice industry organizations. Representatives from the Louisiana Rice Research Board, Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation, and USA Rice Federation provided information on current programs, initiatives, and issues affecting rice producers. Dr. Michael Deliberto, LSU AgCenter economist, presented a market outlook for the 2026 rice crop and discussed current economic conditions impacting the industry.

LSU AgCenter leadership also provided updates on the organization's teaching, research, and extension programs. Dr. Matt Lee, Senior Vice Chancellor and Dean of the College of Agriculture, shared updates on AgCenter activities and initiatives. Dr. Mike Salassi, Associate Vice President and Director of the Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station, discussed ongoing agricultural research efforts across the state, while Dr. Tara Smith, Associate Vice President and Director of the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, highlighted extension programs and outreach activities serving Louisiana producers and communities.

The Rice Research Station was also honored to welcome Dr. James Dalton, LSU Executive Vice President and Provost. During his visit, Dr. Dalton toured the station, met with producers and industry representatives, and gained firsthand insight into the vital role that LSU

Figure 1. Participants at one of the field day tour stops

Figure 2. Participants reviewing scientific posters and visiting with trade show vendors.

Figure 3. Dr. James Dalton, Executive Vice President and Chancellor, and Dr. Matt Lee, Vice Chancellor and Dean of the College of Agriculture visiting with field day participants.

AgCenter rice research plays in supporting Louisiana agriculture. His conversations with producers provided a direct perspective on the value of research-driven solutions and the impact they have on farm operations throughout the state.

The annual field day remains one of the most important opportunities for rice producers and industry stakeholders to learn about the latest research, discuss current production challenges, and gain insight into future research priorities. Just as importantly, it serves as a forum for collaboration, allowing members of the rice industry to exchange ideas, strengthen professional relationships, and work together to ensure the continued economic

Article by Kurt Guidry (Assistant Resident Coordinator and Economist)

Graduate Student Research Highlight: When is Fungicide Worth it for Sheath Blight in Rice?

Sheath blight is one of the most important diseases affecting rice in Louisiana, with the potential to reduce both yield and profit. However, fungicide applications do not always guarantee an economic return. In many cases, spray decisions are based on calendar schedules or general recommendations rather than field conditions, which can lead to unnecessary costs or ineffective disease control.

This research, supported by the Louisiana Rice Research Board, is focused on helping growers make more informed decisions about when fungicide applications are most likely to protect yield and improve profitability.

Why This Matters

Applying fungicide at the wrong time can reduce the value of disease control in two ways. If fungicide is applied too early, when disease pressure is low, the cost of the application may not be recovered. If it is applied too late, the disease may have already caused irreversible damage, limiting the benefit of control. In addition, repeated or unnecessary applications can increase production costs and may reduce the long-term effectiveness of available fungicides. The key question is not simply whether to spray, but when spraying is worth it.

What We Found

Our results show that successful sheath blight management depends on three main factors: application timing, number of sprays, and cultivar susceptibility.

Timing matters more than frequency:

Well-timed applications provided greater yield protection than late or poorly timed sprays, even when fewer applications were used (Table 1).

More sprays do not always mean more profit:

In many situations, two applications performed similarly to three applications but had lower costs, resulting in better economic return.

Table 1. Estimated Yield Protection (lbs/ac) for Rice Cultivars With Different Levels of Susceptibility to Sheath Blight Under Various Fungicide Application Timings [A,B]

Cultivar	PD7	B	H	PD7 + B	B + H	PD7 + H	PD7 + B + H
Susceptible	881	595	353	702	980	883	839
Moderately susceptible	498	302	25	515	583	668	841
Resistant	307	590	393	671	652	496	882

[A] Values represent yield gain relative to non-treated plots

[B] Application timings included single applications at growth stages Panicle Differentiation (PD7), Booting (B), and Heading (H) along with applications at multiple growth stages. .

Cultivar susceptibility changes the decision:

Susceptible varieties responded more strongly to fungicide applications, while moderately resistant cultivars often showed smaller gains from chemical control. Earlier applications are more important in susceptible cultivars, while resistant cultivars may require sprays only when disease is present. Profitability also depends on application costs, rice price, and cultivar susceptibility. As a result, the same fungicide strategy may be profitable in one scenario but not in another (Figure 1).

Support from the Louisiana Rice Research Board plays a pivotal role in advancing this work and helping develop practical, profitable disease management strategies for rice growers.

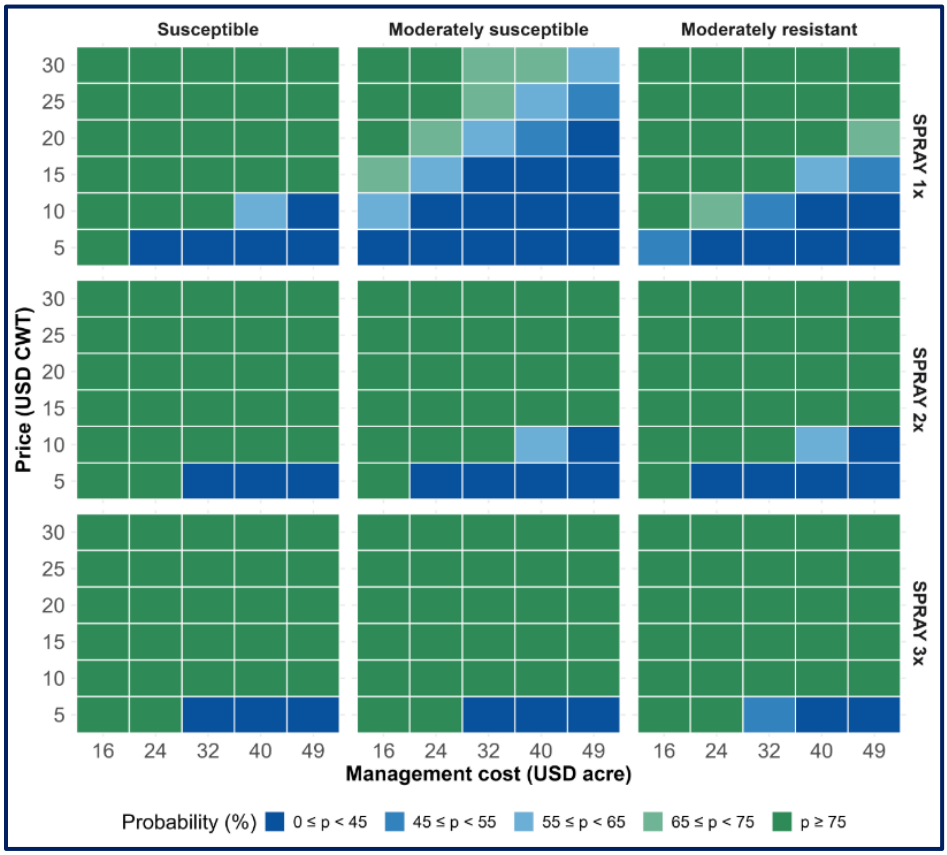

Figure 1. Probability of generating an economic return from one or multiple fungicide applications in the management of sheath blight for different levels of cultivar susceptibility, different rice commodity prices, and different fungicide application costs.

Article by Ricardo Gomes Tomáz (PhD Student – Visiting Scholar – Pathology)

Employee Highlight: Rick Zaunbrecher. Manager – Rice Station Foundation Seed Program

Rick Zaunbrecher's career at the H. Rouse Caffey Rice Research Station is a testament to dedication, experience, and a deep commitment to Louisiana rice production. His connection to the station began at an early age as a student worker in the rice breeding program, where he gained hands-on experience while still in high school. He continued in that role while pursuing a degree in Business Management from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, which he completed in 2009. That early exposure to field research and seed production laid the groundwork for what would become a long and impactful career at the Rice Research Station.

Following graduation, Mr. Zaunbrecher joined the breeding program full time, where he spent several years contributing to the development and evaluation of new rice varieties. His strong work ethic and attention to detail made him a valuable member of the team and ultimately led to his transition into his current role as Research Associate and manager of the Foundation Seed Program. He has now led this program for the past 11 years, overseeing one of the most critical components of the rice production system.

Figure 4. Mr. Rick Zaunbrecher, Manager of the H. Rouse Caffey Rice Research Station's Foundation Seed Program

The foundation seed program plays a vital role in ensuring the success and reliability of rice production across Louisiana. Foundation serves as the essential link between rice breeders and farmers, maintaining the genetic identity and purity of rice varieties before they are multiplied into certified seed. Under Mr. Zaunbrecher's leadership, the program relies on meticulous management practices to uphold these standards. These efforts include the careful monitoring of fields, the hand removal of off-type plants and weeds, and stringent handling procedures throughout production.

Each year, the program manages between eight and ten different rice lines, each of which must be handled independently to prevent any risk of commingling. This requires an exceptional level of precision and discipline. Harvest operations are particularly demanding, as all equipment—especially combines—must be thoroughly disassembled and completely cleaned after each variety is harvested. This careful process ensures that no residual seed remains that could compromise the genetic purity of the next line.

Through his leadership, Mr. Zaunbrecher has helped maintain the integrity of the foundation seed program, which ultimately supports the delivery of high-quality, reliable seed to rice producers across the region. His work ensures that farmers can plant with confidence, knowing that the seed they use will perform consistently and as expected. Rick Zaunbrecher's contributions continue to play a foundational role in sustaining the strength and competitiveness of Louisiana's rice industry.

Faculty, Staff, and Student News

The faculty, staff, and students of the H. Rouse Caffey Rice Research Station are actively involved in outreach, professional and industry events. The following is a list of the activities and events people from the Rice Station participated in over the last 3 months:

April 2026

- Dr. Kurt Guidry (Assistant Resident Coordinator and Economist) participated in a Livestock and Forage Agents Meeting and Training Workshop held in Opelousas, Louisiana.
- Dr. Kurt Guidry (Assistant Resident Coordinator and Economist) presented at the Master Cattlemen Program held in Covington, Louisiana.
- Dr. Kurt Guidry (Assistant Resident Coordinator and Economist) guest lectured for the course Forage Ecology and Management (AGRO 4005)

- Dr. Kurt Guidry (Assistant Resident Coordinator and Economist) conducted two economic impact studies. One study examined the economic impact to the poultry industry from Winter Storm Fern while the other examined the impact to the corn industry from the late season freeze in March 2026.

- Dr. Kurt Guidry (Assistant Resident Coordinator and Economist) presented at the Northwest Region Beef and Forage Field Day held in Homer, Louisiana.

May 2026

- Dr. Kurt Guidry (Assistant Resident Coordinator and Economist) presented at the Southwest Louisiana Cattle Marketing Workshop held in Lake Charles, Louisiana.

- Dr. Kurt Guidry (Assistant Resident Coordinator and Economist) presented at the Lafourche Parish Beef Cattle Field Day held in Raceland, Louisiana.

- Dr. Kurt Guidry (Assistant Resident Coordinator and Economist) participated in an Agent Training Workshop on Crawfish Production and Economics held in Crowley, Louisiana. The workshop was planned and coordinated by Mr. Todd Fontenot (ANR Agent – Crawfish).

- Dr. Kurt Guidry (Assistant Resident Coordinator and Economist) presented at the Advanced Master Cattlemen Program held in Homer, Louisiana.

- Several Rice Station faculty (Dr. Adam Famoso, Dr. Felipe Dalla Lana, Dr. Tyler Musgrove, and Dr. Connor Webster) participated in a Rice Field Day held at McNeese State University.

- Several Rice Station faculty (Dr. Adam Famoso, Dr. Felipe Dalla Lana, Dr. Tyler Musgrove, and Dr. Connor Webster) participated in a Rice Field Day held in Mamou, Louisiana.

- Dr. Connor Webster (Rice Weed Scientist) hosted a Weed Science Open House at the Rice Station's South Farm. The Open House program is a new program coordinated by Dr. Tyler Musgrove (Extension Rice Specialist)

- Gavin Sparks (MS Student – Weed Science) graduated with his MS degree in May. He has started a PhD program at the University of Tennessee.

- Ben Stoker (PhD Student – Weed Science) graduated with his PhD degree in May. He has started a position as Technical Service Representative for FMC.

June 2026

- Dr. Kurt Guidry (Assistant Resident Coordinator and Economist) presented at the Advanced Master Cattlemen Program held in Homer, Louisiana.

- Dr. Kurt Guidry (Assistant Resident Coordinator and Economist) attended the Louisiana County Agents Association Annual Meeting held in St. Francisville, Louisiana.

- Dr. Connor Webster hosted the Rice Station's South Farm Field Day focused on weed management research. Also participating in the Field Day were Dr. Tyler Musgrove, Dr. Felipe Dalla Lana, Dr. Brijesh Angira, and Dr. Herry Utomo.

- Several Rice Station faculty (Dr. Adam Famoso, Dr. Felipe Dalla Lana, Dr. Tyler Musgrove, and Dr. Connor Webster) participated in a Rice Field Day held in Allen parish.

- Rice Station Faculty hosted the 117th Annual H. Rouse Caffey Rice Research Station Field Day. Faculty presented information during field tours as well as displayed research during the scientific poster session. Faculty members involved were Dr. Adam Famoso, Dr. Brijesh Angira, Dr. Blake Wilson, Dr. Tyler Musgrove, Dr. Felipe Dalla Lana, Dr. Manoch Kongchum. Dr. Connor Webster, and Dr. Herry Utomo.

- Marana Hains (Research Associate and PhD Student – Weed Science) was awarded the Southern Weed Science Society Endowment Foundation Travel Scholarship. This award will allow her to spend a week with BASF in Raliegh, North Carolina, learning about different aspects of the industry.

Station Events

The Rice Station hosts a variety of events each year. These events range from agricultural education for youth to training for LSU AgCenter personnel. During the last quarter, the following is a list of the events hosted by the Rice Station:

- April 28, 2026 – The Rice Research Station hosted elementary students from the Myrtle Place Elementary in Lafayette. The students spent the entire day learning about rice and agriculture. Faculty and staff from the Rice Research Station provided fun, hands-on learning opportunities for the students.

- May 25, 2026 – The Rice Research Station hosted a group of 4-H members from St. John Parish. Dr. Kurt Guidry (Assistant Resident Coordinator and Economist) and Dr. Todd Fontenot (Crawfish ANR Agent) met with the group and discussed rice and crawfish production and provided an overview of activities at the Rice Research Station.

- June 11, 2026 – The Rice Station's South Farm hosted the annual South Farm Field Day. This field day is primarily focused on weed management research being conducted.

- June 16, 2026 – The Rice Station's Pathology project hosted Dr. Moncia Navia-Urrutia and Dr. Matthew VanWeelden from the University of Florida. Dr. Felipe Dalla Lana (Rice Pathologist) served as host and discussion was on disease management research being conducted at the station and the potential for collaborations.

- June 24, 2026 – The Rice Station held its annual field day. In addition, the Station hosted meetings for both the Louisiana Rice Research Board and the Louisiana Rice Promotion Board.

- June 26, 2026 – The Rice Station's Pathology project hosted students from the LSU AgCenter's Department of Plant Pathology and Crop Physiology. Dr. Felipe Dalla Lana (Rice Pathologist) and Dr. Adam Famoso (Resident Coordinator and Rice Breeder) meet with the group and discussed research activities at the Rice Station and specifically within the Pathology project.

New Employee Highlight – Mikie Badeaux

Ms. Mikie Badeaux has made an immediate and positive impact since joining the H. Rouse Caffey Rice Research Station on June 1, 2026, as an Administrative Coordinator 3. Serving in a dual role that supports both the Rice Research Station and the LSU AgCenter's Southwest Region, she has quickly become an essential part of day-to-day operations, bringing organization, energy, and a strong commitment to service.

Originally from Morse, Ms. Badeaux lives with her husband and three children. She brings a background in Healthcare Management from LSU Eunice. Prior to coming to the Rice Station, she worked in various roles in healthcare and most recently served in a secretarial role with the Acadia Parish School Board. She notes that her main responsibilities include greeting visitors, answering calls, coordinating meetings and events, managing mail and supplies, and assisting

Since joining the station, Ms. Badeaux has especially appreciated the welcoming atmosphere, noting how helpful and supportive everyone has been. She also shared that she was surprised by the scale and importance of Field Day and has enjoyed seeing firsthand the level of planning and effort that goes into such a large and impactful event. Outside of work, she enjoys spending time with her family and relaxing with a good book.

Figure 5. Ms. Mikie Badeaux, Adminstrative Cooridnator 3 for both the Rice Research Station and the LSU AgCenter's Southwest Region.

Although she is new to the role, Ms. Mikie Badeaux has already proven to be a valuable addition to the Rice Research Station and the Southwest Region. Her strong work ethic, positive attitude, and dedication to supporting others are helping ensure the continued success of the station's mission.

For more information, contact us at the H. Rouse Caffey Rice Research Station
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Office Hours: Monday – Friday 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

For more information, visit our website at:

H. Rouse Caffey Rice Research Station (lsuagcenter.com)

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