



IDENTIFICATION OF PRIORITY DIRECTIONS FOR OPTIMIZING THE IMPORT OF RICE PRODUCTS

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Article history:	Abstract:
Received: 11 th December 2025 Accepted: 10 th February 2026	This article is devoted to the priority areas of optimizing the import of rice products in Uzbekistan, analyzing the sharp increase in the import of these products in recent years, its impact on the country's food security, and ways to solve this problem. The study highlights such issues as the concentration of imports from a limited number of countries, the trend of price increases, problems of efficient water resource use in domestic regions, and insufficient development of local production. The article develops practical proposals for optimizing rice imports by reducing import dependence, stimulating local production, introducing water-saving technologies, and improving customs payments.

Keywords: rice, import, export, food security, optimization, local production, water-saving technologies, customs payments, benefits, price stability, agriculture, diversification.

INTRODUCTION

Uzbekistan, as a country with high agricultural potential, has the capacity to provide its population with essential food products. However, in recent years, due to the rapid growth of the population, urbanization processes, and changes in consumption patterns, the demand for rice products has increased significantly. This growth, combined with the limited capacity of local production, is leading our country to become increasingly dependent on the import of rice products [1].

Rice occupies an important place in the daily diet of the country's population. With an annual per capita consumption rate of 9.8 kg, rice has become one of the strategically important food products in our republic. At the same time, rice cultivation in our country traditionally requires large amounts of water resources, which creates certain resource-related challenges [2].

The sharp increase in rice imports observed in recent years raises serious concerns from the perspective of food security in the country. The fact that imports are carried out mainly from a few countries (primarily Kazakhstan, Pakistan, and Thailand), along with the steady upward trend in prices, leads to excessive outflow of foreign currency from the country

and creates certain problems related to local rice cultivation [3].

This research is aimed at identifying priority directions for optimizing rice imports in Uzbekistan, proposing ways to reduce import dependence, develop local production, and ensure efficient use of resources. The relevance of the study is determined by its significance in ensuring our country's food independence and implementing the sustainable development strategy.

The purpose of this article is to scientifically substantiate the priority directions for optimizing rice imports, analyze the structure and dynamics of imports, the geography of imports, as well as to develop practical proposals for reducing import dependence through the development of local cultivation and the introduction of water-saving technologies. The research results can be practically applied in shaping the food industry and agricultural policy of our republic.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This scientific research is devoted to a comprehensive study of rice products import in Uzbekistan and the prospects for its optimization. Statistical data from the Customs Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the State Statistics Committee, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the World Trade



Organization (WTO) for the period 2023-2025 were used.

In the study, statistical, comparative, normative-legal analysis methods, as well as a systematic approach, induction and deduction methods were used to analyze the rice products market and its foreign trade dynamics. In particular, the import-export volumes of imported rice products, price differentiation, import geography, and the impact of customs duty exemptions on domestic market prices and local production were thoroughly studied.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The permanent population of Uzbekistan is increasing by an average of 2% annually, reaching 37 million people today (and projected to reach 41 million by 2030), which leads to an annual increase in demand for food products, including rice products. Currently, rice occupies one of the most important positions

among food products in Uzbekistan. Therefore, by analyzing the foreign trade statistics of rice products imported into our country over the last 3 years, conclusions and proposals on priority directions for optimizing imports have been developed.

Specifically, according to foreign trade statistics, the import of agricultural and food products for consumer use amounted to 5.1 million tons (2.5 million USD) in 2023, increased by 5.9% compared to the previous year to 5.4 million tons (3.3 million USD) in 2024, and in 2025, it increased by 17% to 6.2 million tons (3.6 million USD).

Rice product imports accounted for 1% (27.9 thousand tons, 7.4 million USD) of total agricultural and food product imports in 2021, 0.2% (7.8 thousand tons, 2.0 million USD) in 2022, and 2% (104.7 thousand tons, 31.2 million USD) in 2023 (Figure 1) [4].

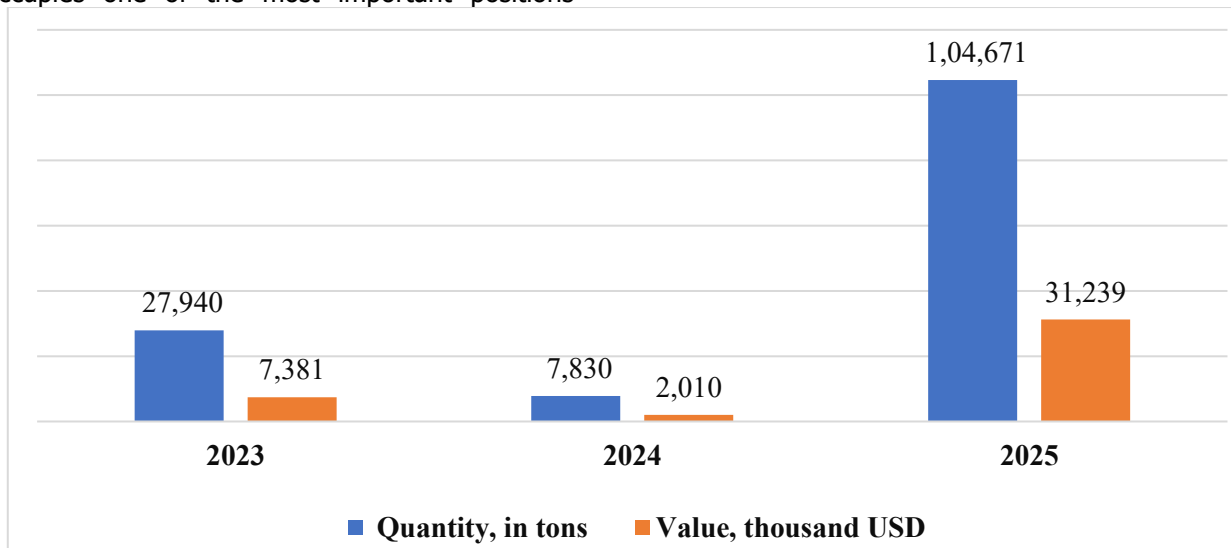


Figure 1. Volume of rice product imports (in tons, thousand USD)

It can be understood from this figure that in 2025, rice was imported 3.9 times more than in 2023.

The volume of rice product imports by month can be seen in the following figure (Figure 2).

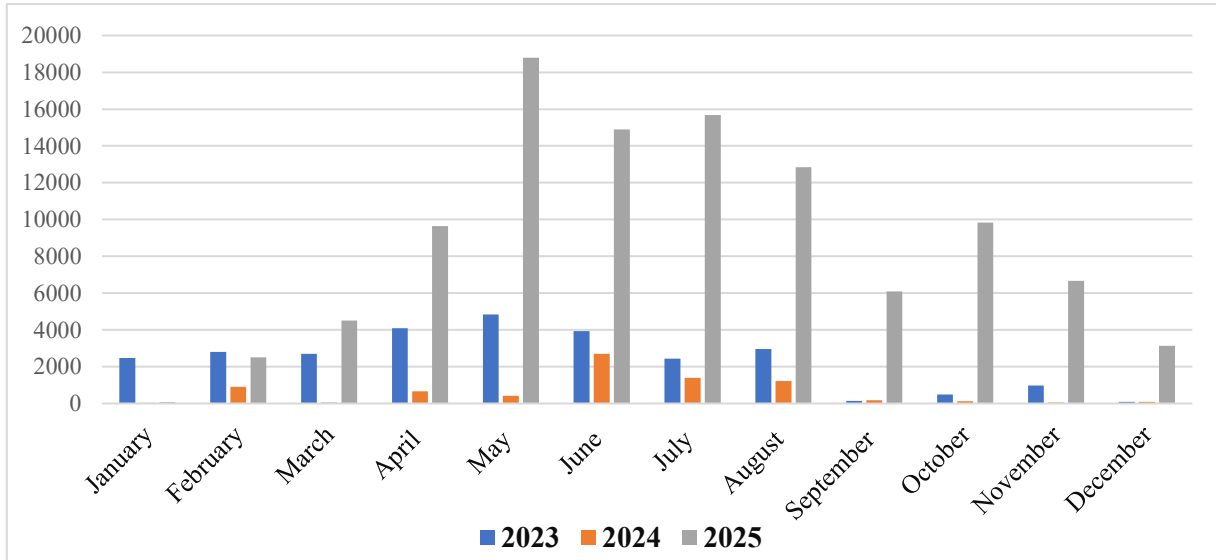


Figure 2. Rice product imports by month (in tons)

It can be observed that the rice imports shown above entered in larger quantities during the months of April-November compared to other months. During this period, the influence of factors such as the wedding and ceremony season in our country, the increase in the flow of tourists, as well as existing problems in agriculture among local producers, particularly water scarcity and low productivity, have also had an impact.

When examining the geography of rice imports, it was found that in 2025, rice imports were carried out mainly from 11 countries, among which Kazakhstan (61.3 thousand tons), Pakistan (31.6 thousand tons), and Thailand (6.9 thousand tons) accounted for the largest shares (Figure 3) [5].

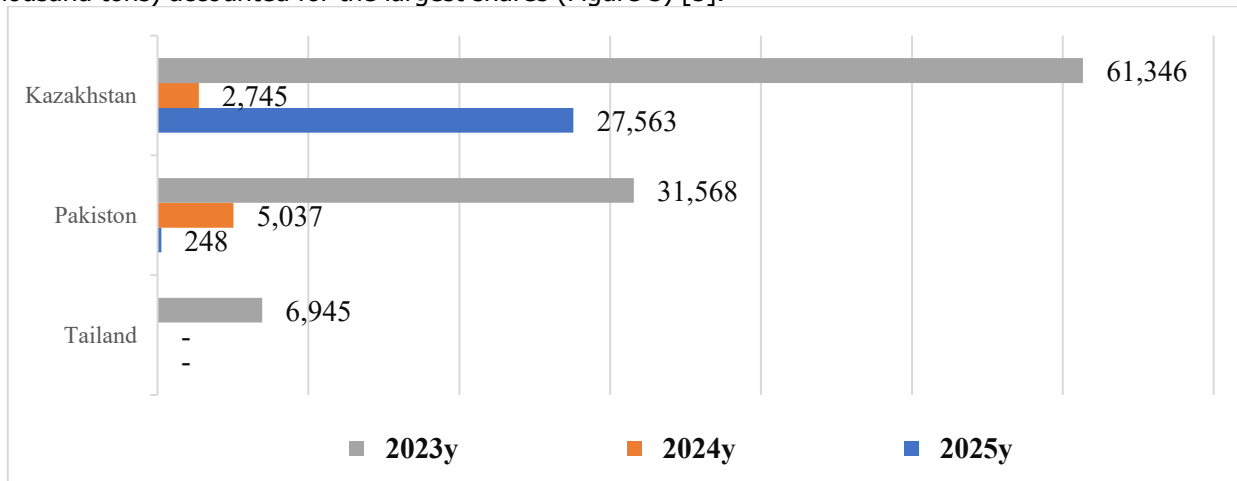


Figure 3. Share of countries from which rice is imported the most (in tons)

From this figure, it can be understood that in Kazakhstan's share of rice imports to our country amounted to 99% and Pakistan's share to 1% in 2023, while in 2025 these indicators were 59% and 30%, respectively.

When examining the average price index of rice products in Uzbekistan, it can be observed that in 2024 it decreased by 3% compared to the previous year (\$0.257 USD), while in 2025 this indicator increased by 16%, averaging \$0.298 USD (Figure 4) [6].

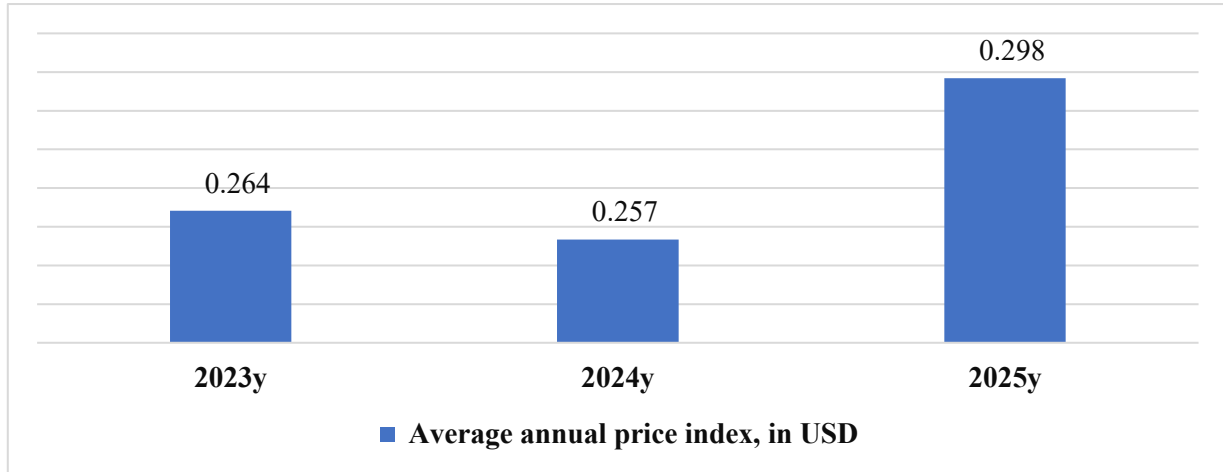


Figure 4. Average annual price index (in USD)

When examining the customs duties collected and exemptions granted on imported rice products during 2023-2025, in 2023 only VAT in the amount of 13.3 billion soums was collected, while in 2024 this amounted to 10.4 billion soums, and in 2025 it was 8 times more than the previous year, reaching 82.3 billion soums. In 2024-2025, based on existing exemption documents (PQ-145, 31.05.2022, PQ-392, 12.10.2022, and PQ-41, 23.03.2023), VAT exemptions in the amount of 0.07 billion soums and 0.1 billion soums, respectively, were applied [7].

In the production and consumption balance of agricultural and food products in the Republic of Uzbekistan, the share of imports in the annual per capita consumption of the main 10 types of food products in 2023 was analyzed as follows (Table 1) [8].

Table 1
Annual consumption norm of the population and the share of imports therein

Nº	Product name	Annual per capita norm (kg/year)	Demand in 2023 (thousand tons)	Import in 2023 (thousand tons)	Ratio of import to demand (%)
1	Vegetable oil	9,3	338,5	403,2	119,1
2	Rice	9,8	364,5	104,7	28,7
3	Flour	91	3 341,5	563	16,8
4	Potatoes	110,1	4 007,6	540,2	13,5
5	Poultry meat	14,2	516,9	49,6	9,6
6	Meat	28,6	1 041,0	66,7	6,4
7	Onions	34,1	1 241,2	45,5	3,7
8	Carrots	34,1	1 241,2	7,6	0,6
9	Eggs, million pcs	234	8 517,6	10,2	0,1
10	Milk	115,8	4 215,1	4,5	0,1



From this table, it can be understood that considering the population residing in our country and the tourists visiting (7 million tourists visited in 2023) staying in the Republic for an average of 10 days, we can project that 364.5 thousand tons of rice will be consumed for 37.2 million people in Uzbekistan.

While the majority of rice in our country is cultivated domestically, it can be observed that the volume of imports is increasing relative to the annual per capita consumption of certain products.

The following table shows the share of imports in the annual per capita consumption of rice (Figure 5) [9]:

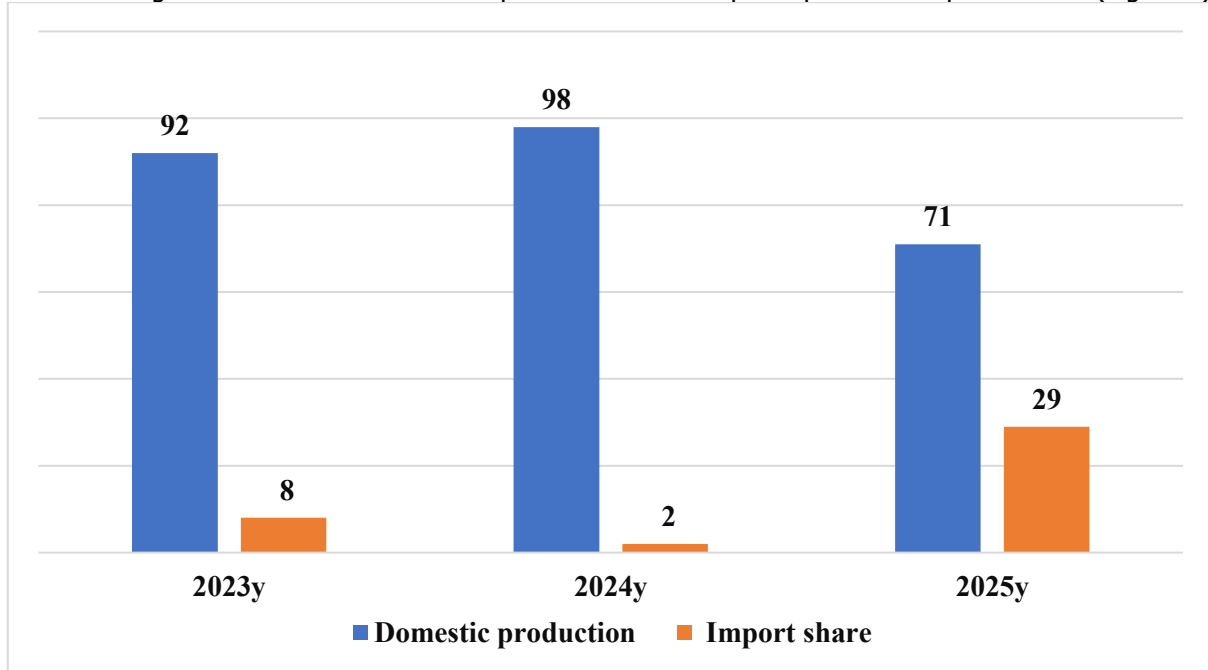


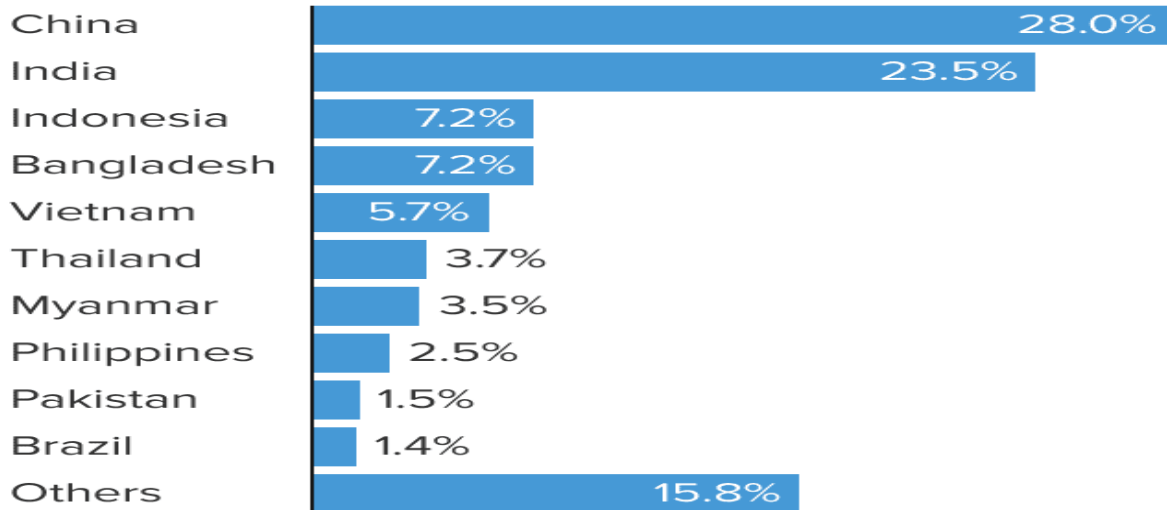
Figure 5. Share of imports and local production in annual rice consumption (in percent)

Considering that in optimizing product imports, primary attention is focused on products with a high share of imports relative to the annual needs of the population, as of the end of 2025, rice (29%) can be cited as an example of such products.

When examining the countries that produce the most rice in the world market, it can be seen that in 2024, China (28%) and India (23.5%) were the leaders (Figure 6) [10].



Top rice-producing countries



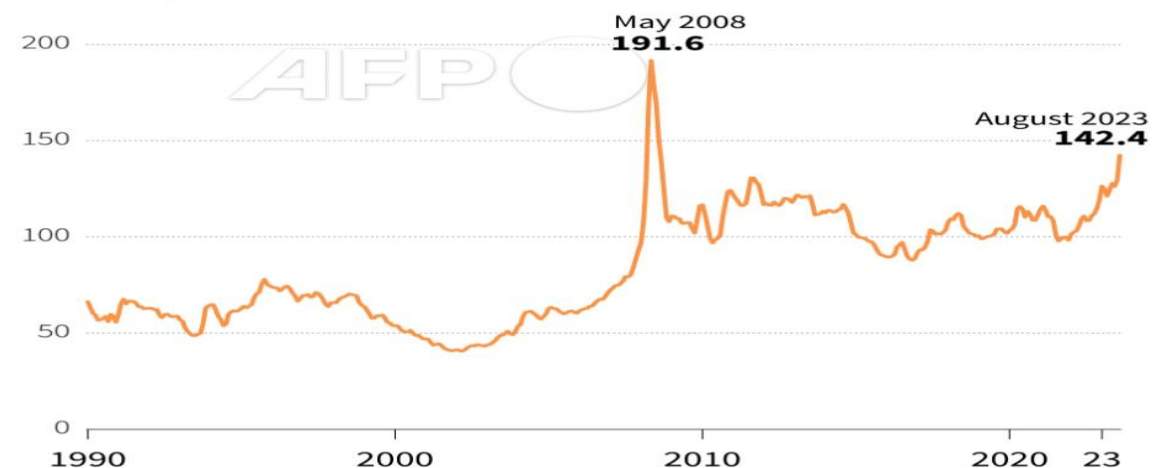
Source: World Economic Forum

Figure 6. Countries producing the most rice (in 2024, in percent)

When examining the global rice price index, it can be seen that the 2025 indicator is lower than the average price index in our country (Figure 7) [11].

Rice prices reach 15-year high

FAO rice price index (nominal value)



Source: FAO



Figure 7. Rice price data on the world market (in USD per 1 ton)



It is known that rice cultivation requires hard manual labor and a large amount of water. On average, 15,000-25,000 m³ of water is consumed for growing rice on 1 hectare of land [12].

At the videoconference meeting held on November 29, 2023, chaired by our President on "Measures for the rational use of water resources in agriculture and reduction of losses," it was announced by the Head of our State that an emergency work system for water conservation would be introduced during 2024, which necessitates the widespread use of water-saving technologies in the rice industry in the future [14].

In recent years, as a result of the adoption of several legislative acts on the development of rice cultivation, the assimilation of foreign experience in the republic, the establishment of rice clusters, and the Rice Research Institute, new water-efficient varieties of rice have been created and water-saving technologies are being widely applied. In addition, obtaining harvests twice a year through seedling planting is leading to further increases in productivity [15]. Nevertheless, the sharp increase in rice product imports in 2025 indicates a decrease in rice cultivation within the domestic territory [16].

In order to reliably meet the food needs of the republic's population, prevent artificial and unjustified increases in prices of socially significant goods in the domestic consumer market, and mitigate their negative impact on the inflation rate through the extensive use of tariff and non-tariff regulation tools, customs duty exemptions were granted for rice products, resulting in an increase in import volumes over the last two years.

Through effective import management, it is possible to reduce external dependence on high-quality products and ensure cheaper and more stable sources of raw materials. Also, import optimization can contribute to economic growth by reducing financial expenditures and stimulating domestic production.

Furthermore, creating the "Uzbek Rice" brand and entering the international market is an important factor in developing our country's food industry. Based on the unique taste and quality characteristics of traditional rice varieties such as "Devzira" and "Alanga," there is an opportunity to create a competitive brand in the global market by registering them as "geographical indications." In the branding process, it is necessary to emphasize the product's environmental friendliness and connection with organic production methods. Participation in international exhibitions, sales through online trading platforms, and integration with the

tourism sector will serve to increase brand recognition. At the same time, raising product packaging, design, and quality standards to international requirements will ensure successful brand development.

Based on the above, the following proposals are put forward:

1. According to the above analyses, the sharp increase in rice imports in 2023 is related to increased domestic consumption and a reduction in local rice cultivation. Taking into account the above analyses, to ensure food security, it is possible to optimize rice imports by supporting local rice producers at the state level, providing them with modern technologies and resources, and increasing and diversifying import sources;
2. Introduction of water-saving technologies, cultivation of new high-yield and drought-resistant varieties, and widespread implementation of modern agricultural technologies;
3. Establishment of rice clusters, state support for them, and modernization of processing enterprises;
4. Adaptation of quality standards to international requirements;
5. Creation and promotion of the "Uzbek Rice" brand.

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