



## Herbicide-Tolerant Rice Varieties

---

 [drishtiias.com/printpdf/herbicide-tolerant-rice-varieties](https://drishtiias.com/printpdf/herbicide-tolerant-rice-varieties)

### Why in News

---

Recently, the **Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI)** has developed the **country's first-ever non-GM (genetically modified) herbicide-tolerant rice varieties (Pusa Basmati 1979 and Pusa Basmati 1985).**

- These varieties **can be directly seeded** and significantly save water and labour **compared to conventional transplanting.**
- **ICAR-IARI** is a deemed university.

### Key Points

---

- **About the New Varieties of Rice:**
  - The new varieties contain a **mutated AcetoLactate Synthase (ALS) gene** making it possible for farmers to spray **Imazethapyr**, a broad-spectrum herbicide, to control weeds.
    - The **ALS gene** in rice codes for an enzyme (protein) that **synthesises amino acids for crop growth and development.**
    - The **herbicide sprayed on normal rice plants binds itself to the ALS enzymes, inhibiting their production of amino acids.**
  - **Imazethapyr**, effective against a range of broadleaf, grassy and sedge weeds, **can't be used on normal paddy**, as the chemical **does not distinguish between the crop and the invasive plants.**
  - However, the new basmati varieties contain a **mutated ALS gene** whose DNA sequence has been altered using **ethyl methanesulfonate, a chemical mutant.**  
As a result, the ALS enzymes no longer have binding sites for Imazethapyr and amino acid synthesis isn't inhibited.
  - The plants can now **"tolerate" application of the herbicide**, and hence it kills only the weeds.
  - It is important to note that, as **there is no foreign gene involved in the process**, the herbicide-tolerance is through mutation breeding. **Thus, it is not a Genetically modified organism.**

- **Advantages of These Varieties:**

- **Direct Seeding of Rice Activity:** The new varieties simply replace water with Imazethapyr and there's no need for nursery, puddling, transplanting and flooding of fields.
  - Water is a natural herbicide that takes care of weeds in the paddy crop's early-growth period.
  - The new varieties will help in **Direct Seeding of Rice (DSR) which has several advantages over paddy transplantation.**
- **Cheaper Option:** DSR cultivation is currently based on two herbicides, Pendimethalin and Bispyribac-sodium.  
However, Imazethapyr is cheaper than these two options.
- **Safer Option:** Imazethapyr, moreover, has a wider weed-control range and is safer, as the ALS gene isn't present in humans and mammals.

## **Paddy Transplantation vs Direct Seeding of Rice**

---

- **Paddy Transplantation:**

- The field where the seedlings are transplanted has to be **“puddled” or tilled in standing water.**
- For the first three weeks or so after transplanting, the plants are irrigated almost daily to maintain a water depth of 4-5 cm.
- Farmers continue giving water every two-three days even for the next four-five weeks when the crop is in **tillering (stem development) stage.**
- Paddy transplantation is **both labour- and water-intensive.**

- **Direct Seeding of Rice (DSR):**

- In DSR, the **pre-germinated seeds are directly drilled** into the field by a tractor-powered machine.
- There is no nursery preparation or transplantation involved in this method.
- Farmers have to only level their land and give one pre-sowing irrigation.

- **Advantages with Direct Seeding of Rice:**

- Water savings.
- Less numbers of labourers required.
- Saves labour cost.
- Reduce methane emissions due to a shorter flooding period and decreased soil disturbance compared to transplanting rice seedlings.

- **Drawbacks of Direct Seeding of Rice:**

- The seed requirement for DSR is also high, 8-10 kg/acre, compared to 4-5 kg/acre in transplanting.
- Further, laser land levelling is compulsory in DSR. This is not so in transplanting.
- The sowing needs to be done timely so that the plants have come out properly before the monsoon rains arrive.

**Source: IE**