



IR8 rice variety

PHOTO SOURCE

In the 1950s, Asia was on the brink of famine. Food was scarce and millions of people were in danger of starvation. India was importing huge quantities of food grains from the US to feed its growing millions in a manner that was famously described as “ship-to-mouth” sustenance. By 1960, the International Rice Research Institute was established with an urgent mission: to develop a high-yielding rice variety that is resistant to attack by major insects and pests.

Peter Jennings and Henry Beachell, who joined as rice breeders at the IRRI, began experiments with rice crossing. The team tried as many as 38 crosses involving rice varieties from China, Taiwan and Indonesia.