

Date of Hearing: March 25, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

Esmeralda Soria, Chair

AB 1551 (Krell) – As Introduced January 7, 2026

SUBJECT: California Rice Commission: purpose

SUMMARY: This bill adds language to the California Rice Commission’s (CRC) declaration and general provisions that it is necessary to maintain a sufficient footprint of annual rice acreage to support the wildlife habitat objectives of the state.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Creates the CRC with a prescribed membership and authorizes the commission, among other things, to promote the sale of rice, educate and instruct the wholesale and retail trade with respect to proper methods of handling and selling rice, and conduct scientific research. (*Food and Agriculture Code (FAC) 71000-71010*)
- 2) Declares the CRC to be necessary for, among other things, carrying out the California rice industry’s commitment to responsible stewardship and increasingly efficient cultural practices. (*FAC 71003*)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: The CRC was created by AB 623 (Machado) Statutes of 1998, Chapter 567. AB 623 provided statutory authority to create the CRC for producers and handlers, for the purposes of engaging in research and market expansion activities. The bill also prescribes the membership and specifies the powers, duties, and responsibilities of the commission.

Rice agriculture in the Sacramento Valley has not only produced globally recognized rice crops but has also become a basis of habitat for hundreds of species and a critical component of regional ecological function and local economies. California’s rice lands today serve as surrogate wetlands in a landscape where more than 95% of historical wetlands have disappeared, providing essential wintering and foraging habitat for migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, fish, and other wildlife.

According to author, California’s roughly 500,000 acres of rice provide vital surrogate wetland habitat to a diverse array of species, including Giant Garter snakes, Sandhill Cranes, and millions of other waterfowl, shorebirds, and native fish. Climate change, water shortages, market shifts, and urban growth all pose a challenge to maintaining enough rice acreage to guarantee a viable habitat for these species. The recent UC Davis study “*The Rice Footprint*” sets forth a plan to maintain this critical ecosystem, which would cost an estimated \$2 billion to restore if we fail to preserve it. This bill supports this crucial conservation work by identifying implementation of the Rice Footprint as a priority of the CRC.

Supporters state recent research has identified rice as critical surrogate wetland habitat supporting a wide variety of species. Research has also identified a minimum amount of rice footprint – annual rice acreage – needed to support these species. However, existing law does not include the maintenance of this critical rice footprint as a function of the Rice Commission or

any other entity. This bill makes changes to ensure there is a designated entity safeguarding this important conservation priority.

The purpose of marketing programs are to provide agricultural producers and handlers an organizational structure, operating under government sanction, which allows them to solve production and marketing problems collectively that could not be addressed individually. Current marketing programs' activities include commodity promotion, research, and maintenance of quality standards.

Commissions provide a structure for solving problems while also providing a vehicle for collecting funds to support activities. Current commissions and marketing orders have been successful in expanding markets, improving product quality, and providing more research for pests and disease prevention.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**Support**

Audobon California
California Rice Commission
National Audubon Society
The Nature Conservancy

Opposition

None on file

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