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fields fallow during the rains. He grows an irrigated crop of BR14 and IR8, called “IRRI8” in Bangladesh, during the dry season (mid-November to late April/May). After the irrigated crop is harvested, he grows deepwater rice during the wet season.

He also tries new technologies on his nonirrigated land. This year, he is planting a mixture of Datury, a local early wet season or summer (April-August) rice variety, and Alloy, a deepwater rice. “We are now just waiting for the rains,” explains the farmer.

For the transplanted wet season crop, he uses the modern variety BR11 and a local variety Nigershail. Half of his land, which is rainfed and low-lying, is planted from April to November to a deepwater crop of Chamara.

The family also raises rainfed jute, wheat, potato, pulses, lentils, and sugarcane. Some of the produce is sold, but most is

consumed by the family. Vegetables, including bottle gourd, pumpkin, and beans, are also grown.

“We sell mustard and about half of the rough rice,” says Mr. Talukdar. He explains that the going rate for rough rice is 300 taka (US\$7.25) for 40 kilograms. For each *bigha* (0.13 hectare) of land, he grosses 3,600 taka (US\$87). His expenses—irrigation, fertilizer, labor, and one pesticide application for stem borer—total about 2,000 taka per bigha (US\$362 per hectare), leaving him with 1,600 taka per bigha or US\$174 on his 0.6-hectare farm. “I make a profit,” says Mr. Talukdar, smiling.

To get modern varieties to produce up to their yield potential, Mr. Talukdar usually applies some chemical fertilizer. Getting fertilizer when he needs it is the major constraint he faces.

In addition to the cropping enterprises, the family also owns eight head of cattle and raises some goats, sheep, chickens, ducks, and pigeons. Ms. Nessa is in charge of the animals. Fodder must be brought to them, for no land is available for grazing. Weeds—roots and all—are sometimes dug up and washed for fodder.

## Muri makes money

**J**oygun Nessa’s life revolves around rice: she eats it; her family raises it on the farm; and it supplies her with a livelihood: making *muri* (puffed rice).

Rice and salt and sand—as a medium for puffing the rice—are all she needs. Ms. Nessa, however, does not use just any old rice. She recommends IR8 or BR11 for the best results.

To prepare her specialty, she uses a clay stove in which the fire is underground. It uses one-third less fuel than other stoves, which is important in a land



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suffering from an acute fuel shortage. She has been using the stove for about 7 years.

Squatting by the stove, she stokes the fire by throwing fistfuls of wheat straw down the stove's holes. Sometimes she uses balls of cow dung, rice hull, and sticks for fuel. The heat produced is intense.

Over one of the holes, she heats up a large clay pot with sand in it. Rice in salted water is warmed in a small pot over a different hole. She stirs the rice with a *naruni*, a utensil made of palm-midribs bunched together.

When the right temperature is reached, she skillfully pours the rice into the big pot with the sand and swirls it furiously for 30 seconds. Suddenly, the rice becomes alive in a burst of steam and fills the pot.

Ms. Nessa knows exactly when the rice is done puffing. If she hesitates a moment too long, the rice will burn. With the precision of a master chef, she dumps the contents into a clay strainer and shakes out the sand.

The muri is warm and mildly salty, with a nutty taste. She makes it every day so that it's fresh for her customers and family.

She markets the muri in bulk and in small plastic bags at the family's grocery store. From 40 kilograms of rough rice, she gets about 26 kilograms of muri. For every kilogram of muri sold, she earns 20 taka (US\$0.48). Ms. Nessa usually sells 52 kilograms of the snack food each week, earning about 1,400 taka (US\$34). Her yearly income from this business is 72,800 taka (US\$1,760) in a country where women factory workers often earn less than 1,000 taka (US\$24) per month, working six, sometimes seven days a week.

If she would simply sell the rough rice in the market, she would get only 12 taka (US\$0.29) per kilogram. For the 80 kilograms of rough rice used to make the muri, she would only earn 960 taka (US\$23.20)—440 taka (US\$10.60) less.

"Muri is profitable!" she says with a smile.

When producing well, the two cows give about 4 kilograms of milk each day, most of which is sold. Ms. Nessa is also a successful entrepreneur with her own puffed rice business. She sells the snack food in the family's grocery store. (See sidebar.)

Ms. Nessa stores her own rice and wheat seeds in bins in their 10-year-old house, its walls made of woven bamboo mats. The seed potatoes are stored in a wooden box kept under the bed.

So how does Mr. Talukdar get the idea to do all of these things? Sometimes he goes to the agricultural officer if he needs advice, but most of the time "I'm doing these things myself," he says. When Mr. Talukdar was involved a few years ago in on-farm research on wheat, rice, and mustard with the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute, researchers would regularly visit him.

Mr. Talukdar takes the lead in working his ricefields, although he does hire laborers. The couple's 15-year-old daughter and 12-year-old son don't have much time to work on the farm because they are both busy at school. Their parents believe education is very important. The son also runs the small grocery store in the nearby village. "I want him to run the business and farm in the future," Mr. Talukdar. "And I want my daughter to be a professional."

When asked about his future as a rice farmer, a grin slowly spreads across Mr. Talukdar's weathered face, and he laughs. "I'll continue to farm the land, but I would really like to go abroad to work, perhaps to Saudi Arabia as a laborer to make more money." ■