

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

RICE: No shortage in U.S., says expert

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The local Sam's Club limits all varieties of rice purchases to four units, said manager John Cruz. Local Costco employees declined to say Thursday what purchasing limitations are being placed on rice at their store.

The spike in the cost of some long-grain rice — the retail price for a 50-pound sack has risen from roughly \$20 to \$40 over the past few weeks — is one of the most extreme examples of a trend that is pushing up prices for all the major globally traded food commodities including rice, wheat, corn, soy and dairy products.

Experts say the price increases for rice largely have been driven by demand from booming Asian economies combined with poor harvests in key export countries like Australia.

But while American consumers have seen food prices rise, analysts

say food shortages are unlikely to happen anytime soon.

There's a big difference between the market for the long-grain varieties of rice now in short supply in America and abroad and the medium-grain rice that makes up the vast majority of California-grown rice, said Jim Morris, spokesman for the California Rice Commission in Sacramento.

Almost all the state's rice is grown within 100 miles of Sacramento, but it's exported around the world, with about a third of it headed to Japan, he said. Still, while some specialty varieties of imported rice may be in short supply, California rice supplies are now "very sufficient to meet the demands of the consumer," he said.

"I got mucho rice," said Gary Patel, owner of Carniceria Mexico in Cathedral City.

But the market shortage in long-grain varieties like basmati and

jasmine rice has boosted prices for California rice growers, said Pat Daddow, owner of the California Rice Exchange in Yuba City, a trading platform for farmers to sell rice to processors.

Prices for California Calrose rice for delivery this fall have shot up from \$9.80 per hundred pounds to more than \$17 — the highest price Daddow has ever seen — in just the past month, he said.

That's likely the result of buyers rushing to secure deliveries in anticipation of future price rises, but it doesn't translate to any shortage of California-grown rice, he said.

Jesse Morales of Carniceria La Michoacana, also in Cathedral City, said his store was unaffected by the shortage.

"We have lots on our shelves, so I'm not worried," Morales said. "(The price) is going up for our customers, though."

Retailers are choosing to limit

sales rather than raise prices, said Dan Sumner, an agricultural economics professor at University of California, Davis.

"Are we short of rice in the United States? No," Sumner said. It is residents of the world's poorest countries who are suffering the most from the rise in food prices, he said.

The demand for corn and soy to make ethanol and biodiesel also has boosted food prices, though economists disagree on how much.

"Our costs have increased, but we want to be considerate," said Ron Cantu, operations manager and co-owner of El Gallito Restaurant in Cathedral City. "We're going to try to see if we can make it through the end of the year without increasing prices."

Desert Sun wire services and Maricar Mendoza contributed to this report.



CRYSTAL CHATHAM, THE DESERT SUN

Saraya restaurant manager Mahmoud Elhamidi, 25, holds a bag of basmati rice at the Cathedral City restaurant. A worldwide shortage of rice and other grains is causing prices to rise.

FLIERS: Obama camp says litter not theirs

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mail to The Desert Sun. Coachella promoter "Golden-voice will provide cleanup to anyone requesting it," he stated.

Representatives of Roger Waters could not be reached for comment Monday. Golden-voice did not provide a statement by press time.

"They're all over the place. It's littering. I've got all my homeowners calling me and complaining," said Bill Hays, onsite manager at the Desert Shores RV resort.

"If I was going to vote for Obama, I wouldn't this morning if this is how he runs his campaign," Hays added.

Ben LaBolt, spokesman for the Obama campaign out of Chicago, said the organization had no involvement in the incident, calling it "strange."

"I was shocked," Sunny Side Estates resident Christie Wiedlan told the Desert Sun about 7 a.m. Indio resident Kim Walker

saw the plane release the tape while listening to Waters' set from her parents' estate home, just north of the polo fields.

"They landed everywhere," she said. The wind appeared to catch the papers, shortly after an inflatable pig was released into the desert night during Waters' set, she said.

When she returned to her home near Avenue 47 and Madison, the entire neighborhood had been sprinkled with the tape.

"It probably wasn't Obama," Walker added.

While Obama's campaign has said it wasn't involved in the incident, Indio resident Carol Davison, who lives two blocks from the polo fields, said the display definitely changes her thoughts on the candidate, calling the incident a "derelict action."

"I am just appalled. All of our gardeners will now have to spend the whole day trying to clean this up. It's going to be in our pool filters clogging them up," Davison said.

CLINTON: Survey says she leads McCain

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Obama was thrown on the defensive as the Illinois senator continued to deal with the controversial remarks of his longtime Chicago pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright.

"I don't think there's any question that over the last three weeks her stature has improved," said Harrison Hickman, a Democratic pollster unaligned in the primary. He attributed Clinton's gains to people moving from the "infatuation stage" of choosing the candidate they like the most to a "decision-making stage" where they determine who would make the best president.

Added Steve Lombardo, a GOP pollster: "This just reinforces the sentiment that a lot of Republican strategists are having right now — that Clinton might actually be the more formidable fall candidate for a lot of reasons, not the least of which is that Obama can't seem to get his footing back."

The AP-Ipsos poll found Clinton and Obama about even in the race for the Democratic nomination. Underscoring deep divisions within the Democratic Party —

and a potentially negative longer-term impact — 30 percent of Clinton supporters and 21 percent of Obama supporters said they would vote for McCain in November if their preferred candidate didn't win the nomination.

Obama leads Clinton in pledged delegates, but she has the advantage among superdelegates with about a third yet to make up their minds.

Democratic Party Chairman Howard Dean said Monday that one of the two must drop out of the race after the primary season wraps up in June so Democrats can unite before the late-summer convention and the fall campaign.

He also urged undecided superdelegates — members of the Democratic National Committee as well as Democratic governors and members of Congress — to side with either Clinton or Obama before the August convention so the party can come together to take on McCain. The Arizona senator clinched the GOP nomination last month and has been campaigning freely since.

Also on Monday, the head of the Republicans' House campaign

committee said the party would rather face Obama in November because the GOP believes Clinton would be more of a threat to McCain among moderate voters.

Said Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla.: Obama "is by any definition very liberal, to the left of Hillary Clinton, in a center-right country. That is very, very helpful to us."

Nearly half the people in the AP-Ipsos poll said the protracted Democratic primary will hurt their party's chances in November.

Overall, people said they trusted Clinton and Obama about the same to handle Iraq and the economy; McCain got similar ratings on Iraq but trailed both Democrats on the economy. And while roughly the same percentage of people said they trusted both Democrats to understand their problems, fewer trusted McCain.

When pitted against McCain, Clinton now wins among independents, 50 percent to 34 percent, when just a few weeks ago she ran about even with him with this crucial group of voters. Clinton also now does better among independents than Obama does in a matchup with McCain.

Clinton has a newfound edge among seniors, too, 51 percent to 39 percent; McCain had previously had the advantage. And, Clinton has improved her margin over McCain among people under age 30; two-thirds of them now side with her. McCain leads Obama among seniors, while Obama leads McCain among those under 30 but by a smaller margin than Clinton does.

She also now leads among Catholics, always an important swing voting group in a general election, and improved her standing in the South as well as in cities and among families making under \$25,000 a year. But she lost ground among families making between \$50,000 and \$100,000; they narrowly support McCain.

The poll, taken April 23-27, questioned 1,001 adults nationally, with a margin of error of 3.1 percentage points. Included were interviews with 457 Democratic voters and people leaning Democratic, with a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 4.6 points, and 346 Republicans or GOP-leaning voters, with a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 5.3 points.

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