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A highland woman at Mai Chau stands behind a stick fence in a yard as she winnows rice with a woven tray. She is wearing loose black pants or a long skirt with a T-shirt and another cloth wrapped at her waist, perhaps to hold tools. Her hair is wrapped and held back by a cloth to protect it from wind, dust, and sun.

Winnowing trays are round and generally plaited from bamboo strands woven tightly onto a rattan frame. In rural villages, they are made at home by members of every household along with most of their other farming and household tools.

Rice grains that have been pounded or milled to separate them from their tough husks are placed on a woven winnowing tray. The person winnowing the grains then tosses the mixed contents of the tray into the air. If done expertly, the light rice husks blow away in the wind while the heavier, and now clean, rice grains fall back onto the tray, ready for cooking. This task, usually performed by women or girls, takes practice to do well. It is not as easy as it looks.



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