

for the bulk of the total consumption of coconut for culinary purpose in India.

Virgin Coconut Oil (VCO) is a treasure trove of Medium Chain Fatty Acids (MCFA), minerals and vitamins which impart good health. There is increasing global demand for VCO. India exported 789.38 MT VCO worth Rs. 24.64 Crores (US \$ 3.73 M) in 2014-15 to countries like United States, Japan, UK and other countries. During the current year up to the month of August, the export of VCO has touched 430.76 MT valued Rs.14.73 crores. Irrespective of the regional preference of cultivation, coconut is consumed all over the country in various forms. Though consumption of coconut oil for edible purpose is limited in Kerala and in parts of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka states, acceptance

of coconut as a food item is pan Indian. The use of coconut in various forms in food is therefore not easily substituted like coconut oil. This indicates that like other essential commodities there exists a consistent demand for coconut and coconut products in the country. Coconut is one of the important horticultural crops of India having national importance and quality coconut oil and virgin coconut oil are the two products of high relevance in terms of food and nutritional security of Indian population. In fact, the whole world is looking upon this crop in view of the multiplicity of the range of products it provides and health and nutritional benefit it carries. Its relevance and support for nutrition, health and wellness of human beings need to be researched further and brought out to public at large. ■



Uses of Coconut Oil amongst the Pacific Communities

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Coconut plays an important role in the socio-economic and cultural lives of Pacific island communities. Although it's economic importance as the main export commodity in terms of copra and oil, has reduced considerably from what it was decades ago, coconut continues to be an important crop for many Pacific island countries, especially for the rural-based population as a livelihood source, food and drink, medicine and for cultural use. In some of the countries, in particular the atolls, the only crop that can grow well in their islands are the coconuts.

Pacific island cultures are very closely linked to the use of coconut oil produced in homes for the treatment of ailments, for massaging, skin protection, for improved appearance and for the exchange of gifts in traditional gatherings. These practices have been in existence over many generations of Pacific people.

Oil extracted from copra continues to be an important export product for a number of Pacific island countries. Overall, despite the relatively low level of export earnings, coconut oil is still considered as one of the main agriculture exports from the Pacific.

With the continuing decline in the sector because

of the low prices of copra and oil, virgin coconut oil (VCO) given its production simplicity and its higher value has become an important option for the Pacific island communities, especially the rural women, to improve their livelihoods. But with so many countries and producers supplying VCO, maintaining high quality standards, developing and properly marketing new products should become the main focus.

Challenges faced include the low nut productivity due the senility of a large percentage of the palms, lack of finance to invest into VCO facilities, product development and marketing, and the issue of market access due to long distances from markets, infrequent shipping, and sub-standard roads.

The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), in collaboration with its partners, is responding to some of the above challenges by supporting Pacific island countries on areas such coconut plantation inventory, utilization of senile palms, genetics, organic certification, production and marketing of VCO and its by-products, and promoting and supporting farmer groups establishment. ■