

Product Quality Standards, the Key to Growth and Sustainability of Coconut Sector

Uron N Salum, Executive Director, APCC

Apart from major products of coconut traded in the world market that include copra, coconut oil, copra meal and desiccated coconut, consumer demand is increasing rapidly for non-traditional products of coconut like virgin coconut oil, coconut water, coconut milk, cream, powder, coconut shell charcoal, activated carbon and coconut fibre products to name a few.

The quality of coconut products affects consumer acceptability, price and competitiveness. Consumers in industrialized countries are gradually imposing stringent quality standards for all products especially for human consumption including feed components for livestock. If standards are not maintained, it could mean loss of market share and tougher competition with similar products from other plant-based products. A number of APCC member countries are developing important strategies to enhance economic viability at farm level for the benefit of coconut farmers through value addition initiatives. India has declared 'Neera' as a national coconut product, Fiji and Papua New Guinea along with other Pacific countries have taken steps to nationalize virgin coconut oil and its by-products to focus their limited resources on developing the industry amongst smallholder farmers and the small to medium enterprises (SME). Thailand and Vietnam are focusing on niche

markets for coconut milk/ cream/ powder, desiccated coconut and finer quality products from coconut oil. Coconut water exports from Brazil and Philippines are increasing by at least over 20% each year. African, Caribbean and Latin American countries are demonstrating increased interest and capacity to compete globally in most of the edible coconut products. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the East African Countries (EAC) of Kenya and Tanzania are amongst the coconut communities preparing their industry road map for inclusive growth and sustainability in the coconut sector as clearly demonstrated in the first National Coconut Festival held in Mombasa and Nairobi that was attended by APCC.

The Philippines initiated a copra quality improvement program to reduce the aflatoxin levels of copra and copra meal. The Philippine Coconut Authority initiated research projects with findings that have assisted in establishing quality standards for virgin coconut oil and most edible products of coconut. A number of countries have commenced work on product quality standards for adoption through in-country regulations as in the Solomon Islands, Jamaica, Kenya and others. The APCC Secretariat in collaboration with national experts has taken the initiative to compile national quality standards of 15 coconut products to date and harmonize



them as APCC Quality Standards that have been published. These would be expanded over time to include most marketable products of coconut. This can be used as a reference by processors, exporters and buyers. It is important to harmonize them with the global standards particularly for products traded worldwide.

The International Conference on Coconut Oil held in Thailand was the first focused forum that discussed many important aspects on the health and nutritional benefits of coconut oil especially through the various papers presented by a number of medical doctors and researchers. The Conference highlighted the need to clarify and confirm a number of important quality standards beginning with virgin coconut oil being the fastest growing coconut

Source: Cocommunity