

An Interview With Mrs. Sirina Siriwiroj, the Owner and Factory Manager, Thai Natural Fibers Co. Ltd., Thailand, by Muhartoyo.

Mrs. Sirina Siriwiroj, 50s, holds B.Sc. of Food Science is the Owner and Factory Manager of Thai Natural Fibers Co. Ltd. As its name implies, her company mainly produces coconut fiber and coconut based-organic fertilizer. However, the company also produces other coconut products such as coconut oil and coconut oil-based soap. This coconut processing plant is based in Chumpon, Thailand. Muhartoyo, Documentalist and Managing Editor of COCOINFO INTERNATIONAL had an opportunity to interview Mrs. Sirina Siriwiroj. The interview was focused on the coir fiber processing business. Below is the excerpt of the interview.

Cocoinfo International (CI): I am grateful to have a face to face interview with you. Mrs. Sirina, what makes you interested in the coconut processing business?

I realized that coconut is the "tree of life"; all parts of the tree are usable. I was born in the province of coconut producing area and I was questioning to myself: "why do I know about this crop only recently?". I should have known about coconut earlier! I spent more than 20 years with the log business in Myanmar. And I just started my coconut business almost at my retiring age.

(CI): When did you begin your coconut product processing?

I started my coconut business in 2003. It began with crude coconut oil processing and later I realized that I could have more benefits from coconut by-product like husk. Since then, my factory has also produced coconut fiber and coconut organic fertilizer. I have attended training courses in Malaysia and in Thailand so I have confidence to process organic fertilizer. It took me about 2 years to run my trial processing of organic fertilizer before I embarked on

commercial production.

(CI): How many coconut products are currently produced by your company?

Major products are coconut fiber and coconut coir based fertilizer. Besides, I also produce coconut oil and coconut oil-based soap.

(CI): Are there enough raw materials to maintain your production capacity?

Nowadays, I am facing with

insufficient raw material. Meanwhile, the demand for my product is increasing. Now the coconut price is higher, which is even three times as much compared with that at the time when I started my coconut business.

(CI): Where do you source the raw materials?

At this time, I obtain the raw materials from domestic suppliers including from Samui



A view of the Coir Fiber Processing Factory. From Right to Left Mr. Domrong Phongmanawuti-CHRC Director, Mr. Romulo N. Arancon, Jr-APCC Exec. Director, Mrs. Sirina Siriwiroj-Factory Owner, Mrs. Wilaiwan Twishri-APCC Assistant Director

island. In the future, I think I must import from abroad, such as Indonesia and Myanmar.

I am proud that I belong to people who save the environment and assist in the reduction of smoke pollution in Samui island by purchasing the husk from farmers in this island. I purchase the husk directly from coconut farmers or through collectors. In the past, coconut husk was just burned into ashes after being de-husked from the mature nuts.

Besides, I think I also help to get rid of the risk of insect pest outbreak since I use the waste from other factories. During the fermentation process of making organic fertilizer, the temperature will increase up to 70°C. This high temperature will destroy insect eggs.

If the waste from fruit processing factories, such as the fruit peel and the coconut husks were left on a mounting open dump, it will attract flies and coconut beetles to lay their eggs and finally their population will drastically increase. Later, coconut beetles will spread out and destroy coconut plantations like what has happened in some areas.

(CI): What is the monthly production capacity of your company?

The production capacity of the coconut fiber is about 100 MT per month and 5000 MT per six month for organic fertilizer.

(CI): Where do you market your products? Do you also export you products?

All of the fertilizer products are sold in Thailand especially in oil palm and rubber plantations as well as in vegetable producing companies.

(CI): I am particularly

interested in coir dust-based fertilizer, can you briefly explain the production process of your organic coir dust-based fertilizer?

The coconut coir dust as a by-product of coconut fiber processing is mixed with other by-products from the fruit canning factories and waste water from oil palm mills. It is, then, mixed with micro organism, and every 10 days the heap of fertilizer has to be turned over. The mounting fertilizer will be composted completely by the microorganism. The completely composted organic fertilizer will be sieved before packing and selling. This whole process takes about 6 months.

During the production process, samples are sent to the laboratory to check the N, P, K, Ca, Mg, pH, MC, EC, OM and C/N ratio. When the fertilizer has not reached the standard, we have to improve it by spraying micro organism or water to continue the fermentation process. We regularly send the samples to the laboratory until the organic fertilizer reaches the standard (based on the laboratory

test). According to Thai organic fertilizer standard, C/N ratio, pH, OM, N, P, K, EC must be 20:1, 6-7,35%,1, 0.5, 0.5, and 6, respectively.

(CI): What is the advantage of using your fertilizer?

Our fertilizer improves soil fertility as it functions like peat moss. As we know, the coir dust-based fertilizer can absorb and hold soil moisture content which can maintain soil moisture. It is durable and environmentally friendly.

Therefore, if this organic fertilizer is applied first, then followed by chemical fertilizer will give good yields. It is because chemical fertilizer will be easily absorbed in moist soil. This is usually practiced in oil palm and rubber plantations.

The responses from my clients after using my organic fertilizer are quite encouraging, for examples (1) from rubber estate owner, he said that the para rubber wood bark is softer and easy to cut to obtain the latex, and he gets more yield (2) from salad-vegetable producer, he said



Turning Over the Coir Pith Mix Using an Excavator



Fermentation Process of Organic Fertilizer

that the quality of vegetable is better and more crispy, (3) from marigold producer, he said that he can minimize the application of chemical fertilizer and (4) from the oil palm and para rubber estate owners, when they apply organic fertilizer from year to year, the soil condition is more fertile and earthworm present in their farm.

(CI): How do you compare your organic fertilizer with other similar products in terms of price and yield?

The price of our fertilizer is cheaper than the products in the market. Its properties are good since it is mixed with coconut coir dust.

We do not put any chemical to attain the standard nutrient content of our organic fertilizer, and we don't make any costly advertisement, and we sell our product without brand. Therefore, our production cost is lower than other producers. We sell our organic fertilizer at 2.50 Baht/kg while others sell at 4-6 Baht/kg. Likewise, we guarantee each batch of our products with the results of the laboratory analytical data before selling to the customers.

(CI): How many people are involved in the production process in your company?

I have 5 main operational staff members in the production area. Of course, the machines and equipment are necessary in the production process.

(CI): What is your marketing strategy to maintain or expand your market share?

The marketing of my products is normally supported by my customers. After having experienced with my fertilizer product, they inform others about the advantages of using my fertilizer. So, word of mouth is an essential marketing strategy which helps me to increase the market share.

I also guarantee the quality of my product with the certificate indicating the result of Laboratory analysis. The most important thing of all is that we can deliver the products on time. Regular customers will also get promotional bonus. This is my way to thank my customers' trust.

(CI): What is the constraint in maintaining or increasing your

coconut product processing business?

Inadequate or shortage of raw material like coconut husk is one of my business constraints. Besides, the rainfall also affect the fertilizer manufacturing process since the huge amount of fertilizer which is being processed is placed on the ground without shade.

(CI): How do you maintain the product quality standards?

We maintain the quality of the fertilizer by having a good storage facility. The final packed products are stored in the warehouse.

(CI): Does the government provide any support to your coconut processing industry?

I do not have direct support from the government. However, I had attended the training course on organic fertilizer processing and Virgin coconut oil and coconut soap processing organized by Department of Agriculture. And I sent the fertilizer samples to Government laboratory to determine the trace elements and later I obtain a certificate of analytical result. This has been done with a fee.

(CI): What kind of support do you expect from the government?

I do not expect anything from them. I run my business fully by my own ability and capacity. However, if the Government encourages agricultural production agencies to use the bio or organic fertilizer, it might indirectly support my business.

Likewise, the government policy aimed at minimizing the number of imported chemical fertilizers will encourage farmer to use more organic fertilizer, and eventually supports my business too.

Thank you very much Mrs. Sirina Siwiroj for sharing your valuable experience about your coconut processing business with our valued readers.