



Importance and Uses of Coconut Oil in India

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India produces 21,665 million coconuts annually from an area of 2.14 million ha with a productivity of 10,122 nuts per ha (2013-14). This production level places India in top of coconut producing countries with the highest global productivity among major coconut producing countries. The bulk of the domestic production of coconut is absorbed by the domestic market to meet the indigenous demand. Around 40% of the coconut produced in the country is utilized for household consumption and 17% is used as tender coconut bringing the total to 57%. Around 35% is converted to copra for production of ordinary coconut oil (CNO) and 2% to Virgin coconut oil (VCO) from coconut milk. Roughly 6% is used for production of other value added products like desiccated coconut, coconut milk, milk cream, milk powder etc.

Production of milling copra is mainly concentrated in Kerala (3.17 lakh MT copra) and Tamil Nadu (4.40 lakh MT copra) states whereas edible copra production is localized predominantly in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh states. Estimated production of coconut oil in the country is 5.225 lakh MT (2014-15). Of the total coconut oil production, 40% is consumed in edible sector, 46% in cosmetics and toiletry sector and the remaining 14% is used in various industrial applications. Besides its use as edible oil, coconut oil is used throughout the country as a hair oil and body massage oil either as such or in medicated form. The use of coconut oil for industrial purposes has decreased tremendously especially in the soap industry in the last 2-3 decades, due to the substitution of cheaper vegetable oils in many applications. However, premium product manufacturers still depend on coconut oil for manufacturing superior quality cosmetics and toiletry items.

Globally coconut oil competes with 16 other major oils and fats. Among these, soybean oil, palm oil, sunflower oil and rapeseed oil are the major oils and the prices of which are closely related to each other. India annually requires about 15-16 million MT edible oil. About 45 per cent of country's requirement of edible oil is met through import. India is the second largest edible oil market in the world after China. Palm oil is

being substituted for edible purpose in order to meet the growing domestic requirement. Similarly, if the price difference of coconut oil is significantly higher, ie. 20 per cent or more, food and soap industry also consider palmolein and palm kernel oil as the cheaper substitutes for coconut oil. Palm oil is used for domestic cooking as well as in the food processing industry because of the price advantage and on account of its resemblance to coconut oil in appearance.

Coconut oil is an excellent cooking and frying oil. It has a smoke point of about 360°F (180°C). Fresh coconut kernel contains 40-50 % moisture, 34 % oil, 2.2 per cent ash, 3% fibre, 3.5 % protein and 7.3 % carbohydrate (Hui 1996). Copra has the highest oil content among all oil-bearing crops, with oil content of 65-68%. Amazing nutritional and therapeutic benefits of fresh coconut kernel, coconut milk extracted from coconut kernel, coconut oil extracted from dried kernel, virgin coconut oil, derived from coconut milk, tender and mature coconut water etc have been revealed and being discussed world over.

The comparatively high price of coconut oil and the availability of imported palm oil at prices much below that of coconut oil are creating a displacement of coconut oil from a sizeable portion of households in Kerala for edible purpose. Apart from affecting the domestic demand of the coconut oil, the availability of cheaper oils encouraged coconut oil adulteration particularly with cheap palm kernel oil, which is causing erosion of nutritional value creating health hazards.

Now the production of coconut has increased in the country and thereby consumption of coconut also gone up. The per capita consumption of coconut in India of late, is assessed to be 19 nuts per person per year (2011). The role played by Coconut Development Board (CDB) in wiping out the misconception in the use of coconut oil is vital in enhancing the consumption of CNO. Board undertook many studies including clinical studies through reputed research institutes to get scientific data substantiating the health benefits of CNO. The four southern states apart from producing 91 per cent of the total production of coconut in the country, also account

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. ■