Editorial

Versatility of Coconut Oil

Throughout the long history of the Thai people, coconut has been used as a “tree of life”. Also known as a “tree of 1001 uses”, as well as “Kalaphruet”, a tree which provides all necessities of life, coconut palm has been associated with Thai people from time immemorial. The most common use of the coconut is to use coconut oil and cream in the preparation of local foods. It is fair to say that both coconut oil and cream have played an important role in the preparation of Thai foods, without any observable incidence of high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, cancer, and heart disease. However, after World War II, Thai people have been urged to consume soybean and other vegetable oils, as well as other processed foods. Since then, the incidence of diet-related diseases in Thailand has skyrocketed and they now represent the leading causes of death. As a comparison, there are several places in remote areas of Asia and the Pacific, which still rely on coconut oil and cream for their cooking. People in these areas have an exceptionally low rate of heart disease, as well as cancer and other diet-related diseases, including obesity (most recently, it had been discovered and thus observed, that constituents of the coconut have helped in the treatment of HIV). Diet-related diseases have been on the increase the last two decades in Thailand because of changes in people’s lifestyle, particularly changes in the food consumption from a traditional diet to a more Western diet.

In addition to being used for consumption, coconut oil can also been used on our skin for medicinal and cosmetic purposes. It has now been clinically proven that coconut oil helps to make skin soft, moist, and healthy. Cosmetics manufacturers are now starting to recognize this fact, and are now using coconut oil in many different beauty products, from soaps and creams, to shampoos and hair oils.

But it is only natural coconut oil, not the refined and bleached hydrogenated oil from copra, which should be used both for consumption and on the skin. Oil from copra has had many of its natural properties removed by the refining. Pure virgin oil from coconuts can be extracted through the use of the “direct micro-expelling” technology, or “DME”.

The coconut oil is the most versatile of all the vegetable oils as a cosmetic, as an ingredient for soap, detergents, and cooking oil. The oil produced through DME is of much higher quality than coconut oil from copra. It also does not require any further processing after it is extracted. With copra oil, it usually takes weeks between the time the copra is made and when it is crushed in the copra mill. DME oil is ready within an hour and a half of opening the nut. DME coconut oil has extremely low free fatty acid content at production, which is far better than the standard set for edible oils on the world market. If free fatty acid levels are too high they can increase a person’s chances of contracting diet-related diseases. Thus, for those concerned about their health, DME coconut oil is one of the healthiest oils in the world.

The amazing part of this new technology is that the entire production process can be done in a village with no further processing. The DME technology does not require hard manual labor either, so every member of the village can be involved in production. The DME process will also benefit the cosmetic industry. The high quality of DME coconut oil is ideal for use in soaps, creams, and other cosmetic items.

It is therefore recommended that in places where the coconut exists, there should be a campaign to produce pure virgin coconut oil to make coconut-based OTOP products. The government agencies concerned should provide necessary appropriate technology for making such products and particularly the procurement of the equipment to extract such oil.