

# EARNING FOREX FROM COCO HUSK

By Muhartoyo and Bambang Tiong

The versatile coconut husk is well proven as a potential foreign exchange earner by Johny Susanto, an Indonesian craftsman who lives in Yogyakarta. He has successfully turned coconut husks into artistic artificial flowers.

Coconut husks are in abundance in Indonesia which has a total of 3.67 million hectares under coconut, yielding 13.6 million nuts annually. This makes it easy for those who are interested in doing business using coconut husks.

Traditionally, coconut husks are used as doormats, dish washing, brush or as sofa filler materials. However, Johny's talent and creativity have added economic value to coconut husks by converting them into artistic artificial flowers.

He got the innovative idea after walking along Malioboro Street in Yogyakarta observing the various expensive souvenir items sold by sidewalk traders. Yogyakarta, where Johny lives is the second largest tourist

destination after Bali in Indonesia. He was obsessed to create more attractive souvenirs at a lower price. His obsession was heightened even more when a few days later, he incidentally saw a few pieces of coconut husks in a garbage can. He picked up the husks and took them home after making sure that



nobody was looking at what he was doing.

With these few pieces of husks, he was able to create several artistic artificial flowers such as lotus, and sunflower, which are usually made from plastics. Since then, Johny's life has changed. He now manages to live a better life. His earlier batik business went bankrupt because of the monetary crisis which severely hit the Indonesian economy.

He began his investment with Rp. 100,000 (US\$ 13) to buy 500 husks. At that time each husk costed him Rp. 50 (US\$ 0.07).

Now, it costs Rp. 250 (US\$ 0.03) each. His handicraft was first offered to his friends and neighbors. Gradually, other people were also interested in buying his artificial flowers including souvenir shops.

The increasing demand for his products encouraged him to involve other people to join his business. Not less than 43 people are now involved in the production process. These people are paid on the basis of the number of flowers they make. They get Rp. 300 (US\$

0.25) for a small flower and Rp. 600 (US\$ 0.125) for a big one. Most of the workers are housewives (85%) and the remaining are jobless youth.

A worker needs to be trained before joining the work. The training may take 10 days to two weeks. When the trainee acquires the skills and production techniques she/he will be provided with necessary equipment and materials. Actual production can be done at home. On the average, each worker can produce 20 big flowers and 75 small ones per day. The finished products are normally delivered

by the workers to Johnny's house in the following morning.

The price of each flower ranges between Rp. 1,250 (US\$ 0.16) to Rp. 2,500 (US\$ 0.3). The big flower sells better than the small ones. The marketing of the products is not limited to his own city but also reaches other big cities like Surabaya, Semarang, Jakarta, and other cities out of Java island. With the assistance of an agent in Jakarta he has managed to export his products to Europe and the United States.

The products are usually delivered after the payment is received. Delivery to other cities in Java island is carried out by train. Delivery by train preserves the quality of the product as the damage during the transport is minimal.



Johnny's husk flower business runs quite well. His turnover now reaches Rp. 125,000,000 (US\$ 16,234) per month. About 20% of that amount is his net profit from the total sale.

Although it is not difficult to get the raw materials, the

increased production brings some additional work. Earlier, he obtained husks from nearby areas. Now, he has to procure the husks from other sub-districts like Wates and Progo in Yogyakarta.

### Production Process

One of the important factors in the production process is to obtain good quality husks from mature coconuts. Johnny explained further that this kind of husks are durable and have artistic texture.

The equipment needed for the production process is quite simple. It consists of a sharp knife, scissors, and a razor blade. The process begins with the splitting of a husk into eight pieces. Each piece is then cut

off into three slices with an average thickness of four millimeters. These slices are then dried in the sun to reduce their water content as well as to avoid wrinkles and fungi from growing. However, the husks must not be too dry as it

will be very difficult to form the flower as desired.

The crown is made from grated coconut husks while the flower leaves are made of corn husks. To make a complete flower, the sepals are glued together then they are joined to the stems using *agel* (banana's stems) thread to give it a natural look. The flower stem is made of bamboo with a diameter of a baby's little finger. A husk can produce three to four flowers depending on its size.

Johnny said that initially the flowers were colored using *somba* (food colorants). Nevertheless, he has stopped using *somba* as more and more people prefer to have natural color.

Johnny's venture in artificial flowers from coconut husk is another proof that coconut fiber deserves the title of the versatile fiber in the world. Even the prestigious German car producer, Mercedes Benz, has proudly advertised that its car seats are made from the coconut fiber. The choice of using coconut fiber was made because it is environmentally friendly.

In the case of Johnny, coconut husk has given him and his family a better life. He convincingly said: "Frankly speaking, coconut husk has saved my family". □

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