

THE ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY COCONUT

By P.G. Punchihewa

The coconut is the most extensively grown and used nut in the world and is the most important of palms.

The kernel and its products

The most important part of the coconut is the kernel. It may be eaten fresh or converted to copra (dried meat) for crushing to obtain coconut oil. A very small volume of the production is also processed into desiccated coconut.

Of the total world production, nearly three-quarters is consumed in the producing countries, providing a cheap source of energy, protein and fibre, particularly to the rural population. The rest is exported, with coconut oil as the main product. An annual

average of about 1.5 million tons of coconut oil was imported by more than 100 countries between 1992 and 1996. The two leading importers were the United States (US) and the European Union (EU).

Coconut oil is used for both edible and industrial purposes. With the increasing availability of substitutable vegetable oils, a higher proportion of coconut oil imported by industrialised countries is now being diverted for non-edible purposes, mainly in the surfactant and detergent industry. The claim that naturally based oleochemicals are more environmentally acceptable no doubt enhances the standing of coconut oil *vis-a-vis* petrochemicals. In the area of surfactant and detergent-manufacture, it is

the lauric oils (primarily coconut oil and palm kernel oil) that are the feed stock as an alternative to fossil fuels.

Trials conducted in the use of coconut oil-based fuels on farm tractors, pick ups and trucks in the Philippines also have proved environmentally friendly and an excellent alternative whether as a blend with diesel or in its pure form, generally showing at least equal if not better specific fuel consumption, and universally higher thermal efficiencies. No problems were encountered with contamination or degradation in the lubricating oil used with the fuels tested.³ However, with the current price of coconut oil, a shift from diesel is a far cry.

While coconut oil continues to be the main coconut product, recent years

**World Export of Coconut Shell
Charcoal and Activated Carbon by Selected Countries 1988-1997 (MT)**

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Shell Charcoal	38.555	70.561	55.472	64.886	67.191	67.332	60.761	52.058	66.861	70.904
Philippines	21.106	40.131	32.126	37.642	44.974	51.975	39.645	33.940	41.065	41.040
Sri Lanka	13.353	20.673	11.317	11.844	8.081	2.995	6.729	3.841	9.941	8.408
Indonesia	1.496	9.757	12.029	15.400	14.136	12.362	14.387	14.277	15.855	21.456
Activated Carbon	22.766	22.146	22.146	30.691	35.008	40.226	36.753	34.364	47.694	53.591
Philippines	15.400	8.881	9.579	13.739	14.924	19.458	15.806	9.489	19.490	28.335
Sri Lanka	7.336	11.262	9.965	12.109	14.363	13.605	13.302	16.425	15.879	16.821
Indonesia*		2.084	2.602	4.843	5.721	7.163	7.645	8.450	12.325	8.435
Total**	11.368	14.391	12.855	16.616	18.271	20.007	18.204	16.545	22.425	24.775
			0.004	0.006	0.007	0.008	0.006	0.009	0.001	0.004

Source: APCC include wood/coal-based activated carbon

* Aggregate of coconut shell charcoal and activated carbon in shell charcoal basis

