



“Coconut Development Authority will be future pioneer of uplifting economy”

Coconut Development Authority, Chairman, Keerthi Sri Weerasinghe

- Largest revenue from coconut exports generated this year
- Many people do not that coconuts have massive nutritional value and is a valuable source of immune boosters
- Our next target is Hambantota Coconut Export Processing Zone

“This will be added to historical records as Sri Lanka’s highest revenue from export of coconut”

“It should be specially mentioned that, we are faced with a very low number of deaths from the Corona virus. Sri Lankan people are resistant to many diseases because of the immunogenic quality of coconuts they consume.”

Coconut Development Authority (CDA) Chairman Keerthi Sri Weerasinghe states that the highest export revenue from coconuts was earned under his Chairmanship. He states that the Coconut Development Authority is working to fulfill the massive economic target of earning export revenue of 2.5 billion US \$ in the coming four years. Here, he speaks about the future of the coconut and coconut-related industries sphere in the present context of the country and the world.

At present, the economy of the country is at a very low level. By this time, only 1.04 billion US \$ is remaining in the National Treasury. The country has to pay massive loan installments. Once they are made, there will not be any money in the country. The country’s economy is at a minus point. We don’t have any money for imported goods. So, all of us have to get together to increase export revenue. For that, we need the cooperation of everyone. Following our traditional methods is not sufficient. Our export revenue is limited because we were following the traditional methods. To overcome that, we have to increase our export revenue strategically.

The reply to the question “How should we follow strategy?” is that all must get together to help the country escape from this hell-hole. Our plantation sphere has, by now, collected massive revenues. Last year, we earned about 661 million US \$ from the coconut industry alone. About 850 million US \$ have been earned by the 11th month of this year. This is about 1% percent growth of export revenue.

We are following a programme to double that. The necessity has come up to bring out the industrialist who was imprisoned with many restraints all this time. It was the industrialists that introduced the coconut- and coconut-related product industries to the world. Coconut-related products became very popular in the world. The reasons for that popularity are the special qualities of coconuts. Talking of qualities, there is a large number of qualities in coconuts and coconut-related products.

Coconuts and MCTs - Brain Cell Fuel

The people of our country are naturally used to consume coconuts. Our people don’t know about the immunogenic quality of coconuts, but people in other countries of the world know. There is a very high demand in the world for coconuts because of that. Coconuts have ingredients such as Lauric Acid, Omega 3 and Omega 6. Other than coconuts, these ingredients can only be found in breast milk. The specialty of breast milk is that it gives immunity from diseases.

The major challenge the world is facing today is boosting human immunity. What we are producing is the best thing for boosting immunity. Medium Chain Triglycerides (MCTs) have become very popular in today’s world. Generally, coconut oil contains about 30% MCTs. MCTs are called Brain Cell Fuel. From that, it can be deduced that it is a chemical compound that is helping the brain and nervous system. It is absorbed to blood and the body quickly.

It is used as a quick energy source.

Generally, energy is produced in the body by burning glucose. But, if we burn lipids, that energy powers the brain cells. Because of that, MCTs are added to children’s food at present. There are various diseases such as Autism and Parkinson’s disease affecting children at present. To the action of the brain, there is a difference in energy produced by burning glucose and burning MCTs.

Insulin is involved in burning glucose. But, glucose is not necessary to burn MCTs. MCTs are excellent for diabetics. Furthermore, MCTs are not fattening. As our food patterns and lifestyles have become more complex, today there are several problems with regard to our health.

It has been clinically proven that the waist size of a person is reduced by one inch if he or she takes just 30 ml of MCTs for one month. Because of that, there is a great demand in the world for MCTs. Not only that, but MCTs are good for people suffering from heart diseases. MCTs are good for skin and reducing obesity. They also boost immunity. This is a very high energy drink. Today, MCTs are produced in capsule form and sold to countries such as America. We have to develop our technology to carry out those processes.

Furthermore, at present, MCTs can be taken with beverages such as coffee and children’s foods. MCTs have caused a revolution in the world. So, in the future, we will have the ability to produce MCTs according to the demand because, at present, we are unable to fulfill the world’s demand. We increased the number of coconuts we use for producing MCTs but, it is not sufficient. Last year it was 2800 million units.

Because of that, the industry our industrialists introduced to the world is slipping away from us. Because Sri Lanka does not have sufficient coconuts, our industrialists have gone to countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines and started factories in those countries.

Our technology was drained away to those countries. We have to compete with them now. Our industrialists are given only 50% coconuts out of the whole yield.

The industry is running at half-capacity because of the lack of coconuts. The industry is unable to run at full capacity. We can get a huge income to the country while supplying the full demand.

Creation of Hambantota Coconut Export Processing Zone

That is why we created the Hambantota Coconut Export Processing Zone. We will import coconuts and give those coconuts to our industrialists, thereby developing the industry and giving them the opportunity to increase the supply to fulfill the global demand.

We will get the ability to bring in revenue of US \$ five billion by the year 2025. At present, we have achieved the highest revenue in the country’s history from coconuts and coconut-related products. After the launching of this Industrial Estate and the re-export zone, we will get the ability of bringing in US \$ 2.5 billion. Without stopping there, we can go beyond that. As the world is leaving the traditional industries, we can go for other industries.

We can produce finished goods. That is not happening due to the lack of coconuts for those industries. I am holding discussions with the highest industrialists in the world at present. We have the ability of increasing the revenue to US \$ five billion. The market share of these coconut-related products is US \$ 40 billion. If we are able to bring US \$ five billion out of that to our country, we can strengthen the economy of our country.

The understanding of the people of Sri Lanka of the economic situation in the country is very less. Especially those in the Government service. 75% of them are negative minded. This situation must change.

We are always trying to work as little as possible. Even during the lockdown, our Coconut Development Authority worked five days a week and endeavoured to bring the institution to this level. I was able to encour-

age the Coconut Cultivation Board, the Coconut Research Institute and industrialists.

Active power should be applied for the development of the country, not for yourself. Not to address your petty grievances. We must use the power given to us to bring development to the country. If that happens, we can get the country out of this economic hell hole easily. The President has a clear need to achieve that. The Finance Minister and our Ministers Ramesh Pathirana and Arundika Fernando are actively working to achieve that goal.

They are interested in achieving that goal. Not only that but they are helping us to achieve that. At present, the tourism industry has suffered a breakdown and is at a very low level.

The only alternative for that is increasing the country’s income. Not only exporting coconuts, but also we should contribute to other spheres. I have to design an active plan with the Chairmen of all other institutions of the country. This can be achieved only if all of us work together. If we want a value for our Rupee, we must all work together.

Arrangements at Hambantota Coconut Export Processing Zone

At present, we have completed all necessary arrangements. With the Board of Investments, we have identified lands for that. Twenty five local



Coconut Development Authority, Chairman, Keerthi Sri Weerasinghe (left) with Board of Investment, Chairman, Raja Edirisuriya

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industrialists have expressed their willingness to provide the necessary contributions. We are waiting for the Plant Quarantine Report. All other relevant work has been completed. Once we receive the recommendations of the National Plant Quarantine Institution and the Coconut Research Institute, arrangements have been made to launch this.

I see this as one of the best opportunities for us. We can bring in a clear income to this country. We are not investing the Government’s money for this. Only money of coconut industrialists is invested.

The Government’s money is only used to open the relevant offices and laboratory. Once it is completed, we can give laboratory services, not only for coconuts but also to the whole of the Southern Province. It can also give laboratory quality certifications to other crops as well.

The first stage will cost about 10 billion Rupees. It is borne by industrialists, not by the Government. The reason for that is that this is a very profitable industry. The Government does not have to invest; it only has to help to maintain this without troubling the industrialist. This project consisting of two stages is a strategic project.

Not even one coconut brought to the country to be used in this project reaches the local market. We expect to import coconuts from any disease-free country. This is located inside the Hambantota Port. Sri Lanka Customs, Sri Lanka Police, the Coconut Research Institute and Plant Quarantine Service all have branches inside this. The highest foreign revenue earner in Sri Lanka is tea.

But, I am certain that we can bring in foreign revenue worth US \$ 2.5 billion by the year 2025. If we continue to work like this, this country will never again fall into an economic depression.

Talking about diseases and pests attacking coconuts, so far we have been unable to control the Coconut Mite infestation. We spoke with the Agricultural Department of Brazil regarding this and they said they will help us in controlling the infestation of Coconut Mite. The problem is that as the coconut tree is very high, towering over houses and farmlands where people are living and working making it impossible to use insecticides and pesticides.

We are endeavouring to find a solution for this in collaboration with the Coconut Research Institute, the Coconut Cultivation Board and the Authority using drone technology. Not only the Coconut Mite, but also there are other pests such as monkeys, squirrels, porcupines, wild elephants and free-roaming cattle. If we don’t control those pests, there will be fewer coconuts for the people of the country to consume.

We have lost one third of cultivations, our national revenue. Even an excess of deer is harmful. In countries such as America, when deer proliferate, licenses are issued to hunt them. If we are to go forward as a country, there cannot be any harm to the food processing process. So, steps have to be taken to prevent them.

require very low capital at the inception. About US \$ 300 million is earned for the country from coconut husks that used to be thrown away. About US \$ 200 million is earned from coconut shells.

Steps to develop coconut-related small scale industries

We are giving massive help to develop coconut-related small scale industries. The benefit here is that coconut-related small scale industries

We give drying machines, technology and interest free loans to start these industries. We find local and overseas business opportunities for industrialists. Presently, people in this country who manufacture coconut-related products are very rich and prosperous. So, the Coconut Development Authority is always prepared to help anyone with interest and dedication towards manufacturing coconut-related products. Now we are giving drying machines to manufacturers of coconut oil. As when coconuts are dried for copra for a long time, mold forms and that mold contain Aflatoxin.

That is why the Coconut Development Authority is giving drying machines so coconuts that have to be dried in the sun for days could be dried and copra formed in just a matter of hours. The people of this country don’t have a clear understanding of aflatoxin. In the recent past, the statements made by media about aflatoxin are laughable and inaccurate. Coconut oil is imported as crude coconut oil. Crude coconut oil is refined before use. The resulting coconut oil is called RBD (Refined, Bleached, Deodorized). Aflatoxin is zero in refined coconut oil. But, the aflatoxin percentage could be higher in locally manufactured coconut oil. I am endeavouring to give refined, aflatoxin free coconut oil to consumers. RBD Oil can be consumed safely. I hope to bring regulations to show the percentage in the coconut oil in the package label in the future.

Part of the coconut yield is used for consumption. Another part goes to manufacture coconut oil. The balance is utilized in the coconut industry. We don’t get the yield necessary to cater to all three sectors. When the coconuts for the coconut industry are getting low, it is we who regulate the supply. We lower the import tax at times when there are fewer coconuts. When there are more coconuts, the import tax is decreased and imports of coconut oil are reduced. If this process is not put in motion at the proper time, the price of coconuts will increase. We can easily control the price of coconuts. So, we are working to not allow coconut prices to increase in the future.

Coconut Milk

At present, more coconut milk is being used than cows’ milk. We want to increase the production of coconut milk threefold. Coconut milk has the quality of destroying molds, bacteria and parasites. Because of that, the global demand for coconut milk has increased. Using coconut milk has contributed to generating strong and intelligent citizens in the country. We want to popularize using coconut milk as we want to prevent the distribution of germs generated in making coconut oil at home. We also want to promote this as a product. When coconut milk is manufactured in the factory, the coconut shell remains intact. The profit from coconut shells is huge. There is a huge demand for remains after squeezing grated coconut to extract coconut milk. So, what we expect from people is refraining from scraping coconuts unless absolutely necessary.