

Ready to serve fruit drinks: A sustainable enterprise to promote underutilized fruits in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Focusing attention on neglected and underutilized fruit species, which are rich in functional properties, would be an effective way to help promote a healthy diet in combating micronutrient deficiencies such as Iron and vitamin A. Producing value added products using novel techniques of food processing such as RTS (Ready To Serve), underutilized fruits can be effectively used to increase consumption of nutritionally rich underutilized fruit species. But many of the underutilized fruits are limited and availability is mostly seasonal. Difficulties in harvesting and collecting these fruits and lack of knowledge and awareness on nutritional importance and processing techniques, keep these fruits away from human consumption. As a remedy to above issues, National Food Promotion Board (NFPB) with the support of Biodiversity for Food and Nutrition project started to process and market RTS underutilized fruit drinks through their outlet chain. Three fruit species, Ceylon olive (*Elaeocarpus serratus* L.), Soursop (*Annona muricata*) and unripe mango (*Mangifera indica* L.) local cultivars as *kohu amba*, *kotta amba* and *mee amba* from wild were selected for processing RTS fruit drinks. Production protocols were developed from these fruit varieties, selecting most suitable maturity stage with excellent organoleptic qualities of the raw materials, to obtain a quality end product. Removal of seeds inside and peeling off the fruits, bottle sterilization, preparation of RTS along with bottling and labeling of the products were standardized at the production sites of NFPB. Distribution of products will be done mainly through NFPB marketing channels. Disseminating the production protocols to novel small holder entrepreneurs were also carried out to uplift livelihoods. Training programmes were developed for entrepreneurs identifying other possible underutilized fruits to improve consumption. Creating sustainable enterprise pathway with locally available biodiversity has been able to increase the utilization of local agro biodiversity fruit species thus popularizing its benefits among the society.

Keywords: Biodiversity, Food, Nutrition, RTS, Underutilized fruits

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