

Sri Lankans are using more palm oils than coconut oil !!

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The coconut oil (CNO) is a major kernel product of coconut in Sri Lanka, next to desiccated coconut. The national requirement in the past was about 3 bottles of CNO (1.95 kg) per head per annum, which can be obtained from about 20 coconut nuts. During 1989 to 2004, the amount of CNO used in Sri Lanka (locally manufactured + imported amount – export amount) varied from 26105 MT to 82613 MT (Table 1) with a mean of 46802 MT. The amount of imported coconut oil alone during 2002 and 2003 has gone up sharply and the values are 25381 MT and 64086 MT respectively. Accordingly, the domestic consumption of CNO per head per year has varied from 2.06 bottles (1.34 Kg) to 6.60 bottles (4.29 Kg) in 2003 with a mean of 3.94 bottles (2.56 Kg).

Table 1. The useful statistics related to CNO industry in Sri Lanka

Year	Population (in million)	¹ Coconut oil used in Sri Lanka (MT)	² Non-CNO used in Sri Lanka (MT)	Rate of oil consumption (bottles/person/year)		
				CNO	None CNO	Both
1989	16.825	44965	21000	4.11	1.92	6.03
1990	17.015	62580	19712	5.66	1.78	7.44
1991	17.267	31507	27231	2.81	2.43	5.23
1992	17.426	30234	40012	2.67	3.53	6.20
1993	17.646	48800	42235	4.25	3.68	7.94
1994	17.891	56121	55276	4.83	4.75	9.58
1995	18.136	55562	36965	4.71	3.14	7.85
1996	18.336	38688	73461	3.25	6.16	9.41
1997	18.568	50915	85023	4.22	7.04	11.26
1998	18.774	35498	90498	2.91	7.42	10.32
1999	19.043	31503	117284	2.55	9.48	12.02
2000	19.359	39751	90079	3.16	7.16	10.32
2001	18.732	61106	72662	5.02	5.97	10.99
2002	19.007	52896	142480	4.28	11.53	15.81
2003	19.252	82613	119502	6.60	9.55	16.15
2004	19.483	26105	111699	2.06	8.82	10.88

(¹ - local production + imported amount – exported amount ; ² - Palm stearin + palm kernel oil + palm oil + soya, sunflower, corn and other vegetable oil, 1 bottle of oil = 0.65 Kg irrespective of type)

At difficult years the country used to import substitute oils for CNO (non CNO) such as palm oils, palm stearin, palm kernels, soya, sunflower, corn in addition to ‘tallow’ which is used only for soap industry as well as CNO. Also oil obtained from the DC pairings, ‘industrial oil’ (5.6% free fatty acid) is used by the soap

industry. Temporal variation of the rate of domestic consumption of oil is shown in Figure 1.

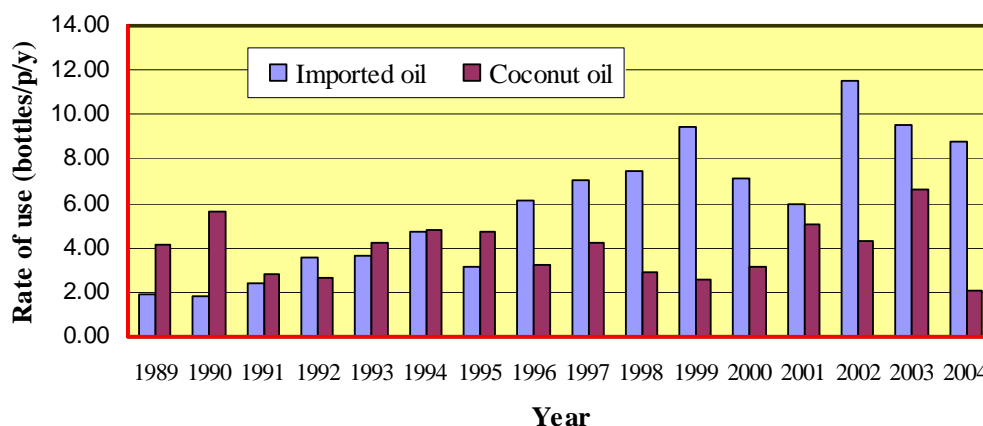


Figure 1. Comparison of the rate of oil consumption (bottles/person/year) between imported oil and coconut oil

According to Fig. 1 the rate of use of non-CNO oil has been increasing over the years since 1996. The rate of use per person per year after 1996 was above 6 bottles with an exceptional value 11.5 bottles (7.48 Kg) in 2002. In contrast the rate of use of CNO per year based has been very low compared with that of non_CNO. Thus the obvious question is,

Does the increase in the use of imported palm oil contribute towards increase in heart diseases among Sri Lankans”?
Do we have scientific evidence to prove that coconut oil alone cause heart diseases in Sri Lanka?

In fact both CNO and palm kernel oil have almost equal percentage (47-48%) of the main fatty acid, lauric acid (C12:0). Because of their high content of lauric acid the two oils are called lauric oils.

Of the imported oils during 1999 to 2004, the percentage of palm kernel was only 15%. However, CNO contains about 65% of short and medium chain fatty acids which do not contribute to the synthesis of cholesterol in metabolism since they are easily digestible.

The per capita consumption in Sri Lanka is around 110 nuts, which is constituted by 90 nuts for fresh nut consumption and remaining 20 nuts equivalent to oil consumption (1 bottle of CNO = 6 nuts). This means that about one fifth of the total local consumption is contributed by CNO production.

The low prices of palm oil in the world market and introduction of lower tariff rates on importation of oils to Sri Lanka has increased the availability of substitute oils at local market at relatively cheap prices. This has affected the sale of the good quality coconut oil leading to the closure of many large scale oil mills as well as small-scale oil producers who use baby expellers have affected. If the coconut oil is substituted by imported non-CNO (as well as imported CNO) then the question will arise:

Does it motivate our coconut growers to increase the productivity of their lands?