

## **Potential and prospects of unutilized coir dust industry in the southern region**

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### **Abstract**

Coir dust is a major by-product of the coconut industry. Coir dust, once considered as a waste material piled up in huge mounds next to the coconut fibre mills, is now a “hot” export product.

The study focused on three objectives. They were to identify reasons influencing coir dust to remain as a waste, to identify alternative ways to improve coir dust as a valuable resource and to examine potential trends in exporting coir dust into the world market.

Based on Simple Random Sampling technique 45 coir mill owners were selected from the Southern Province. Primary data were collected by a field survey using a questionnaire. Secondary data were collected from books, internet and journals. The data analyzed by employing simple statistics; wilcoxon signed rank test and time series analysis.

Annual coir pith production in the Southern has estimated approximately 7620MT. 89% of coir mill owners have engaged either large or small scale wet coir pith or dried coir dust selling. Therefore, coir pith production in the Southern has not created a significant trouble as a waste to the environment. But coir mill owners are facing some significant problems such as lack of coir dust processing unit near by coir mills, insufficient price, lack of technological informations and more time required to coir dust drying.

Measures for improvement of coir pith can be carried out at grass root level as well as industrial level. This investigation has found that majority of them do not practice grass root level measures such as changing water in retted husk pits (0%), minimum usage of salinity water (60%), keeping coir pith piles free from weeds (33%) and excreta (44%), use of concrete floor for coir dust drying (27%), sieving dried coir dust (71%) and maintaining required moisture content (44%). At industrial level, manufacturing of coir dust briquettes for horticultural purposes and as a fuel source, biogas production and coir pith composting are possible.

Sri Lanka exports coco peat to different destinations. But only South Korea, Japan and USA are the major buyers. In 2010, total coco peat exports will be 62 603.76 MT. So, there is a tremendous potential and demand for coco peat in the world due to its environmental friendly nature.

**Keywords:** Unutilized coir dust, Coir pith, Coir dust briquettes, Coco peat