

INTRODUCTION

In the wet tropics the coconut palm (Cocos nucifera L.) is the most important member of the Palmaceae family. The coconut palm is, perhaps, the most important plant grown in rural humid tropical economy, supplying the staple food of the people. It yields, not only, edible fruits, oils and sugary saps, but also, thatching, fuel, construction and building material, fibers and waxes. (FAO 1958)

There is hardly any other plant in the tropics or the temperate areas that has so many uses and of which every part of the plant from the roots to the very tip of the leaves can be used to make life more pleasant. In many atolls the coconut palm is life, and life is the coconut palm.

For centuries the coconut palm has given life to thousands of people on atolls of the Pacific and Indian Oceans. These people have utilized the palm and its by-products to the fullest extent that they knew how.

Before the era of industrialization and a cash economy, the palm had been exploited for domestic purposes. It can be stated that nearly all possible uses of the coconut had been investigated and tried through empirical methods by the various peoples of the world that live in association with the coconut. Since industrialization coconut products and their utilization has been investigated by research workers. To quote S. Balce (1953) in a paper given at the Eighth Pacific Science Congress, "The salient characteristics of the coconut as a potential source of new industrial products are its lignin in the husk; protein in the meat; glutamic acid in the protein, besides arginine, valine and histidine; potash and lime in the ashes of the husk; meat and water; and growth factors for micro-organisms in the water."

The aim of this report is to review available literature on the products of the coconut and their utilization. For greater clarification, the use of diagrams, tables, schematic flow sheets, and graphs are interspersed throughout the report. Where applicable, reference is made to local instances of manufacturing of by-products. Reference is also made to the use of the coconut as food and the use of shells and husks.