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Evaluation of methods of processing of kitul (*Caryota urens*) jaggery in Sri Lanka

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Sap of Kitul is obtained by tapping a young inflorescence. The end product of boiled sap is jaggery. The objective of the study was to make a comparative study on the existing processing techniques of jaggery in Sri Lank to identify their weaknesses and strengths to recommend a suitable method. The study was conducted in Kotmale in mid country of Sri Lanka during the first quarter of 2006. Four ways of jaggery making and selling were identified in the area. The most frequent way was the processing of jaggery at cottage level and selling them in the village itself to the needy customers. In the second method, processing was done individually as described above whereas selling was done under one brand. In the third method treacle was collected from the cottage level processors and reprocessed into jaggery by adding excessive quantities of cane sugar to sell in urban areas. The fourth way of processing was done at a processing center in a mass scale, after collecting sap from identified tappers. Twenty individual processors at the cottage level, 20 processors who sold their products under a common brand name, three mass scale processing centers and one reprocessing center were selected for the study.

Product variation was a common feature of the individual processing at cottage level owing to adoption of inconsistent processing techniques. The different types of fuel wood were used for direct boiling the sap. Therefore, contamination with smoke and ash was possible. Boiling temperature, time and length all found to be varied and the jaggery product derived at cottage level was inconsistence with respect to taste, color and texture. The adulteration could be ranged from 50-90% of sugar in the reprocessing method and the consumers were deceived. The most credible method of jaggery making was community processing due to the following advantages. The sap collection was organized. The basic quality parameters, such as smell, color, cleanliness, and specific gravity were assessed by a skilled person on purchasing and inferior quality sap was rejected. Prompt boiling was done using steam or LP gas and thereby contamination of product with smoke and ash was averted. This method can even be recommended to international market as the final product was adulterant- free ensuring consistent and hygienic quality product.

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