

Sri Lankan Processed Food to EU Market: Organic & Superfoods

Food & Beverage (F&B) plays a vital role for human beings as it consists of essential nutrients that provide massive support to sustain health and prevent diseases. Consumers search for different kinds of nutritional foods with varied origins, flavors, textures, and colors. Hence, it has become a fashionable business in the world.



Jackfruit products are termed internationally as superfoods and they are commercially exported in value-added forms.

It is evident that even with the COVID-19 pandemic spreading worldwide, the demand for F&B products has increased considerably, particularly for food labels such as organic/superfoods/Bio Foods/Vegan,

with many benefits offered by them. Among the food product exporting countries, Sri Lankan F&B has captured reliability and high demand due to the industry's inherent quality/taste of the raw materials used and

the quality standards maintained during the value addition process. This article provides a glimpse of some of the time-tested, high-quality, organically made Sri Lankan food & beverage products, including superfoods.

Jackfruit Products (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*)

Jackfruit is an excellent staple in Sri Lankan diets, and its products have been gaining attention in the West in the last couple of years. Due to its fibrous texture, jackfruit is considered a vegetarian substitute for meat and chicken. Jackfruit exports may prove to be a ripe opportunity for Sri Lanka as veganism and the demand for meat substitutes is rising globally. In the past few months, many non-vegetarian consumers have switched to jackfruit, as the Corona Virus has triggered a skepticism of meat in many parts of the world.

Almost 90 percent of jackfruit exports from Sri Lanka comprise young jackfruit in canned form or glass jars as ready-to-eat mixtures for burgers as meat alternatives, while the remaining 10 percent comprise ripened or dried jackfruits. Jackfruit is now internationally being termed a 'super food', and being hailed as the miracle nutrition option for vegans.

Most Sri Lankan processors/exporters have obtained the organic certification for their products/processes as the buyers are more discerning about the need to ensure traceability/healthiness from farm to fork.

The jackfruit products are currently being exported by Sri Lanka in value-added forms, such as ready-to-eat filling for burgers in different flavors, ready-to-eat jack fruit curry in pouches, and ripen jackfruits fruit base, and jack fruit in brine.

One of the main benefits of the consumption of jackfruit is that it is a high-calorie food with little to no cholesterol or saturated fats. The jackfruit is packed with B vitamins, with its vitamin B6 content alone providing 25 percent of the daily requirement. It is also a good source of vitamins A and C, dietary fiber, protein, phytonutrients, potassium, and other minerals. Its antioxidants can help protect eyesight, boost immunity, maintain blood pressure, promote cardiovascular health, improve digestion, and prevent colon cancer. It is also believed to reduce skin aging and strengthen bone health.



Above left and right: Ripened and dried jackfruits as ready-to-eat mixtures are exported from Sri Lanka to various countries.

Kithul Syrup and its products (*Caryota urenus*)

Kithul sap is obtained from the young inflorescence of the kithul tree as an excrete to produce kithul

syrup. It is an unrefined natural sugar with minimal process without adding any artificial components. Kithul syrup is popularly known as the "medicinal sugar". Currently,



Top: kithul jaggery. Below: kithul syrup/kithul treacle.

Sri Lanka is exporting Kithul Syrup to countries like Australia, the UK, Canada, the USA, New Zealand, Japan, Italy, Russia, France, Belgium, and Germany.

Many consumers actively avoid or reduce sugar intake and look for products without sugar or reduced sugar content. Obesity, diabetes, and heart disease have also been related to the high-glycaemic index (GI) of many products, including sugar. Compared to the conventional sugar with a Glycaemic Index (GI) of 60, Kithul treacle has a GI of 28 and is considered a low-GI food and could be considered a healthy alternative to sugar.

The Sri Lanka Export Development Board worked with the Import Promotion Desk (IPD) in Germany to get the “Sensory Evaluation” of kithul treacle done by the German Laboratory - SGS Germany GmbH. Kithul treacle was compared with Maple Syrup, which is also a plant-based natural syrup for taste and odor. As per the results, Kithul syrup is with “Medium Difference” from maple syrup. It had less sweet/smoky/roasty taste and a less sweetish, roasty, and spicy odor.

Kithul treacle could be used as a food additive, glaze in breakfast diet as a healthier alternative for other sugar-flavored syrups. It could be used to develop energy bars, specialized (Ice-cream topping, puddings), as a sweet topping for fish/meat products/biscuits. The caramel taste of the treacle may be an advantage to be used as a glaze for meat products.

The mineral content of kithul syrup includes calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, potassium, and iron and traces of zinc and copper. The vitamin content contains folic acid and B-complex vitamins. Thus, other than that, it is a good source of energy. It also prevents rheumatic afflictions, prevents bile disorders, helps relieve fatigue, aids relaxation of muscles, nerves, and blood vessels, maintains blood pressure and reduces water retention, increases hemoglobin level, and prevents anemia. Kithul syrup is high in anti-oxidant activity.

Moringa Powder/Moringa Capsules (*Moringa oleifera*)

Moringa has been used in the traditional medicine of Sri Lanka for

centuries and is packed with powerful antioxidants. Referred to sometimes as ‘the miracle tree’, the use of moringa has proven to lower blood sugar levels, reduce inflammation, promote good cholesterol levels, and even protect against arsenic toxicity. Moringa is an excellent protein, calcium, beta-carotene, vitamin C, potassium, and iron. The COVID-19 pandemic has also increased demand for natural immune-boosting products in Europe.

The demand for moringa ingredients has been increasing in the last few years. More consumers have become aware of its benefits, and the number of product launches has risen. Sri Lanka is currently exporting moringa products like capsules containing leaf powder, herbal teas, flavors infused to other food origins, dehydrated moringa pods, and dried moringa flowers.

The most prospective countries for moringa are the Western European countries. These include Germany, the UK, France, the Netherlands, Italy, and Spain. They are the most prominent nutritional supplement markets with a relatively high awareness of moringa.

It is expected that the demand for moringa-based health products will rise more shortly, as more Sri Lankan exporters have entered into the European market with established brands for moringa products.

Banana Blossom (*Musa acuminata*)

Banana flowers, also known as banana blossom or banana heart-based products, are now popular in the European market as an alternative to fish products mainly to serve vegan consumers (Vegan fish). Texture and the appearance of the product are very much similar to tuna fish. High-fiber content, which can help improve digestion and absorption of food, is another factor for the increased demand from consumers. Germany is one of the leading markets in the EU, and the demand is growing further for its value-added products.

Banana flower packed with essential minerals such as phosphorous, calcium, potassium, copper,



Sri Lanka exports moringa products like capsules containing leaf powder, herbal teas, flavors infused to other food origins, dehydrated moringa pods, and dried moringa flowers.



Banana blossom contains high fiber and many health benefits.

magnesium, and iron, is vital for several human body parts. It has outstanding medicinal properties and act as a natural antidepressant. The banana flower contains phenolic acids, tannins, flavonoids, and various other antioxidants. These antioxidants neutralize free radicals, prevent oxidative damage, and reduce the risk of heart diseases and cancer. Cooked banana flowers can help deal with pain abdomen and reduce menstrual bleeding. Consumed along with curd or yoghurt, these flowers increase the progesterone hormone in the body and reduce bleeding. The ability to effectively treat infections in natural ways is another advantage. The banana flower, a galactagogues vegetable, increases the breast milk secretion of the lactating mothers. It also helps to support the uterus and reduces post-delivery bleeding. Banana flower, rich in vitamin C and potent antioxidants, is vital for health because it reduces stress on cells and slows down the aging process.

Banana Powder

Banana Powder is produced from banana fruit rich in carbohydrates and minerals such as potassium,

magnesium, copper, and vitamin B6 and C. Banana flour is a natural source of resistant starch. It helps moderate the blood sugar level and assist in boosting digestion. This is marketed as a gluten-free alternative to wheat-based flour for celiac disease and those who choose a gluten-free diet. Because of the high starch content, banana flour has excellent cooking/ baking characteristics that replace wheat and other flour. However, even in cooked products like pasta, banana flour increases total resistant starch content in appreciable amounts. This may be the main ingredient for baby foods, bakery products, beverages, desserts and is used as a coloring agent.

Value Added Tropical Fruits

Sri Lanka is blessed with natural resources and climatic conditions from temperate to tropical to sub-tropical and is suitable for growing a wide range of fruits and vegetables. The country can produce many types of tropical fruits (endemic and exotic) throughout the year. Favorable natural conditions, including its low sites, two monsoons a year, geographic, and good soil conditions would lead to year-round cultivation of these crops in different parts of the island.

Sri Lanka's unique tropical flavors have gained recognition the world over. "We offer fruit in pieces, pulp, juice, preserves, and dehydrated form."

Sri Lanka's unique tropical flavors have gained recognition the world over...Packaged attractively in cans, bottles, pouches, and cartons for the retail market, they are also offered in bulk for the food connoisseurs, hoteliers, and others in the food trade. Frozen/ chilled forms are also marketed for the markets in nearby regions.

These products still have flavors and textures unique to no other. Packaged attractively in cans, bottles, pouches, and cartons for the retail market, they are also offered in bulk for the food connoisseurs, hoteliers, and others in the food trade. Frozen/ chilled forms are also marketed for the markets in nearby regions. The most popular processed fruits are pineapple, mango, papaya, banana, passion fruits, and melons; they are within the top ten processed forms, with other seasonal fruits such as rambutan and mangosteen showing an increasing trend.



A range of tropical fruits with unique flavors exported to international markets.

Utilizing modern technology to preserve taste, color, texture, aroma, and vitamins, products like dehydrated pineapple, mango, banana, papaya, and passion fruits are popular varieties for value addition. They are exported to the markets like the EU, the UK, the USA, Australia, and the Middle East.

Sri Lankan fruit juice manufacturers and suppliers export fruit juices extracted from passion fruit, papaya and pineapple that show great potential to take over the hearts and taste buds of consumers worldwide. Delicious, canned fruit juices are exported in glass jars and tins. Pineapple juice in light syrup, sliced pineapples, pieces, chunks, and mixed fruits are shared with the world. Their customary packaging, labeling, and presentation are recognized around the world.

It is a little-known fact that Sri Lankan gherkins are used to make the world-famous McDonald's burgers. Gherkins preserved in brine and vinegar are high-demand products worldwide. Japan is the largest market for Sri Lankan gherkins, which is followed by Australia, the



Coconut chips are a good source of dietary fiber.


Netherlands, and Thailand. These value-added gherkins are bottled and exported to international fast-food chains, restaurants, hotels, and supermarkets.

Rice-based Products (*Oryza sativa*)

Rice and cereals are preferred to wheat-based products as they offer higher nutritional value for those consumers preferring high-fiber foods. Consumers' health consciousness is going back to the traditional varieties, thus increasing the demand for such categories. Sri Lankan rice manufacturers and suppliers grow and export traditional varieties such as *Kalu Heenati*, *Suwadel*, *Rathudel*, *Madathawalu*, *Hetadha Wee*, *Pachchaperumal*, *Ma-Wee*, and *Kuruluthuda* in increasing volumes.

Rice varieties such as *Suwadala*, *Alhal*, *Rathhal*, and red basmati, healthy rice for diabetic patients, are popular in international markets in the UAE, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Italy.

Coconut Chips (*Cocos nucifera*)

Made from the white flesh of the coconut kernel, coconut chips are the cut-off pieces that are baked and turned into a crisp. The process includes osmotic dehydration followed by hot air drying. Coconut chips are available in colors from white to light brown and in various flavors, from salted to fruit. Yet, all of them deliver the same goodness and health benefits. Coconut chips contain large amounts of medium-chain fatty acids (MCFAs), a type of saturated fat similar to most coconut products. Unlike other fat acids, MCFAs do not get stored in the body. Instead, it helps the body to generate energy. If coconut chips are consumed, the body can wait for a longer time to get hungry again. Similar to desiccated coconut, coconut chips are also a good source of dietary fiber. Therefore, it helps to maintain a healthy weight, lowering the risk of heart disease and cancer. 



Left: Rice crackers. Below: a variety of traditional Sri Lankan rice is grown and exported.



Gayani Wijethilake
Assistant Director, Export
Agriculture Division, EDB