

Good Times Ahead For The Coconut Industry

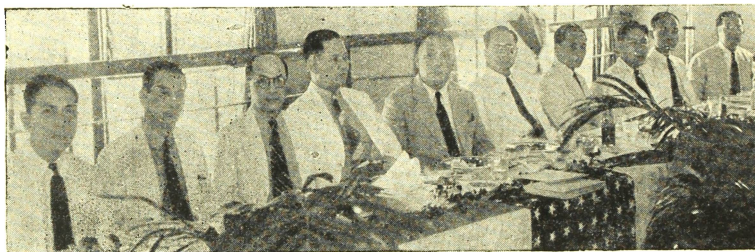
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WAR conditions notwithstanding, good times are ahead for the Philippine coconut industry. This is not only because of the higher prices now being paid to planters and producers and the broadening market for coconut products abroad but more so because of the increasing utilization of the by-products of the industry. In the very near future, the full benefits of the government's industrialization program are bound to be felt by coconut planters all over the Islands.

Recently, Dean Conrado Benitez, assistant manager of the National Coconut Corporation, spoke on the coming "revolution" in the coconut industry which will give employment to many people and improve considerably the lot of coconut planters all over the country. He painted this picture before members of the Foreign Policy Association of the Philippines at the Avenue Hotel during that organization's monthly luncheon meeting. Dean Benitez' speech covered essentially the NA-

he received for his copra six months ago.

In connection with the promotion of the coir industry, Dean Benitez disclosed an ambitious program of the NACOCO to distribute spinning wheels in the coconut regions for the production of the coir fibers. To help boost this industry, the corporation has already ordered a defibering machine in the United States. This plant will be installed at the heart of the coconut region from where the distribution of the coir to spinners will be made. The coir fiber has been found to have several uses, and the by-products obtained from this raw material have already found a growing domestic market, with possibilities of developing a potential market abroad. Incidentally, during these war times, the coir has come to occupy a strategic position in the national economy, the NACOCO having found it useful in the large-scale production of sandbags to be used by the Civilian Emergency Administration in the country's preparations for national de-



Head table at the monthly meeting and luncheon of the Foreign Policy Association held at the Avenue Hotel on Oct. 20.

COCO's contribution to the industrialization program and also the effects on the industry of various major factors arising from the war, including export control, shipping shortages and world conditions.

This coming revolution, he said, will be brought about by the industrialization program mapped out by the government some time ago to solve the problems confronting coconut planters and producers. He singled out the coir industry particularly as growing into a major industry giving employment to thousands of people. Although he also pointed out the benefits being derived by producers from the standardization of copra, he gave special emphasis to the fact that this industrialization of the by-products of the industry, particularly the coconut husks, will give the planter more than what

fense.

Reflecting the bright outlook of this industry is the increasing demand noted for the fiber from abroad as well as from the domestic market, Dean Benitez revealed the NACOCO also will buy from local producers "buri" braid (a product belonging to the coconut family) in any quantity. Owing to the closing of former sources of similar fibers suitable for making women's hats and other allied products, the United States has been inquiring into the possibility of importing from the Philippines buri fibers in commercial quantities.

Other essential by-products enhance the position of the coconut industry in America's war economy. The coconut charcoal is the most important raw material in the manufacture of gas masks. It

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is understood the Philippines is so far the only source of United States requirements. According to Dean Benitez, the production of charcoal from coconuts is already a big industry here, and the military authorities in the Philippines have been assured that the NACOCO can step up output and turn out the product in any quantity should the necessity arise.

In improving the position of the major industries, particularly copra production, the coconut corporation has done, and is still doing a lot, for the benefit of planters and producers. While the appreciable pickup in prices during the fast few months has been due largely to the bullish influence of the overseas markets, to a certain extent the improvement in the method of production here has been an important factor, having maintained the good name of Philippine copra in the world's market. However, copra produced in Luzon is considered the poorest in the world, and the corporation is therefore doing all it can to improve the present method of drying and thus eliminate this grade of the product for the good of the industry as a whole.

Coconut planters in the Islands can now obtain crop loans from the National Coconut Corporation. It was disclosed that most of these loans are around P500 and below P1,000. These loans have been found to be a powerful weapon against usury, fast eliminating middlemen who heretofore have been responsible for the miserable plight of the coconut planters.

Copra and coconut oil are major items in America's economy which may assume increasing importance as they are also vital raw materials in certain industries, particularly in the manufacture of munitions and explosives. So far they have not been accorded full priority, but it was reported some time ago that the Office of Production Management in Washington were considering revision of the priority schedules to include these commodities. In spite of shipping shortages, however, the Philippines has actually shipped larger quantities of these products to the United States. For one thing, demand in the United States has broadened considerably, more than offsetting the loss of the European market. The diversion of P. I. ships previously calling at Atlantic ports to unload their cargoes only on the Pacific coast has been decided by the U. S. Maritime Commission to remedy the shipping shortage. Although there have been less bottoms, therefore, there have been more voyages. It is believed, however, that the industry has not been able to take full advantage of the heavy demand for copra and oil in the United States.

Besides feeding American industry which is now being geared to the defense effort, the Philippine coconut industry is actively doing its part in America's economic warfare against the Axis. Since the outbreak of the war in Europe, no copra, copra cake or meal, or coconut oil has been shipped to Ger-

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C than the green kernel (5). Although we do not emphasize the use of coconuts for mineral and vitamin content, we do recognize the value of the coconut as a source of fuel for the body, for the value of coconut fat in sparing vitamin B, in the body, as a source of vegetable protein and for its value in enhancing the flavor of products made from other foods.

- (1) *Handbook of Philippine Agriculture, Los Baños, Manila Bureau of Printing, 1939*
- (2) *Biswas, H. G. and Ghosh, A. R. Investigator on the Vitamin C Content of the coconut. Science and Culture vol. 1, p. 518 (1936)*
- (3) *Ganguli, S. K. Chemical Examination of Water from Cocoa Nucifera Science and Culture vol. 2, p. 224 (1936) Chemical Abstracts vol. 31, p. 4684 (1937)*
- (4) *Banerjee, H. N. Ascorbic Acid Content of Some Plant Fluids Current Science vol. 4, p. 28 (1935) Chemical Abstracts vol. 29, p. 7385 (1935)*
- (5) *Banerjee, H. N. Chemical and Physiological Investigations on the Chemical Abstracts vol. 32, p. 5036 (1938) Presence of Vitamin C in certain Substances in Plants. Trans. Bose Res, Institute, Calcutta vol. 10, p. 145 (1934-1935)*
- (6) *Salmon, W. D. and Goodman, J. G. Alleviation of Vitamin B Deficiency in the Rat by Certain Natural Fats and Synthetic Esters J. Nutrition vol. 13, p. 477 (1937)*

many. Italy likewise has not been getting any of these raw materials since her entry in the war. Then came the export control program, which is perhaps so far the best weapon of America against Germany's junior partner in the Orient. Application of the control schedule resulted in the cessation of shipment of copra and oil to Japan and Russia. The Soviet Union, being now on the side of the Democratic Allies, can undoubtedly have access to these raw materials; but not so in the case of Japan. Japan particularly bought heavily this year before the setting up of the export control machinery.

Statistics gathered by Dean Benitez show that for the first half of this year Japan purchased P1,632,758 worth of copra and P299,111 worth of coconut oil; there was no importation of copra for the same period of last year and only P156 worth of oil. Russia imported P760,240 worth of copra for the first half of 1940, the first shipment to that country since the first world war; but for the corresponding period of this year, her purchases dropped to P261,000. Provided bottoms are available and Russia should stay in the war indefinitely, there is a good possibility of that country improving her importation of this product from the Philippines. The experience of the first world war shows that Russia needs copra in wartime.

While suffering from the closing of the European market, therefore, the Philippine coconut industry has, on the other hand, found new opportunities and new horizons. But the revolutionary changes in the industry that are foreseen for the near future are to come from the current industrialization program which is already bearing results and which is expected to further better the lot of the coconut planters and producers and give employment to more people.