

THE COIR ASSOCIATION

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Vegetable Fibres for Brush Production

Nine months ago we issued a report outlining our concerns regarding the availability of Coco and Bassine Brush Fibres and with regret, the situation has not improved. In actual fact the situation has worsened due to a number of factors and it is important that end users be made aware of the current challenges affecting the supply of natural vegetable fibres.

In summary of our previous report, hackled fibre production in Sri Lanka has been greatly reduced as a consequence of high volume buying of Coir mattress fibre for the Chinese market. Historically Coir fibre was extracted for two primary applications, short fibre for mattress production and long fibre for brush production. However, with the huge volumes required by the Chinese mattress manufacturers, the millers in Sri Lanka have been using newer technology to maximise the separation of fibre from the coconut husk. Unfortunately this new machinery does not easily separate the short and long fibres and the Chinese buyers are happy to buy what is now referred to as Mixed Fibre as such the availability of long fibre for hackling is greatly diminished. Furthermore, the areas where vegetable brush fibres are extracted (Tamilnadu, India for Bassine and Sri Lanka for Hackled Coco) are now seeing alternative higher paid employment opportunities and an increased trend of migrant labour.

The above issues have seen prices continue to increase throughout 2010 and we do not expect prices to be reduced this year, in actual fact we have already seen price increases and poor availability of fibre. The monsoon rains in India and Sri Lanka during the last quarter of 2010 arrived much earlier than expected and continued far longer than usual, consequently conditions were not accommodating for the production and drying of fibre. These factors combined with reduced availability of fibre and labour has caused the price increases that continue. Furthermore, a prolonged monsoon period has meant that most shippers are only now shipping containers that should have left one, two or even three months ago. Again this puts further pressure on pricing as exporters try to ship material at old prices and as such are reluctant to offer fibre for shipment prompt (due to old commitments) and forward orders are hard to secure due to uncertainty for forward prices.

Under such conditions we are recommending all users of Coco and Bassine fibres plan their requirements carefully and, where possible, build a larger than average amount of stock to a) reduce exposure to price increases and b) maintain a healthy amount of fibre in order to avoid running short of material due to late shipments.

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