

□ Mohd. Nasir Basri and Mat Rasid Jais

**W**hy use palm oil? That's the obvious question one would ask of Liasari Sdn. Bhd. a Malaysian exclusive cosmetic manufacturer. Liana Low, the Managing Director was quick to answer: 'Why not?' Indeed why not palm oil: it is abundantly available in Malaysia, it is consistent in supply and it is natural! Specifically, the company has taken the various positive attributes of palm oil and weaved them with their business plan to popularize cosmetic and skin care products formulated with palm oil derivatives.

As Malaysia is the world's leader in palm oil production, it is only natural that a cosmetic and skin care products' manufacturer in Malaysia should use palm oil products as their main ingredients. The company has successfully produced a range of products under the trade name of 'Pure Palm' and in introducing these products, the company seeks to maximize the usage of palm oil derivatives which are readily biodegradable. Furthermore, crude palm oil contains beta carotenes and vitamin E and these constituents offer distinct benefits to skincare formulations.

'Liasari has made a bold move by coming out with the Pure Palm product range,' said Low. 'We hope to promote the uniqueness of the products and we are confident that the Malaysian audience will be receptive to our products,' she added.

Palm derived ingredients for cosmetic applications are free from polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons which may be present in petrochemical based cosmetics widely found in the market. These hydrocarbons may be harmful to humans. In addition, palm oil due to its natural composition, is naturally stabilized and requires no hydrogenation. It contains more monounsaturated fatty acids than



many other vegetable oils. Products made with palm based ingredients are, therefore, non-toxic and are biodegradable.

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Liasari initiated Research and Development of palm based products in 1988 in collaboration with SIRIM. However, Low explained, the concept did not take off due mainly to the 'mental block' about palm oil as a result of the anti-tropical oil campaign. Things began to move again in 1992 when Liasari collaborated with PORIM on another product *i.e.* hand and body lotion. An MOU was signed in 1992 between PORIM and Liasari to develop palm based hand and body lotion. The product was successfully formulated with the technical



back-up from PORIM and the product is now in the market. With this success the company went on to formulate other palm based cosmetics and currently there are 12 products in the Pure Palm range.

An important point to note about products formulated with palm based materials is that the 'base' itself is a 'performing base' compared to other products which would require the addition of other active ingredients. Up to 80 percent of the ingredients in Liasari's Pure Palm range are palm based. That is a very high content by any standard and is testimony to Liasari's confidence in palm oil.

In addition, Liasari has other product ranges which contain palm derivatives as active ingredients.

Coming out with new products requires some investment and to date Liasari has spent about RM1 million on R&D. 'We have allocated another RM1 million for R&D for the next three years,' said Low.

The money will be spent in the light of the projected market expansion. Currently Liasari is concentrating on the domestic market. But they have also sent some consignments of products to Fiji and China. Liana Low's vision is to put Liasari products along the same line as those of established names in the cosmetic business. 'But for the time being we will concentrate on selected markets such as Fiji, China, India, Pakistan, Turkey and closer to home, Brunei and Singapore,' she added.

In fact, during the recent Palm Oil Week in Singapore organized by MPOPC, Liasari's Pure Palm products which were on display received tremendous acclaim and was a sell-out.

As a leader in her company, Low believes in empowerment. And she translated this concept in her franchising business. She hopes to start a chain of franchise for her products by 'empowering' her franchisee with 'the right products for the right markets'. This way, she hopes to enable them to give their best services to their clients and in the process to expand her business world-wide.

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She also believes in teamwork and specialization. "Therefore, I will concentrate on product development and let the others do their assigned jobs. We have to position the right people to do the right jobs," she philosophized.

It is certainly a novel idea to enter the cosmetic market with a new range of products based on palm oil. Certainly, with the current consciousness about natural products, the timing is very right and the products will be a big boost to consumers who care to 'green their skins the palm oil way'. ■