

Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka Transfers Research Outcomes for Industry



RESEARCHES & INNOVATIONS



Prof. D.A.I. Dayaratne Director University Business Linkage cell



Prof. Thusitha Abeytunga Lead Academic Expert Research and Innovation AHEAD Project



Prof. Udaya Rathnayake Vice-Chancellor



Prof. Achini M. De Silva Project Coordinator AHEAD Grant RIC No. 16



Ms. Taniya Rashmi Cell Manager UBL Cell



Ms. Hasanthi Kosgahakumbura Business Development Manager UBL Cell

The University – Industry Linkages primarily focus on win-win outcome for both parties which will intern stimulate the economic growth and spur the socio-economic development. At present, universities in Sri Lanka gain a momentum by extending the missions to establish meaningful collaboration with the industries. Alignment of university mission with the industry is pivotal at this hour for the country. Hence, the Sabaragamuwa University is in the forefront of directing its mission to expose the university inventions to industry usage in transferring valuable research outcomes to leading companies in Sri Lanka.

In view of further cementing the industry collaboration, the Sabaragamuwa University officially entered into a licensing agreement with Cargills Ceylon PLC to commercially exploit two inventions namely, “A Healthy Cinnamon Latte” and “A Healthy Cinnamon Leaf Tea”. These two products were developed as a collaborative research effort between Department of Agribusiness Management, Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and Accelerating Higher Education Expansion and Development (AHEAD) Operations.

This counts the third licensing agreement of the university during its short history. This momentous occasion was held on 03rd November 2021 at the board room of the Vice Chancellor's office of the University. This remarkable achievement passes a valuable milestone in the concept of University Business Linkage Cell (UBLIC) which initiated by the UGC in 2016.

The event was attended by the Vice-Chancellor of the university Prof. Udaya Rathnayaka, the Director of the University Business Linkage Cell Prof. Indunil Dayaratne, Lead Academic Expert Research and Innovation - AHEAD Project Prof. Thusitha Abeytunga, Dean – Faculty of Agricultural Sciences Prof. Asha Karunaratne, Head of the research project Prof. Achini De Silva and her research team, Group Managing Director - Cargills Ceylon PLC Mr. Imtiaz Wahid and his team, and other dignitaries.

Cinnamon is a staple spice which derived from an exotic tree native to Sri Lanka and Southwest India, and its usage goes back to historic time in Sri Lanka. Among all the cinnamon varieties, Ceylon Cinnamon is identified as the world's best quality cinnamon species, free from the toxic compound called "coumarin". Sri Lanka is the world's largest exporter and fourth-largest producer of cinnamon, its cinnamon exports account for 21.3% of global cinnamon exports in 2020 and ranked 3rd among cinnamon exporters in the world. Sri Lanka exported 17,480 metric tons of cinnamon in 2019, while the United State and Germany being the topmost importers. Cinnamon production in major producing countries like Sri Lanka has taken upward trend due to this increased demand.

Bringing more visibility to cinnamon beverages, the research team of the university has created two unique cinnamon products, capable of providing a natural health booster blending 100% high quality Ceylon cinnamon (*Cinnamomum zeylanicum*) with pure Ceylon cinnamon taste.

It is expected that the products will win the international market and gain a competitive edge over the opponents by giving value-added cinnamon products for global consumers. Undoubtedly, these two products will ensure a new lucrative business model for the Cargills Ceylon PLC.

The Vice-Chancellor Prof. Udaya Ratnayake, while extending his appreciation to Cargills, stated that the university marked another milestone in its research commercialization endeavors with this agreement. Further he emphasized, "In addition to knowledge dissemination, universities are currently exploring opportunities to transfer the knowledge to the industries than ever,"

By expressing his views Professor Indunil Dayaratne, the Director of the University Business Linkage Cell stated that the scientifically developed products enhance the competitive edge for the companies in the marketplace. He also added, this is another effort by the University, to promote research and innovation culture of the university with the active participation from the industry.

He further explained the role of the University Business Linkage Cell in creating these industry relationships. The main intention of technology transfer initiative is to transform the innovative ideas of the university into commercially viable products by expanding the business relationships between the university and the partnering companies.

Facilitating licensing agreements to commercialize patented inventions of inventors is one of the main responsibilities of the UBL Cell. In technology transfer process the UBL Cell transforms the innovative ideas into intellectual property by filling the patents and other forms of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR). In the commercialization process, the UBL Cell negotiates the terms and conditions of the licensing agreement with the expectation of finalizing a deal which gives win-win outcome for both parties.

Addressing the gathering, Professor Thusitha Abeytunga, Lead Academic Expert Research and Innovation - AHEAD Project stated that the interest of the innumerable number of companies in the field of cinnamon industry, cinnamon market size is increasing exponentially since new inventions are coming to the market, “The main concern of the University Business Linkage Cells is to have an enthusiastic research groups, eminent manufacturers, and prestige industry partners.”.

Dr. Nelum Vithana, Group Manager of the Cargills Ceylon PLC, highlighted that “Sri Lanka is an exporter of high-quality Ceylon cinnamon and Cargills is aiming to bring more dollars to the country by exporting value added products to international markets”.

Professor Asha Karunaratne, Dean – Faculty of Agricultural Sciences noted “With the increasing market demand, special orientations need to be done for the raw cinnamon so that many varieties of value-added cinnamon beverages have come forward”.

Professor Achini De Silva, Principle investigator of the research project expressed that Ceylon cinnamon is popular globally since the restrictions imposed on consuming the Cassia due to the prevalence of carcinogenic compounds. She highlighted that the inventions have been directed to the patent protection locally and internationally for creating head start over its competitors since the composition of these cinnamon beverages are not previously reported elsewhere in the existing markets.

In conclusion, Sri Lanka is still in the early stage of establishing robust University-Industry Linkages. However, some success stories are visible within the university set up in Sri Lanka and we can see a bright light at end of tunnel before long. The prevailing bottlenecks can be overcome with a clear national level policy framework aiming at strengthening the links between universities and industry.

Participants from left to right; First Row - Prof. Athula Gnanapala - Dean/Faculty of Management Studies, Dr. Sampath Fernando – Dean/Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages, Prof. HMS Priyanath – Dean/ Faculty of Graduate Studies, Ms. Rukshani Wanigasekara - Legal Manager/Cargills Ceylon PLC, Dr. Nelum Vithana - Group Manager/ Cargills Ceylon PLC, Mr. Dilantha Jayawardhana - Executive Director/ Cargills Ceylon PLC, Mr. Imtiaz Wahid- Group Managing Director/ Cargills Ceylon PLC, Prof. Udaya Rathnayake - Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Achini M. De Silva - Project Coordinator, Dr. Chathurika Jeewanthi - Deputy Project Coordinator, Prof. Thusitha Abeytunga - Lead Academic Expert Research and Innovation/AHEAD Project, Prof. D.A.I. Dayaratne - Director/UBL Cell, Prof. AAY Amarasinghe - Director/OTS, Prof. Asha Karunaratne – Dean/Faculty of Agricultural Sciences Second Row- Mr. Tharaka Weddagala – Research

Assistant, Mr. N.S.A. Senarathne - Research Assistant, Buddhika Wijamunige - Research Assistant, Ms. Taniya Rashmi – Cell Manager/UBL Cell