Postharvest handling and uses of Asaí (*Euterpe precatoria*) fruit

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Abstract

Asaí is a neotropical palm with fruits that are traditionally consumed by native communities in the Amazon. Consumption has increased due to the antioxidant contents. Distribution of this wild Amazonic palm is widespread and it is possible to find more than one species. While in Brazilian forests, *E. oleraceae* is the most abundant; in the eastern Amazon, the principal species is *E. precatoria*. During recent decades, many institutes, universities and research centers have studied many topics related to the palm. Despite these advances, harvest indices, postharvest handling, as well as processing lack the necessary knowledge for the well-timed harvest of bunches and fruit handling, in order to take advantage of this biological resource. Skin color and pigment contents are good harvest indices. Fresh fruits are not usually consumed but pulp, beverages and dehydrated powders constitute commercial products. To obtain good products from the fruit, postharvest handling includes conditioning operations such as selection and classification, which assure the delay of fruit decay and fermentation. Some processing protocols have been developed in order to obtain pulp and dry powder from asaí fruit, which preserve high antioxidant activities due to polyphenolic compounds. Uses of fruit pulp and dehydrated powders have diverse applications and all of them preserve a functional condition, such as in energy bars, instant beverages, chocolate fillers and gummy confectionery. Asaí fruits exhibit interesting options for the food industry with high potential for inclusion in many derivatives that satisfy industrial requirements, which could be reinforced with advances in technology and innovative processing to enhance preservation of the functional bioactive compounds.