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POSTHARVEST CHANGES AND PERFORMANCE AT PROCESSING OF SOME
SRI LANKAN VEGETABLES

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A B S T R A C T

This work was carried out to study the processing possibilities of bittergourd, snakegourd and ridgegourd. These three vegetables were subjected to freezing, dehydration and fermentation. It was found that freezing was the superior processing method for these vegetables when compared to dehydration and fermentation. In the case of bittergourd, the best maturity stage for harvesting and the storage condition for harvested pods were studied. According to the proximate composition and physical properties such as weight, length and circumference of bittergourd pods, the maximum yield was found to be obtained by harvesting after 10th day of flowering. The shelflife of harvested bittergourd was about 5 days at normal condition and the shelflife was found to be extended upto 30 days by packing in polypropylene bags and storing at 2°C (35.6° F).

The dehydrated products of these three vegetables exhibited very poor qualities with respect to the retention of chemical constituents and textural qualities. These vegetables contain more than 90% of moisture and removal of this moisture content affected the textural quality of the final products. The microscopic examination of the dehydrated vegetables also showed irreversible changes of cellular structure of the tissues. Therefore, the dehydration ratio of dried vegetables was less than 5.

A natural convective solar dryer was constructed and it was found that the dryer was able to dehydrate vegetables while retaining 76.6% of β -carotene. This amount is significantly higher when compared with the β -carotene content retained in vegetables dehydrated by exposing to direct sun light. The latter process showing only trace amount of β -carotene.

The effect of pretreatments on the quality of processed vegetables were examined. Blanching was found to be an effective pretreatment in retaining ascorbic acid and β -carotene content of these vegetables. The retention of ascorbic acid was increased when the blanching solution contained 0.1% KMS (Potassium meta bisulphite). In the case of frozen bittergourd, the retention of ascorbic acid was 87.7 % in the sample blanched in 0.1 % KMS solution and at storage for 28 weeks at -18°C (-0.4°F).

Of these three vegetables, snakegourd and ridgegourd could be preserved by fermentation. The fermentation was carried out by providing the growth of naturally present lactic acid producing organisms on these comodities and the process was able to reach the 1% acid in the media within 12 days of fermentation. During this period, the total soluble sugar content was found to decrease by 90.8 % in snakegourd and 94.0 % in ridgegourd. In the case of bittergourd, the fermentation was incomplete and the

production of acid did not exceed 0.5 % during 12 days of fermentation. However, the development of a new product was possible by preserving bittergourd in acid-salt suspension. In this preservation, the ascorbic acid content was found to reduce gradually during storage, and at the end of the 6th month, the retention of ascorbic acid was 32.5 %. The variation of β -carotene in fermented vegetables was similar to frozen products. The overall results showed the possibility of preserving these three vegetables by freezing or fermentation. Dehydration possibilities exist with respect to bittergourd compared to snakegourd and ridgegourd.

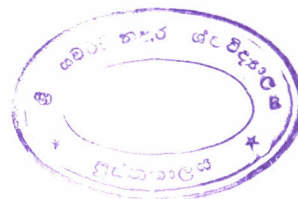


TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	xvii
LIST OF FIGURES	x
LIST OF TABLES	viii
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 POSTHARVEST CHANGES	13
1.2.1 Physiochemical changes	13
1.2.2 Nutritional changes	19
1.2.3 Textural changes	29
1.2.4 Pathological aspects	31
1.3 PROCESSING OF VEGETABLES	35
1.3.1 Preservation of vegetables by processing	35
1.3.2 Preparation of vegetables for processing	36
1.3.3 Blanching as a pretreatment of vegetable processing	38
1.3.4 Sulphiting of vegetables before processing	40
1.3.5 Preservation of vegetables by freezing	42
1.3.6 Dehydration of vegetables	43
1.3.7 Fermentation of vegetables	45
2. EXPERIMENTAL	48
2.1 METHOD OF ANALYSIS	48
2.1.1 Determination of dry matter content	48
2.1.1.1 Materials and equipments	48
2.1.1.2 Method	48

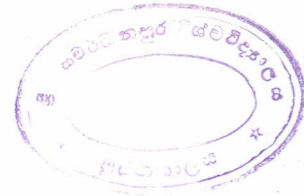


	Page
2.1.2 Determination of acidity (Titrable)	49
2.1.2.1 Materials and equipments	49
2.1.2.2 Method	49
2.1.3 Determination of drip loss	50
2.1.3.1 Materials and equipments	50
2.1.3.2 Method	50
2.1.4 Determination of acid detergent fiber	50
2.1.4.1 Materials and equipments	50
2.1.4.2 Method	51
2.1.5 Determination of alcohol insoluble solids and total soluble sugar content	51
2.1.5.1 Materials and equipments	51
2.1.5.2 Method	52
2.1.6 Determination of chlorophyll content	54
2.1.6.1 Materials and equipments	54
2.1.6.2 Method	54
2.1.7 Determination of β -carotene content	56
2.1.7.1 Materials and equipments	56
2.1.7.2 Method	57
2.1.8 Determination of ascorbic acid content	58
2.1.8.1 Materials and equipments	58
2.1.8.2 Method	58
2.1.9 Determination of peroxidase activity	60
2.1.9.1 Materials and equipments	60
2.1.9.2 Method	60

	Page
2.1.10 Determination of protein content	61
2.1.10.1 Materials and equipments	61
2.1.10.2 Method	61
2.1.11 Determination of minerals	62
2.1.11.1 Materials and equipments	62
2.1.11.2 Method	63
2.1.12 Determination of rehydration ratio	64
2.1.12.1 Materials and equipments	64
2.1.12.2 Method	64
2.1.13 Microscopic examination of the tissue structure	65
2.1.13.1 Materials and equipments	65
2.1.13.2 Method	65
2.1.14 Sensory analysis	66
2.1.14.1 Materials and equipments	66
2.1.14.2 Method	66
2.2 MATURITY AND POSTHARVEST STUDIES OF BITTERGOURD	66
2.2.1 Maturity studies	66
2.2.1.1 Materials and equipments	66
2.2.1.2 Method	66
2.2.2 Postharvest studies	67
2.2.2.1 Materials and equipments	67
2.2.2.2 Method	68

	Page
2.3 PROCESSING OF VEGETABLES	69
2.3.1 Sample preparation	69
2.3.1.1 Materials and equipments	69
2.3.1.2 Method	70
2.3.2 Estimation of blanching time	70
2.3.2.1 Materials and equipments	70
2.3.2.2 Method	72
2.3.3 Solar dehydration	72
2.3.3.1 Construction of basic solar dryers	72
2.3.3.1.1 Materials and equipments	72
2.3.3.1.2 Method	72
2.3.3.2 The effect of solar dryers on dehydration of bittergourd	74
2.3.3.2.1 Materials and equipments	74
2.3.3.2.2 Method	74
2.3.3.3 Construction of natural convective solar dryer	75
2.3.3.3.1 Materials and equipments	75
2.3.3.3.2 Method	75
2.3.3.4 Study of thermal performance of natural convective solar dryer	77
2.3.3.4.1 Materials and equipments	77
2.3.3.4.2 Method	77
2.3.3.5 Effect of natural convective solar dryer on dehydration of snakegourd	78
2.3.3.5.1 Materials and equipments	78
2.3.3.5.2 Method	79

	Page
2.3.4 Mechanical dehydration	79
2.3.4.1 Dehydration of bittergourd	79
2.3.4.1.1 Materials and equipments	79
2.3.4.1.2 Method	80
2.3.4.2 Dehydration of snakegourd	81
2.3.4.2.1 Materials and equipments	81
2.3.4.2.2 Method	81
2.3.4.3 Dehydration of ridgegourd	82
2.3.4.3.1 Materials and equipments	82
2.3.4.3.2 Method	82
2.3.5 Freezing preservation	82
2.3.5.1 Freezing preservation of bittergourd	82
2.3.5.1.1 Materials and equipments	82
2.3.5.1.1 Method	83
2.3.5.2 Freezing preservation of snakegourd	83
2.3.5.2.1 Materials and equipments	83
2.3.5.2.2 Method	83
2.3.5.3 Freezing preservation of ridgegourd	83
2.3.5.3.1 Materials and equipments	83
2.3.5.3.2 Method	83
2.3.6 Fermentation of vegetables	84
2.3.6.1 The production of acid during fermentation of vegetables	84
2.3.6.1.1 Materials and equipments	84
2.3.6.1.2 Method	84



	Page
2.3.6.2 Fermented pickle of snakegourd	84
2.3.6.2.1 Materials and equipments	84
2.3.6.2.2 Method	86
2.3.6.3 Fermented pickle of ridgegourd	87
2.3.6.3.1 Materials and equipments	87
2.3.6.3.2 Method	87
2.3.6.4 Nonfermented pickle of bittergourd	87
2.3.6.4.1 Materials and equipments	87
2.3.6.4.2 Method	87
3 RESULTS & DISCUSSION	89
3.1 MATURITY AND POSTHARVEST STUDIES OF BITTERGOURD	89
3.1.1 Maturity studies	89
3.1.2 Postharvest studies	93
3.2 ESTIMATION OF BLANCHING TIME	97
3.3 SOLAR DEHYDRATION	99
3.3.1 Effect of basic solar dryers on dehydration of bittergourd	99
3.3.2 Study of thermal performance of the natural convective solar dryer	102
3.3.3 Effect of natural convective solar dryer on dehydration of snakegourd	104
3.4 MECHANICAL DEHYDRATION	106
3.4.1 Dehydration of bittergourd	106
3.4.2 Dehydration of snakegourd	111
3.4.3 Dehydration of ridgegourd	116
3.5 FREEZING PRESERVATION	119
3.5.1 Freezing preservation of bittergourd	119

	Page
3.5.2 Freezing preservation of snakegourd	126
3.5.3 Freezing preservation of ridgegourd	134
3.6 FERMENTATION OF VEGETABLES	142
3.6.1 Production of acid during fermentation of vegetables	142
3.6.2 Fermented pickle of snakegourd	146
3.6.3 Fermented pickle of ridgegourd	154
3.6.4 Preservation of bittergourd in acid-salt suspension	159
CONCLUSION	163
REFERENCES	167
APPENDIX 1	177
2	179
3	181
4	183
5	185