

**SMART CHOICE** ■ SIRINYA WATTANASUKCHAI

# A matter of percentages



**D**on't worry, the bird's nest beverage you are drinking is made of "100% genuine bird's nest". Some manufacturers make the drink even more special with the use of cave nest.

But customers must realise that the 100% assurance may not mean what they think it does.

The 100% assurance has become an issue since a man posted a sign in various public places, claiming that each bottle of bird's nest, a favourite drink of his aged mother, contained just a little more than

1% of dried nest. He is now facing lawsuits from beverage manufacturers as well as an educational institute that he quoted in his sign.

Meanwhile, the Foundation for Consumers filed a complaint with the Food and Drug Administration, saying that the "100% bird's nest" label on some products is misleading. It may make customers falsely believe that the bottle contains only bird's nest.

There are four manufacturers in the market, namely Bezz, Brand, F&N Gold, and Scotch. Each brand

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offers different formulas. For example, Scotch has seven while Brand has 10. Typical formulas include original and sugar-free, with a widely-used substitute like xylitol. Some manufacturers add collagen and ginseng supplements. The product also comes in different grades with different price tags. A bottle of between 40ml and 80ml costs between 85 and 125 baht, while premium-graded products are more expensive. The cheapest dried nest in the market costs at least about 50,000 baht a kilogramme.

The foundation conducted research on the four brands. It found that only one brand, Bezz, shows a complete list of ingredients on the label—which are 83.8% water, 15% rock sugar and 1.2% of dried nest. The others disclose only basic ingredients, for example, Scotch and Brand shows 10-12% of rock sugar and between 1.1% and 1.4% of bird's nest; while F & N Gold shows 19% milk, 0.16% of dried nest, 4.8% skim milk, and other unidentified ingredients. Every label is approved by the FDA.

Most of them contain an average of about 1.1% to 1.4% of genuine dried nest. However, some of the premium recipes have almost 3% of dried nest. Scotch shows the exact amount of each ingredient on its website while Brand only offers the ingredients in each recipe, without the percentage.

According to Thailand Institute of Scientific and Technological Research, natural bird's nest comprises 5.11% of water, 60.9% protein, 0.85% calcium and 0.03% potassium.

Mahidol University's Nutrition Institution has conducted a lab test on two brands of beverages and found the ready-to-drink bird's nest beverage generally contains an average of a little more than 1% dried nest and 12% rock sugar. The institution's test also found some nutrition facts. In a 70ml bottle, sample one offered 52 kilocalories, 0.28 grammes of protein, 0.001mg of B1 and 0.018mg of B2, 17mg of calcium and 2.3mg of phosphorus. Sample two, in a 75ml bottle, offered 52kcal, 0.22 grams of protein, 0.001mg of B1 and 0.014mg of B2, 23.8mg of calcium, and 1.5mg of phosphorus. The nutritional substance can be compared to an egg which costs less than 10 baht, providing 81kcal, 6.5 grammes of protein, 0.05mg of B1 and 0.19mg of B2; 30mg of calcium and 111mg of phosphorus.

A bottle of bird's nest beverage with an approximate 70ml to 75ml costs about 125 baht. To get the nutrition equivalent of an egg, one would need to consume 26 bottles of bird's nest which would cost 3,250 baht. And to match the nutrition of a box of UHT milk, one needs to consume 34 bottles, which would cost 4,250 baht. A bottle of beverage is equivalent to just two tablespoons of fresh milk or two peanuts.

