Chapter 2

Sustainable Foods and Consumption

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Abstract

Sustainable food is a concept defined to ensure the sustainability of food systems by bringing together environmental, social and economic dimensions. This concept aims to reduce the environmental impacts of food production and consumption, ensure food security and promote healthy nutrition. Sustainable food systems protect natural resources while also considering human health and social well-being. Sustainable food is often associated with diets that promote the consumption of plant-based foods. Developing sustainable food systems plays a critical role in societies achieving their food security and environmental sustainability goals. In this context, models such as community supported agriculture (CST) have significant potential for strengthening local food systems and ensuring environmental sustainability (Yıldırım, 2024). CST contributes to making food systems more sustainable by encouraging the participation of local communities in agricultural production processes.

1. Introduction

Sustainable food refers to food systems and dietary patterns that prioritize environmental health, social equity, and economic sustainability. The concept encompasses a variety of practices that aim to reduce the ecological footprint of food production and consumption while ensuring food security and nutrition for current and future generations. Sustainable diets are characterized by low environmental impacts, respect for biodiversity, and optimization of natural resources, as defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) (Gupta

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et al., 2022; , Klimczak and Gliszczyńska-Świgło, 2024). The sustainable food system aims to provide clean water, fertile soil and healthy food for future generations by protecting natural resources.

Food waste means that the food produced goes to waste without being consumed or processed. It is important to reduce this waste in terms of sustainability. Food waste can be minimized and a sustainable food cycle can be created with practices such as conscious consumption, correct storage methods and food sharing.

The increasing awareness of sustainability among consumers has led to significant changes in food purchasing behavior. Studies show that consumers increasingly prefer locally sourced, organic, and sustainably produced foods (Pinard et al., 2014). This trend is reflected in the practices of large food retailers and restaurants, such as large chains such as Wal-Mart and Costco, who have begun to adopt sustainable sourcing policies, such as switching to cage-free eggs (Pinard et al., 2014). Furthermore, the food industry plays an important role in promoting healthy and sustainable diets by integrating nutritional considerations into sustainability discussions, as highlighted by the EAT-Lancet Commission, which emphasizes the need for diets that are both nutritionally and environmentally sustainable (Miller et al., 2021).

Sustainable diets are not only about the types of foods consumed, but also the broader food systems that support these diets. For example, the Mediterranean diet is often cited as a model for sustainable nutrition because of its emphasis on plant-based foods, moderate consumption of animal products, and low environmental impact (Dernini & Berry, 2015). Additionally, sustainable food practices in the food service sector, such as waste reduction and energy efficiency, contribute to the overall sustainability of food systems (Ju & Chang, 2016).

Sustainable food encompasses a holistic approach to food systems that integrates environmental, social and economic dimensions. It requires collaboration between consumers, producers and policy makers to create an ecosystem that supports sustainable dietary practices while addressing the challenges of food security and environmental degradation.

1.1. Sustainable Food Consumption

Sustainable food consumption refers to the practice of choosing food products and dietary patterns that promote health and well-being while minimizing environmental impact. This concept encompasses several dimensions, including ecological sustainability, social responsibility, and economic viability. Increasing awareness of these dimensions has led to

increased interest in how consumers can make choices that contribute to a more sustainable food system. A key aspect of sustainable food consumption is that it is compatible with environmental sustainability. This includes choosing food products that have a lower carbon footprint, are produced using environmentally friendly methods, and contribute to the preservation of biodiversity. In addition to environmental considerations, sustainable food consumption also encompasses social dimensions such as animal welfare and fair trade practices. Consumers are becoming increasingly aware of the ethical implications of their food choices, leading to increased demand for products that comply with humane animal treatment and equitable labor practices. This awareness is essential to promote a holistic approach to sustainability that considers not only the environmental impacts of food systems but also their social justice dimensions.

Sustainable food consumption can be achieved through a variety of practices, including plant-based foods, organic produce, locally sourced produce, fair trade produce, and seasonal produce. These choices not only support individual health, but also contribute to broader environmental and social sustainability goals. For instance, organic food is often highlighted as a sustainable choice due to its reduced reliance on synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, which can harm ecosystems Annunziata et al. (2019). However, the environmental benefits of organic food can vary, and there is ongoing debate about its overall sustainability compared to conventional farming practices (Rahman & Luomala, 2020).

Sustainable food consumption is influenced by socio-demographic factors, including age, education, and cultural background. Research indicates that younger consumers, particularly those from higher socio-economic backgrounds, are more likely to prioritize sustainability in their food choices (Wyrwa, 2023; Mota-Gutierrez, 2024). This demographic shift is crucial as it indicates a potential for increased demand for sustainable food products, which can drive changes in food production and supply chains (Biresselioglu, 2023).

In addition to environmental considerations, sustainable food consumption also encompasses social dimensions, such as animal welfare and fair trade practices. Consumers are increasingly aware of the ethical implications of their food choices, leading to a rise in demand for products that adhere to humane treatment of animals and equitable labor practices (Verain et al., 2012; Sánchez et al., 2021). This awareness is essential for fostering a holistic approach to sustainability that considers not just the environmental impact but also the social justice aspects of food systems.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of sustainable food consumption. The disruptions in food supply chains and the heightened awareness of food security issues have prompted consumers to reconsider their food purchasing behaviors. Many have shifted towards local and organic products, recognizing the benefits of supporting local economies and reducing food miles (Ramos et al., 2022). This shift is indicative of a broader trend towards sustainability, as consumers seek to make choices that are not only beneficial for their health but also for the planet.

To promote sustainable food consumption effectively, it is essential to implement educational programs that raise awareness about the environmental and social impacts of food choices. Policymakers and stakeholders in the food industry must work collaboratively to create frameworks that encourage sustainable practices, such as labeling initiatives that inform consumers about the sustainability of food products (Jones et al., 2011; Matschoss, 2022).

1.2. Sustainable Food Examples

Sustainable food consumption encompasses a variety of food choices that prioritize environmental health, social equity, and economic viability. Examples of sustainable foods include plant-based foods, organic products, locally sourced items, fair trade goods, and seasonal produce all of which contribute to reducing the ecological footprint of our diets.

Plant-Based Foods: A significant shift towards plant-based diets is one of the most effective strategies for promoting sustainable food consumption. Research indicates that diets rich in legumes, nuts, whole grains, and vegetables can substantially lower greenhouse gas emissions (GHGE) compared to meat-heavy diets Brink et al. (2019). For instance, replacing meat with legumes and nuts not only reduces environmental impact but also supports health by providing essential nutrients (White & Hall, 2017). The Mediterranean diet, which emphasizes plant-based foods, is often cited as a sustainable dietary model due to its health benefits and lower environmental impact (Donini et al., 2016).

Organic Foods: Organic products are another example of sustainable food choices. These foods are produced without synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, which can harm ecosystems. The demand for organic foods has been increasing as consumers become more aware of their health benefits and environmental sustainability (Verain et al., 2015). Studies show that organic farming practices can enhance biodiversity and soil health, making

them a preferable choice for environmentally conscious consumers (Huang et al., 2022). However, the sustainability of organic foods can vary, and it is essential to consider the entire food system when evaluating their environmental impact (Rahman & Luomala, 2020).

Locally Sourced Foods: Foods that are sourced locally contribute to sustainability by reducing transportation emissions and supporting local economies. Local food systems often prioritize seasonal produce, which can lead to fresher and more nutritious options for consumers (Braun et al., 2018). Initiatives such as farm-to-school programs exemplify how local sourcing can enhance the sustainability of food procurement in educational settings, promoting both environmental and social benefits (Pagliarino et al., 2021). Additionally, local foods often have a smaller carbon footprint compared to imported goods, making them a more sustainable choice (Utzig, 2019).

Fair Trade Products: Fair trade foods, which ensure that producers receive fair compensation and work under safe conditions, are also integral to sustainable consumption. These products often include coffee, chocolate, and certain fruits. By choosing fair trade options, consumers can support ethical practices in food production and contribute to social sustainability (Verain et al., 2012). This approach aligns with the principles of sustainable food consumption by addressing social equity alongside environmental concerns.

Seasonal Foods: Consuming seasonal foods is another effective way to practice sustainable food consumption. Seasonal foods are typically fresher, require less energy for storage and transportation, and are often more affordable. This practice encourages consumers to adapt their diets based on what is locally available at different times of the year, which can help reduce reliance on out-of-season produce that often has a higher environmental impact due to long-distance transportation (Harray et al., 2018).

1.3. Countries best practicing sustainable food consumption

Countries that exemplify best practices in sustainable food consumption often integrate environmental, social, and economic considerations into their food systems. These nations typically promote policies that encourage organic farming, local sourcing, and reduced food waste while fostering consumer awareness about sustainability. Below are several countries recognized for their efforts in sustainable food consumption:

Sweden: Sweden is often cited as a leader in sustainable food practices. The country has implemented a comprehensive food policy that emphasizes

sustainability across all levels of food production and consumption. The Swedish government promotes organic farming and has set ambitious targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the food sector. Research indicates that Swedish consumers are increasingly prioritizing environmental and ethical considerations in their food choices, which aligns with national sustainability goals (Rejman et al., 2019). Additionally, Sweden's focus on plant-based diets and reducing meat consumption has been pivotal in its sustainability efforts (Diachkova et al., 2022).

Denmark: Denmark is recognized for its strong emphasis on organic food production and consumption. The Danish government has established policies that support organic farming, aiming for 60% of all food consumed in public institutions to be organic by 2025. Danish consumers are also increasingly adopting flexitarian and plant-based diets, further contributing to sustainability (Mota-Gutierrez, 2024). The country's commitment to reducing food waste through initiatives like the "Stop Wasting Food" movement has also garnered international attention (Annunziata et al., 2019).

Germany: Germany has made significant strides in promoting sustainable food consumption through its "National Strategy for Sustainable Development," which includes initiatives to enhance organic farming and reduce food waste. German consumers show a high level of awareness regarding sustainability, often choosing organic and locally sourced products (Rejman et al., 2019). Moreover, Germany's robust food labeling system helps consumers make informed choices about the sustainability of their food (Pércsi, 2024).

Italy: Italy is known for its rich culinary traditions that emphasize local and seasonal foods. The Italian government supports sustainable agriculture through various programs aimed at preserving biodiversity and promoting organic farming. The country has also embraced the Mediterranean diet, which is recognized for its health benefits and lower environmental impact (Ferrari et al., 2020). Italian consumers are increasingly aware of the importance of sustainability, leading to a rise in the consumption of organic and locally produced foods (Annunziata et al., 2019).

Netherlands: The Netherlands is a pioneer in sustainable agriculture, particularly in the realm of innovative farming techniques that reduce environmental impact. The Dutch government has implemented policies to promote sustainable food systems, including initiatives to enhance food security and reduce food waste (Diachkova et al., 2022). Dutch consumers

are increasingly interested in sustainability, often opting for organic products and supporting local food systems (Rejman et al., 2019).

France: France has a long-standing tradition of valuing high-quality food, which has translated into a growing interest in sustainable consumption. The French government has introduced policies to promote organic farming and reduce food waste, including the "Anti-Waste Law" that mandates supermarkets to donate unsold food (Mourad, 2016). Additionally, French consumers are increasingly adopting plant-based diets, contributing to the overall sustainability of the food system (Mota-Gutierrez, 2024).

1.4. Turkey's position in sustainable food consumption

Turkey's position in sustainable food consumption is multifaceted, with challenges and opportunities, particularly in agriculture and food systems. The country has recently taken steps to improve food security and sustainability.

Food Security and Agricultural Policies: Turkey has recognized the importance of food security and has implemented various policies aimed at improving agricultural productivity and sustainability. The government has focused on enhancing food security through initiatives that support local farmers and promote sustainable agricultural practices. However, bureaucratic challenges and rigid regulations often hinder effective implementation, leading to inefficiencies in the food system (Ekici, 2023).

Economic Factors and Food Prices: Economic conditions, particularly inflation, significantly impact food consumption patterns in Turkey. Rising food prices, driven by supply shocks and currency fluctuations, have restricted consumers' ability to purchase sustainable food products. This economic pressure can lead to a reliance on cheaper, less sustainable food options, which poses a challenge to promoting sustainable consumption practices among the population (Akın et al., 2019).

Consumer Awareness and Behavior: There is a growing awareness among Turkish consumers regarding the importance of sustainability in food choices. However, the prevalence of unhealthy food advertising, which often promotes high-fat, high-sugar products, complicates efforts to shift consumer behavior towards healthier and more sustainable options (Güran et al., 2010). The challenge lies in effectively educating consumers about the benefits of sustainable food consumption and providing them with accessible alternatives.

Environmental Policies and Agricultural Practices: Turkey's environmental policies have begun to address the sustainability of its agricultural practices. The country has made commitments to improve its environmental performance, but the effectiveness of these policies is often undermined by economic growth strategies that prioritize short-term gains over long-term sustainability (Acar & Gultekin-Karakas, 2016). For example, the reliance on fossil fuel subsidies has been criticized for detracting from investments in cleaner agricultural technologies (Acar et al., 2018).

Integration of Sustainable Practices: Despite these challenges, there are positive developments in Turkey's approach to sustainable food consumption. Initiatives aimed at promoting organic farming and local food systems are gaining traction. The Turkish government has also been encouraged to adopt more integrated approaches to food policy that consider environmental, social, and economic dimensions (Çelik & Serin, 2022).

1.5. Sustainable food consumption behaviour gap

The gap between sustainable food consumption attitudes and actual behaviors is often referred to as the "attitude-behavior intention" disconnect. This disconnect suggests that while individuals may express positive attitudes towards sustainable food practices, these attitudes do not consistently translate into corresponding purchasing behaviors. The gap between sustainable food consumption attitudes and actual behaviors is influenced by a complex interplay of knowledge, values, social influences, and educational factors. While positive attitudes towards sustainability exist, translating these into consistent behaviors remains a challenge. Addressing this gap requires multifaceted approaches that consider the unique motivations and barriers faced by different consumer segments. Shanks et al. found that participants' knowledge about sustainable food systems did not lead to significant changes in their dietary practices over time, indicating a persistent gap between intention and action (Shanks et al., 2012). Similarly, a survey of dietitians revealed that only 47% incorporated sustainable food principles into their practices, highlighting a lack of self-efficacy and inconsistent training regarding sustainability in dietetics education (Hawkins et al., 2019).

Several studies have explored the determinants of sustainable eating behaviors, particularly among specific demographics such as university students. Mollaei et al. conducted focus group discussions that revealed key perceptions and determinants influencing sustainable eating behaviors among Canadian university students, emphasizing the importance of targeted interventions to promote sustainable habits (Mollaei et al., 2023).

Additionally, Larson et al. demonstrated that young adults who value sustainable practices tend to consume diets of higher nutritional quality, suggesting that fostering these values could bridge the gap between attitudes and behaviors (Larson et al., 2019). However, despite these positive correlations, many consumers still struggle to align their food choices with their sustainability values, as evidenced by Rejman et al., who noted a significant gap between consumers' favorable attitudes towards sustainability and their actual food purchasing behaviors (Rejman et al., 2019).

Education and awareness play crucial roles in shaping sustainable food consumption behaviors. Arslan and Alataş found that increasing education levels did not necessarily correlate with improved sustainable eating habits, indicating that knowledge alone may not be sufficient to drive behavioral change (Arslan & ALATAŞ, 2023). Furthermore, Kamenidou et al. identified that Generation Z university students primarily focused on seasonal and regional food consumption, suggesting that specific behavioral segments exist within this demographic that could be targeted for interventions (Kamenidou et al., 2019). The literature also indicates that personal values and social influences significantly impact sustainable food choices, as noted by Olsen and Tuu, who found that environmental values mediate the relationship between future time perspective and sustainable consumption behaviors (Olsen & Tuu, 2021).

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