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**Sustainability in the Food & Beverage Industry:
 Barriers and Drivers
 for Local and Organic Food Supplies**

by
 Megi Tarko
 (S5678439)

Supervisor: Dr. Sven Kilian
Co-assessor: Dr. Mariana Cardoso Chripim

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the barriers and drivers in the adoption of local and organic food supplies in the f&b sector from a sustainability perspective, in such a way that companies can get valuable insights for an effective adoption of this sustainable practice. The paper examined the internal dynamics of an f&b company through a focus group discussion and follow-up interviews, involving employees from different hierarchical levels. From the research, different aspects pertaining to the acquisition of local and organic food supplies arose: the procurement process is, together with organizational culture, the biggest barrier for f&b companies, nevertheless some desirable solutions have been identified to streamline the supplies acquisition. Furthermore, the findings reflected the importance of a strong organizational culture and a good strategy for an effective implementation of local and organic food supplies. The values motivating the employees represented the most persistent drivers for sourcing ingredients locally and sustainably.

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Introduction

In face of phenomena such as climate change, industries had to start changing their way they were operating. One of these industries, the food & beverage one (f&b), in 2022 was responsible for 36% of the global emissions (Jong, 2022). Not only is the food sector one of the largest industries worldwide, but also comprehends long and complex supply chains that lead to emissions, deforestation and waste production (Jong, 2022). As a result, the industry, which employs a large number of people in most nations, is coming under growing pressure from stakeholders, governments, nongovernmental organizations, and consumers to enhance the sustainability standards throughout their supply chains and operations (Adams et al., 2023). As a response, companies are looking to find alternative ways to provide products which are sustainably produced and sourced, and local food is one of them. Indeed, there is an overall growing trend on local food demand in the last decade (Granvik et al., 2017): this is primarily due to its nutritional properties and appealing image it has towards consumers. Most importantly, local food represents a way to achieve a more sustainable consumption and food production. Indeed, local food is defined as locally-grown produce and it is associated with concepts such as freshness, environmental sustainability, and support of the local economy (Cvijanović et al., 2020).

Due to shorter supply chains, local food is often associated with sustainability. Indeed, the greatest environmental performances of locally grown food have been studied by researchers, with transportation posing the largest environmental burden throughout the whole agri-food chain. (Calderón et al., 2018). Although the distances decrease, it is important to highlight that transportation is not the sole factor linking local food supply, but other factors, such as producing

sustainably, come into play. Local food is sustainable when the producer preserves natural resources, refrains from endangering them, and mitigates the effects of climate change while protecting the welfare of farmed and wild species (SUSTAIN, 2009). Therefore, when local food is produced sustainably, it can be also defined as organic food, which its growing demand reflects consumers' worries about the damaging impacts of conventional agriculture on the environment and public health (Meemken et al., 2018).

To understand the dynamics behind a specific sustainable initiative, which in this case is local and organic food supplies, the paper wants to bring a closer focus on the food & beverage context and on what could be the drivers and barriers when following the sustainable practice in question. The research will provide a practical guideline for f&b firms on which factors to take into account when purchasing local and organic food supplies, as well as discuss some potential solutions to overcome the challenges of this sustainable practice. Overall, the research will bring valuable insights to the f&b sector to support sustainable food chains and positively impact the local communities. By taking into consideration a f&b company who is striving to make an impact through local and organic food supplies, the research question of the paper is the following: *what are the drivers and barriers for a food & beverage company in adopting local and organic food supplies?*

Literature Review

Local and Organic food: Definitions

Although the popularity of local and organic food, finding a sole definition for these terms has its difficulties. Especially for local food, it has to be determined for which distance food can be considered local: in most cases local food was produced in the same city or state, or it was grown

physically close to the consumer (a few miles away from the point of sale, for example) (Martinez et al., 2010). Therefore, the concept ambiguity of local food can challenge the companies in defining under which criteria they should purchase locally. Furthermore, it has to be recognized that certain food supplies cannot be found in certain geographical areas, therefore local food comes already with some limitations. Concerning organic food, it differs from standard food as its production involves preventive and system-oriented measures due to the restricted or prohibited use of numerous direct control techniques, including synthetic soluble fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, and veterinary medicines (Niggli, 2015). Consequently, one of the benefits perceived from consumers is health consciousness (He et al., 2020), fostering its popularity among consumers and companies. Because of the ‘trend effect’ of both local and organic, these terms are often used interchangeably despite having different meanings. In this research, they coexist and together with the term *food*, because of simplicity, they implicitly refer to beverages as potential local and organic supply.

Sustainable Practices in the Food & Beverage Industry

In the f&b context there is a variety of studies on, for instance, motives and challenges in the case of green supply chains (Wang et al., 2013) and sustainable strategies (Adams et al., 2023). As a matter of fact, local and organic food has been often mentioned among the environmental practices, however the literature has not focused solely on this sustainable practice. At the same time, most of the articles in local and organic food adoption and its drivers and barriers have been analyzed in the context of restaurants. Therefore four main articles will be analyzed, from which barriers and drivers can be derived in order to answer the research question.

Roy (2022) explores the drivers and barriers for restaurants for purchasing food locally from farmers, taking into account its impact on the environment and community. Among the drivers, the article identified community support: businesses would view the efforts of local producers as essential to sustainability, because of the way they produce, by taking care of the local landscape. A further driver is the freshness of the products, nutritional values and safety. Although beneficial, purchasing local food comes with some challenges, such as seasonality and costs. Furthermore, companies found difficulty in managing the transportation and delivery of local food supplies based on their timing needs and would buy more locally produced food items straight from farmers' market vendors if the circumstances of product availability and opportunity were met. To get a more comprehensive understanding of what implies following certain norms within larger companies and the internal dynamics, other articles take a broader perspective, considering several environmental initiatives. Adams et al. (2023) analyzes the barriers and drivers in adopting sustainable strategies in the f&b industry. According to the paper, as management and staff address growing concerns about sustainability challenges in the larger community, ethical motivation—doing the right thing—becomes an increasingly essential motivator.

Kasim et al. (2012) brings an emphasis on the internal dynamics of the companies such as top management and employees' commitment to sustainability. The paper highlights that decisions made at the highest levels of management have an impact on the work culture of the organization, thus deducting that the more top management sets sustainable goals, the more it will positively impact the employees' commitment. Despite top management's interest in sustainability, employees in restaurants can lack diverse and competitively priced organic products: finding a variety of organic products at affordable prices can be challenging, thus

hindering their ability to source sustainable ingredients for their menus (Kasim et al., 2012). Furthermore, inexperienced and unmotivated employees can also limit implementation (Meager et al., 2020). To add a different perspective, Frederick et al. (2013) analyzes the determinants for the implementation of Green Supply Chain Management for f&b companies. The paper acknowledges that clear goals in line with the vision and purpose of a firm have to be linked to a clear environmental strategy and planning, thus avoiding confusion and tension within the company and with the external stakeholders. Geyer and Jackson (2004) point out that the vision and mission should serve as a roadmap for setting specific operational goals. The article takes into consideration also the importance of a strong cooperation and trustful communication with the actors of the supply chain, making sure that the suppliers are making a meaningful contribution in terms of sustainability and enabling an exchange of ideas. According to Vachon and Klassen (2006), collaborative environmental initiatives yield greater benefits the more integrated a supplier is. Furthermore, Reinhardt (1998) notes that in order for a green product to be effectively launched, consumers must be prepared to pay a premium, and businesses must provide reliable information about the product.

Whilst local food has not been a primary focus as a way to achieve sustainable goals, because of the recent trend of eating locally, local food has mostly been studied from the viewpoint of the customer (Martinez et al., 2010) particularly in direct and farmers' markets (Roy, 2022) thus resulting in a marketing strategy, rather than a sustainable practice. Organic food has a similar story: because people are becoming more informed, the growth and consumption of organic food items have increased dramatically in recent years (Basha et al., 2015). However, organic agriculture is primarily discussed as a consumer trend that farmers need to respond to. It is still

not seen as a comprehensive strategy for achieving genuinely sustainable farm productivity (Niggli, 2015). As a result, the process behind introducing local and organic food supplies because of sustainability from f&b firms has not been widely explored from the literature: to analyze this different perspective, it will be helpful to discuss what pushes and stops f&b companies to incorporate local and organic food supplies from a sustainability point of view and take into account the context of the f&b industry. This will bring important insights on the reasons why companies consider the purchase of local and organic food and its related barriers, as well as improve their strategies for the adaptation of this sustainable practice.

Overall, the research in question provides a better understanding on the concept of local and organic food supplies: the paper acknowledges the responsibility of the f&b industry towards a more sustainable future and therefore explores what motivates and limits companies in the food and & beverage industry to purchase locally and sustainably sourced food supplies. The thesis gives a significant contribution to the literature because it provides a unique perspective of local food supplies, as it considers the food and beverage context and reflects the internal dynamics of an organization that is making an effort to effectively incorporate local food supplies as a way to create sustainable value. This sets it apart from several researches that primarily focus on specific contexts, on general sustainable initiatives, and on local and organic food as a means of attracting new customers. Lastly, the paper can be considered as a guideline for those companies that are planning to rely on local and organic food supplies or that generally want to explore environmental operations, and as a source of new strategies for a more sustainable food acquisition and application, thus improving firms' contribution to a more sustainable future.

Methodology

Case Description

In order to understand what can foster or limit the adoption of local and organic food supplies, the drivers and barriers perceived by a f&b company based in Northern Netherlands, will be analyzed. The company in question is connected to a university and includes departments such as a restaurant, the university canteen, and the several food outlets in the campus. The peculiarity of this company is the presence of students who have the opportunity to work in one of the departments and learn the practical side of what they are studying. Among the organizations' sustainability guidelines, one is to purchase locally and sustainably across all the different branches. Nonetheless, they acknowledge that this guideline is not always followed and they would like a better understanding of the determinants in the adoption of local and organic food.

Data Collection

Focus Group

To answer the research question, qualitative research based on a focus group and follow up interviews has been chosen as a research method. The focus group will consist of ideally 10 people, while 6 people only will be chosen to conduct a short interview after the focus group. Focus groups can shed light on the disparities in viewpoints across various groups of people and reveal a variety of thoughts and emotions that people have on particular topics (Rabiee, 2004). Focus-group interviews are unique due to their group dynamics; as a result, the type and breadth of data provided through the group's social interaction is frequently richer and deeper than that of one-on-one interviews (Thomas et al., 1995). Thus, adopting this research will give the opportunity to start an open discussion where employees from different hierarchy levels and

departments can share their thoughts and opinions on sustainability and local/organic food supplies acquisition, revealing the reasons behind the acquisition of more sustainable supplies and the barriers limiting the organization in unitedly implementing the sustainable practice, as well as the arguments on which the respondents agree or disagree with.

The respondents have been reached through another employee of the company who initially got contacted from the researcher. An email has been sent with the information regarding the focus group to several potential respondents to reach the ideal number of 10 participants. However, the actual respondents were 7, to which a consent form has been sent with the purpose of the research and all the procedures regarding ethical concerns, especially regarding the focus group, as employees from different hierarchy levels might feel pressured in openly answering the questions. Indeed, it is important for the group members to interact and feel at ease with one another (Rabiee, 2004). Therefore, it has been assured that the research aim is to purely get different perspectives on local and organic food supplies acquisition. Moreover, the participants have been informed that the research satisfies the ethical guidelines of the University of Groningen. After that, the focus group has been scheduled in presence at the company. A researcher from the university connected to the company was the moderator of the discussion, while the researcher was taking notes.

Follow-up Interviews

After the focus group, 5 participants have been chosen to schedule follow up interviews, in such a way that the researcher would collect further information needed and avoid socially desirable answers. The focus group lasted 90 minutes, while the interviews were around 30 minutes. Both of them were recorded and transcribed using the softwares Trint and Descript, whose transcripts

have been transferred to Excel. Concerning the follow-up interviews, their aim is to cover unanswered questions and uphold the arguments discussed during the focus group, thus gaining a deeper comprehension of the individual's viewpoint as opposed to a broad understanding of a topic (McGrath et al., 2018). To get a greater overview of the dynamics within the organization, the respondents chosen are the organization employees from different hierarchies. More specifically, the general manager of the firm, heads of department (HoD), senior practical facilitators (PF) and practical facilitators. The general f&b manager works on the strategic and vision level of the whole company, while the HoDs are head of a specific branch, whose main responsibility is to implement policies and assess their impact. Below this position, there is the senior PF, whose role is to execute the day-to-day work of the department, while the practical facilitators are mostly focused on training students during their practice period.

Data Analysis

After reading and rereading the interview transcripts, codes arose from the respondents' language and were recognized using terminology from the examined literature. The codes were gathered and then compiled into themes pertaining to sustainability drivers and barriers. Indeed, coding techniques use procedures that highlight themes present in the data (Williams et al., 2019). The themes and codes of each interviewee have been confronted to recognize patterns and differences, while for the focus group the frequency and extensiveness of certain arguments have been highlighted, which is suggested as one of the aspects to consider when coding focus groups data (Krueger, 1994). After data interpretation, conclusions were derived that were more broadly based on the data and connected to the study's research topics and literature (Braun et al., 2006).

Findings

During the focus group, all the respondents consistently agreed on the arguments pertaining to what fosters and limits the adoption of local and organic food supplies, therefore there were no completely opposite ideas on the topics of the research. On the other hand, differences in perspective based on the role employees play within the organization have emerged. PFs and senior PFs were more aware of the operational issues and felt the lack of a clear company identity and structured guidelines, whereas higher-level managers expressed their thoughts mainly on the strategy the organization is building and the values that motivate them to pursue a more local and organic approach. After the focus group and the follow-up interviews, several barriers and drivers have been identified, which have been grouped according to 5 major themes: all this information can be found in **Figure 1**. The results are explained in the following sections.

	Barriers	Drivers
<i>Procurement</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Large need of supplies - Organizational/logistical needs - Unavailability of local supplies - Lack of hygiene certification among local suppliers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transparency on supplies origin - Concentrated set of suppliers - Enhanced collaboration/communication between company and suppliers - Vision alignment with suppliers
<i>Organizational Culture</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of experienced employees - Lack of support from top management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhanced communication with employees - Salience of opportunities with local and organic food - Environmental awareness among employees
<i>Costs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Higher costs - Higher prices 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support the local community/economy

<i>Values</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide high quality/fresh/healthy food - Promote local food among employees - Food as love mentality - Proximity of local supplies - Cultural belonging/heritage
<i>Strategy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of marketing expertise - Undefined company vision - Lack of strategy fit - Shareholders focus on profit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear guidelines

Figure 1 Summary results from focus group and follow-up interviews. (Source: Author)

1. Procurement

Procurement refers to all the activities related to the acquisition of supplies, including the relationship between company and suppliers. In this category, both barriers and drivers have been identified.

Barriers

Most of the difficulties expressed by the respondents when dealing with local and organic food supplies were related to the procurement of those. Indeed, as the company analyzed is a mid-large organization, small producers are often not able to provide the firm with the quantity needed to operate, thus representing a barrier to a more local and organic food approach. Besides the quantity of the supplies needed, also the organizational and logistical aspect of the procurement represents a barrier for the employees. More specifically, for the company going to each producer and getting the supplies requires a lot of effort. As examples, the interviewees explained that local suppliers are able to provide the supplies on certain days and that they are sometimes not able to pay them on a short term. A further relevant barrier for the company is the

unavailability of local and organic food supplies: the respondents gave the example of chocolate, so products that in countries such as the Netherlands cannot be found locally:

‘I think if we look at buying and purchasing locally, we try to do as much as possible, but some products are just not available locally. Thinking about chocolates or coffee, for example, products that are not produced in the Netherlands, but products that you cannot deal without in a catering or restaurant company.’ (HoD)

Lastly, a respondent confirmed that some suppliers might not have the required hygiene certifications, which can represent a barrier for the firm, since smaller companies might not have enough resources to keep up with the hygiene standards expected from the organization.

Drivers

Concerning the drivers, few respondents agreed on the fact that transparency on the origin of supplies is an important driver when it comes to local and organic food supplies. Indeed, employees find it difficult to order local and organic products when the source of the supplies is not communicated clearly from the supplier. In addition to that, the respondents acknowledged that relying on a concentrated set of suppliers, i.e. a single supplier that cooperates with different suppliers, makes the procurement process much more feasible than being in touch with several suppliers, as explained in the following comment:

‘And what you see quite often is that working locally has some challenges as well, especially if you look at small suppliers. And I think that, for us, it's amazing to work together with *name of supplier* because they are the ones who pick up the products from the different farmers and make sure that we can just order it, centrally from our system. If we would have needed to do the same and manage the distribution from ourselves, that would be pretty much impossible. So in comparison to before, working with *name of supplier* it's a lot better.’ (senior practical facilitator)

At the same time, some respondents expressed as a driver an enhanced communication and cooperation with suppliers in order to share knowledge on organic and local produce, as well as initiate new projects which can foster the adoption of local and organic food supplies. Besides the operational needs, one of the respondents declared that having a vision alignment with the supplier would create a more trustworthy relationship, as both firms would share similar values concerning sustainability.

2. Organizational Culture

The organizational culture refers to how the rules and norms concerning local and organic food supplies are embedded within the corporation, making sure that the employees are informed about the correct criterias in the adoption of ingredients.

Barriers

For a respondent, the presence of an unclear vision reflected a sense of lack of support from top management, representing a barrier that caused confusion on what the company wants to reach as goals. Additionally, two respondents acknowledged the lack of experienced employees, more specifically people who are well informed about the guidelines and how to integrate them in the company, as well as chefs who have high expertise on the creation of new dishes with local/organic ingredients:

“Plus, what I miss a little bit in the company is that we really need a few ambassadors. Okay, that actually supports the guidelines. Now, we also still see, with a lot of staff members, employees facing difficulties. During winter, there are no products. What do we need to sell then? So I still have quite often the function of telling people that they are making the wrong decision”. (senior practical facilitator)

Drivers

Several respondents recognized that an enhanced communication towards the employees would be a desired driver for a more local and organic supplies acquisition. Indeed, higher-up employees sometimes feel that they limit employees because of the restricted choice of supplies, but they think that by using resources in teaching the reasoning behind the guidelines and its principles can help the acquisition of more local and organic supplies. Additionally, one of the respondents who has not been part of the guidelines setting, discussed that knowing more about the decision-making process behind the decision of the sustainability guidelines would help him/her to have a better understanding of the operational dynamics involving local/organic adoption. Furthermore, two employees suggested that another driver would be to show the salience of opportunities of local and organic food supplies when creating new dishes, so that local and organic supplies can be perceived more as an opportunity rather than a limitation. Additionally, one of the respondents confirmed that a driver facilitating the adoption of local and organic supplies would be to see more environmental awareness among the employees, mostly pertaining to the knowledge on local/organic food.

3. Costs

As discussed beforehand in the literature review, costs represent a burden for f&b companies when adopting sustainable practices. As a consequence, the data collection reflected costs as barriers only.

Barriers

One of the main barriers emerged from the majority of the respondents is the higher costs in acquiring local and organic ingredients. Two employees discussed that the main factor increasing

the production costs is the organic aspect, which is more expensive as it uses alternative and more sustainable production methods. This barrier reflects another barrier which are the higher prices: both employees and consumers acknowledge that the prices for the meals offered are sometimes too high and they are not willing to spend that price for a meal. This point is discussed in the below comment:

“Well, people find us quite expensive. And we know that already. For quite a long time, especially the last two years, we had to raise the prices a little bit because the products were getting more expensive as well. And at this moment you see that pretty much our target group just thinks we're expensive and they don't really have a clue on what type of products they're eating”. (senior practical facilitator)

4. Values

In this section, the beliefs that push the employees to opt for a more local and organic option in their daily work have been grouped, therefore, they have been categorized as drivers only.

Drivers

Five respondents out of seven declared that they feel compelled to choose local and organic food supplies in order to support the local producers, which have more difficulties compared to big organizations. This driver reflects the motivation of supporting the local economy and preserving the cultural heritage of the local food traditions. In addition to that, respondents feel a sense of belonging to the culture, thus representing a driver for the local and organic food adoption. For the employees it is not only important to support the local community, but also to bring benefits to the consumers. Indeed, four employees confirmed how important it is for them to provide to their clients healthy food, while others declared that freshness and high-quality are the features that they appreciate besides the local aspect:

“But one thing we didn't talk about is health and nutrition. And that's a big one. So it's also balancing local and sustainable, which is a thing we can all agree on and it's part of guidelines per se right now. But also as we're talking about the future is what we are consuming. And what does that mean for our bodies as well. And that's very important for us. In terms of transparency and conversation. While we're looking at local and sustainable, we're also looking at what is the product, what's in it? Is it full of preservatives? It could be a local product.” (general manager).

Furthermore, a respondent expressed their motivation to promote local and organic food among employees, by showing them the benefits of getting such supplies. Whereas, another respondent thinks of ‘food as love mentality’ as a strong driver for the adoption of local and organic food supplies, perceiving the meal as a moment to appreciate the ingredients that have been grown and sourced respecting local and sustainable values. Lastly, an employee stated as the main driver the proximity of local supplies, as they provide a more reliable sourceability of the supplies.

5. Strategy

The last theme that emerged from the data analysis is Strategy, which concerns the measures taken by the corporation to effectively incorporate internally the guidelines as a matter of local and organic supplies and translate it to the outside part.

Barriers

A barrier that has been mentioned by every respondent is the lack of marketing expertise: while the company is doing several efforts to promote values such as local purchase and sustainable production, it does not have the necessary resources to communicate those beliefs to the consumers. As a consequence, employees declared that the clients do not understand the reason

behind the high prices of the dishes and therefore they are not able to fully appreciate the quality of the ingredients. This issue is then explained in the following comment:

“So how do we still explain why sometimes our products are a bit more expensive? But we are lacking a marketing expert in this company to actually be able to do that. So we try our best.” (HoD)

A further barrier acknowledged by the employees is the undefined company vision at the current status of the firm. Because some recent changes occurred within the organization, the company is undergoing a process of searching for the right vision which can reflect the beliefs of the firm and therefore the guidelines concerning food and beverages supplies. For a respondent, not having a defined company vision and guidelines reflected on a further barrier, which is a sense of lack of support from the top management. Furthermore, one of the respondents mentioned the role of the shareholders and how some of them have a focus on profit which represents a barrier in achieving sustainable goals. At the same time, the interviewee discussed as a barrier the lack of strategy fit, which refers to the challenge of following a local strategy and fitting, in this case, a more international one.

Drivers

As mentioned beforehand, the company is currently defining its vision and values. Because of that, the guidelines that the employees are relying on have been created by themselves. As a result, four employees confirmed that they needed enforced regulations to avoid confusion and know which are the right choices to make in terms of supplies. In addition, few employees mentioned that clear guidelines are needed to set the geographical ‘boundaries’ defining when an ingredient is local or not, despite the respondents recognizing the difficulty behind it. The necessity of structured rules is elaborated in the following comment:

“I think guidelines are kind of necessary so that everyone is on the same page. It will be a bit organized. And if everyone has different opinions, that's good to have, because that enables us to debate and to see what's the next thing or what we're doing right or wrong. But I think that at some point we would really need to have something to follow on a structure.” (practical facilitator)

Discussion

The analysis of a company which is committed to the adoption of local and organic food provided several barriers and drivers to answer the research question. Involving employees with different roles gave a comprehensive overview of what the respondents perceived mostly in their daily job when dealing with the acquisition of supplies, thus enabling to create a bigger picture of the internal dynamics of the company.

Barriers

Together with organizational culture, the more consistent category for barriers was procurement: indeed, the research revealed that the process of acquiring the supplies represents a heavy burden on the companies. One barrier is the need for large quantities of supplies, which in this case is not a result of seasonality limiting the supply quantity (Roy, 2022), but rather of small producers' inability to meet a high supply volume. At the same time, f&b organizations find it difficult to manage the logistics of getting the supplies from each supplier and align it with the organizational needs of the producer. Prior studies have shown the logistical aspect to be among the biggest obstacles that foodservice establishments face when making direct purchases from farmers and local suppliers (Dougherty et al., 2013; Freedman et al., 2016). A strong limitation confirmed by the company is the inability to procure all the necessary ingredients locally (Burns et al., 2018), but bringing an emphasis on the inability to procure certain ingredients that can only be found outside of the country, thus hindering the creation of menus (Kasim et al., 2012). Meanwhile, a barrier that has not been mentioned in the examined literature is the lack of hygiene certifications among small producers that might not have enough resources to afford them.

In addition to the operational aspects of procuring local and organic supplies, the study highlighted the importance of fostering a company culture rooted in these supply choices. This cultural foundation plays a crucial role in the overall process. Two main barriers have been identified from the respondents: few respondents feel a lack of employees with the expertise needed to enforce the guidelines and create menus and dishes with local and organic ingredients. Indeed, integration of more effective sustainable strategies is frequently hindered by a lack of knowledge and experience (Friedman & Miles, 2001). Additionally, one respondent felt that there was no strong support from the top management, which in the literature is associated with a lack of attention towards environmental goals and understanding between environmental and economic cost relationship (Post & Altman, 1994). Nevertheless, in the following paper the lack of support from top management is reflected by the current situation of the company that is in the process of defining its vision and guidelines.

In general, the increased cost of sustainability methods is one of their main drawbacks. However, some respondents did note that the cost of the goods is more affected by their biological or organic nature than by their local production. Indeed, the company struggles in being local, environmentally friendly and financially sustainable. The higher costs then reflect on higher prices which decrease their willingness to spend more on a local/organic dish. Another key aspect frequently mentioned by respondents was the strategy required for effectively adopting local and organic food supplies, which has been discussed by one paper only from the analyzed literature. To stand out in the market, a firm must create a strong competitive advantage. This involves building a distinct internal identity that aligns with its supply choices. Organizational culture, according to Angel del Brío et al. (2008), is essential for a long-term competitive advantage. As for procurement, several barriers have been identified, mostly because, as already

anticipated, the company is currently in the process of defining its vision and the guidelines in terms of sustainability. Indeed, one first barrier is the undefined company vision, as this creates confusion on the values the company wants to pursue, thus challenging the food supplies adoption process. An environmental vision and/or mission, from which all practices can be drawn, serves as the cornerstone for staff involvement (Frederick et al., 2013). An additional barrier not mentioned in the literature is the lack of marketing expertise that impedes the firm to justify the higher price to the consumer, who is often not willing to pay the extra premium. Indeed, consumers of restaurants were prepared to pay a premium for menu items that were identified as being produced locally (Ortiz, 2010). To obtain these pricing advantages, f&b companies must inform their clientele that they use local and organic grown food. Regarding strategy, the firm faces the challenge of integrating a new strategy alongside its local focus. While the company aims to support the region, it also seeks to expand internationally. A respondent also identified shareholder priorities as a barrier, noting that the emphasis on short-term profits makes them reluctant to invest in long-term sustainability initiatives.

Drivers

Through the research, drivers have been found under the procurement sphere, opposing the analyzed literature that mainly considered procurement from a barrier point of view. A key driver for adopting local and organic food supplies is strong collaboration between the company and its suppliers: this partnership involves not only exchanging knowledge about the local and organic food sector but also sharing similar sustainability values. The most promising type of cooperative connection to accomplish environmental goals is a collaborative strategy (Frederick et al., 2013). More specifically, the employees of the company analyzed would like to see more transparency

on the source of the supplies (Blake et al., 2010). A further driver that links to the logistical and organizational needs of the f&b company, is the presence of a large supplier that can take care of collecting different supplies from several suppliers, thus assisting the firm in handling the procurement part.

The employees see as potential drivers a stronger communication among them, especially on the guidelines adopted by the firm, thus ensuring those rules can be learned and embedded in the company. Indeed, not having enough strategies to guarantee employees buy-in can lead to a lack of focus as well as an inadequate use of staff members' strengths (Angel del Brio et al., 2008).

An additional determinant discovered by the paper is to show to employees local and organic food as an opportunity to experiment new dishes and ingredients, rather than a limitation. Moreover, the data collection reveals that a general environmental awareness on the practices adopted in terms of local and organic food among the employees is desired for reaching sustainable goals: staff training and education on environmental issues is essential to the present push for a more sustainable society (Kasim et al., 2012).

For the drivers side, the values category was the most consistent one, showing that the employees are highly motivated for purchasing more sustainable and local food supplies at work, thus contributing to bring a positive environmental impact impact, opposite to the lack of motivation that has been found as a barrier in the literature (Meager et al., 2020). Indeed, aspirational levels of employees affect an organization's ability to adapt and learn (Long et al. 2018). The two most frequent drivers were supporting the local community and economy (Roy et al., 2019; Casselman, 2010). Additionally, the majority of respondents highlighted the importance of higher quality, and freshness, which is why companies favor local food (Kang & Rajagopal, 2014), and nutrition (Tobin et al., 2012). Through the research, further values which

are more connected to the personal sphere were found. Some respondents feel a sense of belonging to the culture behind local food and want to preserve its heritage. Further drivers are the opportunity to promote local and organic products among the employees by showing the benefits of it and the proximity of local supplies. Another respondent takes a different perspective and perceives food as a love mentality, through which you can enjoy locally and sustainably grown ingredients.

Furthermore, employees recognized that as the company began to adjust its vision, practical guidelines are a potential driver for daily operations in order to achieve an efficient adoption of local and organic food supplies. These rules, created by the employees themselves, are now desired to be officially embedded into the company's policies. Moreover, the concept ambiguity of local food discussed in the literature, i.e. the difficulty of defining geographically what is local food, pushes the respondents to the need for more enforced guidelines. Indeed, the development of both explicit and quantifiable goals and objectives is recommended in green supply chains in the f&b sector (Frederick et al, 2013).

Conclusions

The thesis provides a unique and closer focus to the adoption of local and organic food supplies as a sustainable practice in the f&b industry, differentiating from the existing literature that focuses on organic/local food as a trend among consumers. The paper highlights several issues and determinants, highlighting different aspects of the process behind the local and organic food supplies acquisition. The research acknowledges one of the most complex but fundamental aspects recognized by f&b firms is procurement, providing concrete problems and potential solutions, which can support a company that wants to consider the operational implication for local and sustainable ingredients acquisition. Moreover, the paper recognizes that local food comes with a limitation in procuring ingredients that cannot be found in the geographical area the company is operating, which represents a barrier difficult to overcome. On the same level, the study emphasizes the challenge of under which distances food can be considered local, which impacts on the driver of setting defined rules within the firm.

The study brings to light two fundamental elements often discussed by the analyzed firm—organizational culture and strategy—that are not frequently mentioned in the context of sustainability in the food and beverage sector. Building a strong company identity and aligning it with clear and internalized sustainability goals guarantees that the company follows homogeneous practices when adopting local/organic ingredients (Frederick et al., 2013), as well as employees' awareness of the values the firm believes in and wants to promote. Furthermore, the paper draws attention on the importance of reflecting the internal values to the consumers to guarantee the effectiveness of the strategy, which are insights that f&b companies can take into consideration prior to the adoption of local and organic food supplies. The study significantly

contributes to the literature since it analyzed a company that represents the opposite of an firm that uses local and organic food as mainly a source of profit: the firm has strong values behind local and sustainable choices, but does not have the resources needed to externalize it and guarantee that the consumer is willing to pay for the higher premium. Hence, the study acknowledges that despite the environmental efforts, a marketing strategy is fundamental in order to inform the clientele with truthful information on the product (Reinhardt, 1998) so that the consumer is willing to pay for the higher price. The commitment of the analyzed organization in pursuing sustainability objectives reflects as key drivers the employees' mindset and their personal beliefs in achieving sustainable goals, and recognizes how relationships with employees and with the suppliers can be beneficial for acquiring local and organic food supplies. Aspiration among employees is explicitly measured in terms of shift toward corporate sustainability (Benn et al., 2014). These insights suggest that f&b companies can consider strategies for fostering employees' commitment to sustainability, as well as for enhancing their relationship with both suppliers, which can boost social capital, an important for business-to-business interactions (Cox et al., 2007), and employees.

Overall, the thesis explores further motivations and limitations in addition to the ones of the literature and sets the ground for future research in the f&b sector, more specifically in local and organic food. The research acknowledges the responsibility of the f&b industry to look out for sustainable solutions, analyzes local and organic food from a sustainable point of view, recognizing both motivation and challenges in following this practice. The study will offer f&b companies useful advice on what considerations to make when buying organic and locally grown food sources, fostering the research on possible ways to address some of the obstacles that may arise from using this sustainable approach.

Limitations and Future Research

The paper comes with different limitations: the research has been conducted in a narrow geographical area. On top of that, the sample for data collection is restricted, since no more than one company has been considered for answering the research question. Furthermore, the thesis studied an organization which has a strong connection with a local university: indeed, employees have different students to train in all the departments each month. Therefore, the academic influence on the company might limit the generalizability of the results.

To support the findings of this paper, additional research with a similar purpose of this paper is necessary to collect further information on local and organic food and its impact on companies' sustainability goals in the f&b sector. Specifically, greater focus should be given to the role of strategy and organizational culture in firms when they incorporate sustainable supplies in their operations, which are topics that have been overlooked by the literature. Furthermore, to prove the applicability of these findings, research should be conducted in other countries and more than one organization should be involved to have a wider data set.

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Appendix

Table 1 Questions' guide focus group

<i>Introductory question</i>	Could you introduce yourself and briefly describe your job position?
<i>General question</i>	What role does local food/beverage supplies play in your daily working activities? Why do you opt for local food/beverages supplies?
<i>Transition question</i>	How easy do you think it would be to increase the quantity of local food/beverage supplies?
<i>Specific questions</i>	What do you think makes it difficult to adopt local food/beverage supplies? What motivates you to adopt local food/beverage supplies? What would make it easier to adopt local food/beverages supplies?
<i>Final question</i>	Finally, is there anything connected with the adoption of local food/beverage supplies which has not been discussed that you feel strongly about and would like to bring up now?

Table 2 Interview guide follow-up interviews

<i>Question 1</i>	What did you think about the focus group?
<i>Question 2</i>	For you, which are the main motivations for adopting local food/beverage supplies at work?
<i>Question 3</i>	For you, which are the main challenges for adopting local food/beverage supplies at work?
<i>Question 4</i>	How does the non-clarity of visions/goals affect the adoption of local food/beverage supplies?
<i>Question 5</i>	How does non communication/transparency to the employees affect the adoption of local food/beverage supplies?
<i>Question 6</i>	What would you suggest in order to better address the need for local food/beverage supplies?
<i>Question 7</i>	Which skills/expertise are needed to better address the need for local food/beverage supplies?
<i>Question 8</i>	Is there any discussion made during the focus group on which you did not share your opinion on?
<i>Question 9</i>	Is there any other aspect that we didn't cover in the focus group that you would like to discuss?