

Exploring the Demand for Organic Food Consumption in Casual Dining Restaurants in Western Province; from the Restaurant Managers’ Perspective

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Food tourism is a rapidly growing segment in the hospitality and tourism industry with great potential. Further, its exponential growth has resulted in exploring the niche market for organic foods in the restaurant industry. At present, it has become a trend to consume organically grown foods at ‘dine-in’ in restaurants. But, contradictory ideas exist in the literature regarding organic and conventional food consumptions. Based on the identified research gap, the objectives of the study were aimed to identify the demand for organic food consumption in restaurants from the restaurant managers’ perspective in Sri Lanka, to examine the promotional strategies used for organic foods in restaurants, and to identify the limitations of promoting organic foods. Primary data were collected from 18 restaurant managers in casual dining restaurants in the Western Province of Sri Lanka, which are registered at Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority and also operated in the Western Province of Sri Lanka. The purposive sampling technique was used to formulate the sample and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. Under the qualitative research approach, collected data were transcribed and analyzed by using the content analysis method. The findings of the study revealed that there is a growing demand for organic food consumption by customers and they are highly attentive to consume organic products when they ‘dine-in’ in restaurants. Further, the study explored that the demographics and the perceptions of the consumers to consume healthy have impacted to consume organically. Therefore, restaurant managers are also willing to promote organic foods in their daily food operations in restaurants. But, it was revealed that organic promotional strategies are complicated to be performed specifically due to the limited access in restaurants to expand the organic theme in their daily food operations. Therefore, the recommendations of the study have exposed the potential to expand organic food production in the restaurant industry under the government's concerns and restaurant managers are also recommended to be engaged in delivering healthy consumption patterns by enhancing organic dining-in within the industry. The study will further provide the significance of developing a sustainable environment in the Sri Lankan restaurant industry.

Keywords: Dining-in Organically; Organic Food Consumption; Qualitative Content Analysis; Restaurant Managers