

Environmental Stewardship In Food Operations: Understanding Implementation Strategies For Sustainable Practices

Vince Richard Q. Gomez

Abstract *This qualitative study investigates how food service businesses use sustainable operating approaches to encourage environmental stewardship. As the need to reduce environmental impact grows, food companies are addressing sustainability issues by using eco-packaging, waste reduction, and local sourcing. The study focuses on the effects these tactics have on food operators' business and the community. Direct observations and interviews at a few local restaurants were used to gather data. Purchasing food from nearby farmers' markets and farms improves community ties and lowers emissions associated with transportation, according to research. Segregation techniques, expiry tracking to reduce spoiling, and efficient food portioning are all part of waste reduction initiatives. Additionally, using recyclable and biodegradable packaging greatly reduces reliance on plastic. These strategies increase consumer loyalty while simultaneously promoting environmental awareness. For long-term effects, the study emphasizes the necessity of regular sustainability training and community-based cooperation.*

Keywords: *Environmental Stewardship, Sustainable Practices, Local Sourcing, Food Waste Reduction, Eco-Packaging, Food Operations, Sustainability in Food Service*

Introduction

The food service industry's effects on the environment have come under more criticism in recent years. The worldwide movement toward sustainability has forced many food businesses to review their procedures, especially those related to packaging, waste management, and procurement. Food enterprises should be proactive in encouraging environmental stewardship as consumer and regulatory awareness rises. The food industry is a major contributor to the generation of waste and the depletion of natural resources. In order to address these challenges, the circular economy approach offers a promising framework for sustainable waste management in the food industry (Saha, 2023). Many businesses showed a significant commitment to ongoing progress in this area by starting to link their policies with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Pinedo-López et al., 2024b).

Environmental sustainability in food businesses is a strategic necessity rather than just a passing fad. Implementing eco-friendly packaging, cutting waste, and sourcing locally are practical measures that companies may do to support sustainability objectives. In addition to lowering carbon emissions and landfill contributions, these measures also generate employment possibilities in nearby areas. By placing a strong emphasis on sustainability, restaurants may stand out in a crowded market and attract ethical customers. In the food industry, sustainability is increasingly crucial and hotly contested, impacting businesses and stakeholders everywhere. To satisfy current demands without sacrificing those of the future, sustainability techniques have been created and

incorporated into the policies and activities of the food sector (McDonagh et al., 2024). Global leaders, legislators, corporate executives, environmentalists, academics, and scientists from all over the world have been focusing their efforts on sustainable development since 1987 because of the substantial climatic changes the planet has seen in recent decades. Clean manufacturing, responsible consumption, and sustainable infrastructures are the norm in this development, which not only supports economic sustainability but also environmental, social, and corporate sustainability (Pinedo-López et al., 2024). The Philippines should strive toward a more robust and sustainable food system by enacting laws that assist small-scale farmers, making investments in environmentally friendly agricultural methods, expanding access to resources and technology, and increasing consumer knowledge (Tracextech & Tracextech, 2024). The following priority laws are required to support these actions: (a) extended producer responsibility (EPR), which holds producers accountable for the recycling and disposal of post-consumer products; (b) electronic waste management, which addresses the issue of growing waste from gadgets and digital appliances; (c) food waste management, which expands the number of composting facilities and permits safe food redistribution; and (d) green public procurement, which improves compliance of procuring entities in incorporating green criteria in procurement guidelines, bidding documents, and technical specifications (*Philippine Action Plan for Sustainable Consumption and Production (PAP4SCP) – SDGS – Philippines*, n.d.).

The purpose of this study is to look at how Olongapo City's food establishments practice environmental stewardship. The research advances a better knowledge of grassroots sustainability practices by highlighting certain tactics and obstacles. Other food operators who want to incorporate environmentally friendly practices into their operations might use the findings as a reference.

Methodology

Semi-structured interviews, which are thought to provide participants more freedom to respond to questions on their own terms than standardized interviews, were used in this qualitative study (May, 1997). The experience, expertise, and dedication of the interviewer affect the caliber of the data produced (Kumar, 2005). A total of forty-eight (48) participants for this study were chosen using purposive sampling technique. The participants are owners and managers in different food establishment. Twenty-six (26) were using conventional food service system, eleven (11) is assembly-serve, ten (10) commissary and nine (9) ready-prepared food service system. The data collection happened in June 2025. The interview was recorded using Google Forms. All the forty-eight (48) participants were given a letter of request to conduct an interview. Every participant was given a hard copy of the letter of request. The interview was conducted during their lean time at the vicinity of their establishment. An organized workflow of questionnaire was set and a timetable to manage the interview properly and accurately. Every participant was given an identical series of questions on their own perspective about their sustainable practices they were using in the food service. The data was coded, examined, evaluated, and verified after transcription. By listening to and reading the transcribed interviews again, the researcher may develop a greater grasp of the topic through the transcribing process. Once all of the data had been thoroughly transcribed, coding got underway. Content is categorized and organized using keyword codes, which are regarded as a crucial component of qualitative research (Sarantakos, 1998). The data was analyzed, classified, and arranged into themes and additional sub-themes after the coding process. A unique code was assigned to each of the developing patients. The next step was to interpret the data, which included pointing out any patterns that appeared repeatedly as well as any parallels and contrasts. The next step was data verification, which involved reviewing the codes and transcripts once more to ensure that the comprehension

was good. The researcher can confirm or alter earlier notions using this strategy (Sarantakos, 1998). Throughout the investigation, the research complied with ethical guidelines. Before the interviews, participants were briefed on the goal of the study and their informed consent was acquired. Data was securely stored and pseudonyms were assigned to ensure anonymity and secrecy. There were no repercussions for participants who left the study at any time, and they were guaranteed that their answers would only be utilized for academic research. The study was carried out in compliance with the institutional norms for qualitative research ethics.

Results and Discussions

LOCAL SOURCING

Food operators frequently sought out products from local farmers and marketplaces. By doing this, they guarantee fresher products, save transportation expenses, and assist local companies. According to establishments, collaborations with regional vendors enhance product traceability and foster confidence. Future sustainability objectives include sustainable manufacturing and procurement methods as well as additional emission reductions (McDonagh et al., 2024). First and foremost, local sourcing typically results in lower logistics costs and associated expenses, which over time also improves environmental impact and lessens the "fair treatment" (or lack thereof) of suppliers or labor issues that are frequently present in cross-border logistics (Mukhopadhyay,, 2021). Choosing to source locally is more than simply a cost or convenience decision. It is an investment in community support, operational flexibility, and supply chain resilience that is sustainable. You may obtain faster lead times, increased visibility, and more responsive services in the event of supply chain interruptions by having suppliers close to where your firm operates (*Local Sourcing: Why Businesses Are Making the Switch*, n.d.-b).

"Customers appreciate that we serve food that's always fresh and that we don't waste anything. They also like that we support local sources."
Participant 24.

"A few of our sustainability practices include local sourcing, every ingredient we use are sourced every day from the local market and waste management through proper segregation of biodegradable and non-biodegradable"
Participant 33.

"We prioritize local sourcing, reduce waste, install energy-efficient appliances, use eco-

friendly packaging, and offer plant-forward menu options to support the regional economy, reduce food miles, and support the environment." Participant 23.

"They likely source local ingredients from nearby markets or suppliers in Zambales or Central Luzon, helping reduce transportation emissions and supporting local farmers or producers. Dine-in services usually use reusable plates, utensils, and glasses, which cut down on disposable packaging waste. Their menu focuses on items like tacos, pizzas, and wraps—quick to prepare and portion-controlled. These types of dishes tend to have lower prep waste compared to complex multi-course meals." Participant, 43.

"The management's goals were waste reduction and local farmer support. Additionally, people began to inquire about it, so we adjusted." Participant 46.

"We're proud of switching to compostable packaging and building relationships with local farmers for fresh, seasonal ingredients." Participant 3.

Nearby Markets

Ingredients keep their taste, color, and texture when they are gathered locally and utilized right away. When diners notice, they return for more (Why Customers Are Choosing Local: A Fresh Take for Restaurant Owners, 2025). Purchasing products from local farmers directly supports the local economy. A consistent income is advantageous to small-scale farmers, and the money they make is frequently reinvested in nearby companies and services (CRJ Produce Inc., 2025). According to research, locally grown vegetables may reach your plate 24 hours after harvest, as opposed to the weeks it takes for imported commodities to arrive. In addition to maintaining nutritional content, this quick transfer from soil to plate also improves flavor, which is a crucial distinction in the culinary industry. According to surveys, 73% of customers think local cuisine taste different. For restaurants that employ local foods, this results in increased customer satisfaction and repeat business (Dragonsourcing & Dragonsourcing, 2024)

Local Farmers

Direct partnerships with regional producers. Participating in local food systems promotes a feeling of belonging and community, which in turn motivates a group effort to adopt more sustainable practices and better eating patterns (Foraged, 2024). Purchasing regional cuisine builds strong connections between chefs, producers, and consumers, turning dining into a social experience. Activities like farmers' markets and farm-to-table events foster community, transparency, and trust in the food system (Dragonsourcing & Dragonsourcing, 2024). Buying local is a sustainable choice that supports the community, reduces carbon footprints, and provides fresher, tastier food while connecting consumers directly with farmers (Staff, 2025). Purchasing from nearby farms keeps money within the community, supports local jobs, and promotes sustainable practices, creating a cycle of economic and social growth (Brown, 2025).

Community Support

Supporting local businesses and economy. Local sourcing helps in preserving the community's unique character. Artisanal products and local specialties become a source of pride and a draw for tourism (Embracing Local Sourcing for Greater Impact - FasterCapital, n.d.). Local food systems support jobs from farming to sales and enable innovation through new products and sustainable agricultural technologies tailored to regional needs (Foraged, 2024). One of the strongest reasons to buy locally grown fruit is its economic impact. Spending at nearby farms supports community development, boosts local businesses, creates jobs, and can lead to improvements in schools, infrastructure, and overall economic stability (Brown, 2025).

WASTE REDUCTION

To reduce waste, participants highlighted techniques including precise portion control, inventive component reuse, and keeping an eye on expiry dates. By separating recyclables from biodegradables, waste segregation promotes simpler recycling and better disposal techniques. Reducing food waste at its source, protecting natural resources, and fostering ecological resilience all depend on sustainable agricultural and production methods. To promote sustainable practices and create a more robust and sustainable food system, cooperation between farmers, producers, legislators, and consumers is crucial (S et al., 2024). Reducing food

loss and waste is vital to feeding the growing global population, especially since nutrient-rich foods like fruits and vegetables are highly perishable—about 40% are lost or wasted yearly. With one-third of all food going uneaten, minimizing waste can help combat malnutrition and ensure more people have access to a balanced diet (Goodwin, n.d.). Food waste reduction is a shared duty that calls for effort from both restaurants and homes. Both the economy and the environment may be significantly impacted by putting the tactics discussed in this essay into practice. A more sustainable future may be achieved by preventing food waste via meal planning, making inventive use of leftovers, and putting sustainable packaging techniques into practice (Jenks, 2024).

"Not a formal project yet, but we're proud that we consistently minimize food waste and support local sourcing. It's part of our everyday routine." Participant 24.

"We cook just enough food to avoid spoilage. And we use local vegetables and meat from nearby markets." Participant 32.

"We are focusing more on waste reduction, saving energy and water to control the cost and to reduce the use of electricity. We also use eco-friendly product to reduce the use of plastic and to have a small contribution on climate change." Participant 3.

"Our approach to sustainability focuses on efficiency, waste reduction, and responsible sourcing. Since most of our food items are pre-prepared and simply assembled or reheated in-store, this helps minimize food waste and energy use. We are gradually shifting to eco-friendly packaging like paper bags and recyclable containers to reduce plastic waste. We also partner with local suppliers whenever possible to lower our carbon footprint from transportation. Our goal is to provide convenience while being mindful of our impact on the environment." Participant 5.

"Waste separation is already being implemented at our store along with the 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) and responsible sourcing." Participant 6.

"One possible solution is reducing food waste through precise portion control and ready-to-eat meals with proper shelf life. Since our food is pre-portioned and only reheated in the store,

fewer ingredients go to waste and inventory is more controlled. We also use energy-efficient equipment like microwave ovens and chillers to save electricity." Participant 10.

"There are many things to adjust, you'll depend it on your customers. We removed some menu items that are not popular and do not sell well in order to reduce food waste; we also try to save electricity and water by turning off electronics not in use that unnecessarily consumes electricity." Participants 11, 12 and 13.

"We avoid wasting food by tracking expiration dates properly and we also reduce plastic use whenever we can." Participants 8, 9, 10 & 11.

Food Waste

Portion control and ingredient reuse. Ask for smaller quantities if you believe you won't be able to finish everything being provided at a restaurant, in the cafeteria at work or school, or at an event where food is being served, even if it's simply supper with friends (How to Reduce Your Food Waste, n.d.). The process of measuring and regulating serving sizes for every dish or beverage to preserve customer satisfaction, limit food expenses, and guarantee uniformity is known as portion control (The Success Manual Editors, 2025). Smart portion management is one of the best strategies to reduce waste in dining establishments. Restaurants may decrease food waste, improve inventory control, and increase profitability by optimizing portion sizes (Modi, 2025).

Waste Segregation.

Separating recyclable and biodegradable materials. The practice of dividing garbage into several groups is known as waste segregation. We learn how to separate our waste in school and operating a food company follows the same principles (Kitchen Waste Segregation 101, n.d.). Smaller plastic containers can be used by food store tenants and stallholders with little room to separate their food waste (Standards, 2022). The process of sorting garbage according to its characteristics is known as waste segregation. Proper waste segregation

begins with identification and classification (Velhal & Velhal, 2025).

Expiration Tracking

Monitoring product dates to prevent spoilage. Organize your inventory using the First In, First Out (FIFO) method, which prioritizes using older things before newer ones. By adding dates to product labels, you can make sure that nothing is wasted or left out for too long (Qckbot, 2025). Tracking expiration dates helps businesses avoid waste, save money, and protect consumers by ensuring only fresh, high-quality products are used (Jaydalal, 2023). Food should be carefully stored and divided into smaller amounts when purchased in bulk. Label each piece with the date of purchase and freeze whatever you won't use right away (Artisan, 2024).

ECO PACKAGING

Paper-based containers, reusable diningware, and recyclable paper straws are just a few of the reusable and biodegradable options that businesses are switching to. This change dramatically reduces the use of plastic, reflects the values of the consumer, and establishes the company as ecologically conscious. To minimize environmental effects throughout its life cycle and reduce packaging waste at its source, prevention and innovation are crucial. Adopting policies to enhance packaging design and reduce environmental effect from a life-cycle viewpoint is becoming increasingly important. (McDonagh et al., 2024). Eco-friendly packaging contributes to waste reduction and environmental preservation. The food business has increasingly used sustainable packaging to draw in eco-aware consumers and promote environmental improvement (Vankat & Vankat, 2025).

"Customers are super appreciative. They notice when we're using eco-friendly cups or when we talk about our local sourcing." Participant 10.

"Since we're a convenience store, we also aim to adopt sustainable practices like using paper bags to reduce plastic waste as much as possible." Participant 7.

"At this branch, sustainability is guided by corporate standards and focuses on waste reduction, energy efficiency, and ethical sourcing. The store promotes reusable cups,

participates in the FoodShare donation program, and uses energy- and water-efficient practices. While packaging waste and limited recycling infrastructure are challenges, the team is committed to improving and finding local solutions where possible." Participant 36

"Reusable cups: Customers get a discount for bringing their own cup, and we also sell reusable tumblers to promote less single-use waste." Participant 27.

"We used eco-friendly packaging instead of using plastics. We received good feedback when it comes to the security of the food packaging." Participant 41.

"At our store we have "Bring Your Own Container" (BYOC) program for takeout orders. We started encouraging customers to bring their own reusable containers to reduce plastic and packaging waste. As a small local café, we saw how much single-use packaging was going to waste every day, so we wanted to take action in a simple, realistic way." Participant 43.

Biodegradable Materials.

Paper containers and compostable packaging. Prevention and innovation are key drivers for reducing packaging waste at the source and minimizing environmental impacts throughout its life cycle. (McDonagh et al., 2024). Packaging waste might be greatly decreased by using new environmentally friendly packaging options, such as edible packaging manufactured from algae or seaweed. These options include benefits like longer shelf life and fewer material use in addition to their reduced environmental impact (Green Paper Products, 2023). Using natural materials that decompose over time, biodegradable packaging helps lessen the amount of garbage that ends up in landfills and the ocean. Using natural materials that decompose over time, biodegradable packaging helps lessen the amount of garbage that ends up in landfills and the ocean.

Reusable Items.

Durable containers and utensils for dine-in. Although reusable coffee cups are already widely used, foldable models go one step further (Anderson, 2025). Choosing reusable items, such as cloth shopping bags and stainless-steel water bottles, greatly lowers waste and

encourages environmental sustainability (GreenSmartEco, 2025). Reusables are becoming more and more popular because to developments like collapsible water bottles, leak-proof food containers, and reusable cups for festivals, big events, and athletic activities (Teasdale, 2025).

Plastic Alternatives.

Paper straws and recyclable materials. Compostable, plant-based bioplastics that may potentially be utilized as edible packaging materials are now the main emphasis. Because of their renewable and biodegradable qualities, these new trends are transforming the business through the use of materials including seaweed, bamboo, cornstarch, and sugarcane (Exploring Alternatives to Plastic Packaging for Food: A Sustainable Revolution | CAS, n.d.). The rise of eco-conscious consumers is positively influencing the food service industry. A KerryDigest study found that 58% of North American consumers prioritize sustainability when dining out. Though costlier, eco-friendly materials like bamboo, cornstarch, and recycled paper offer compostable or recyclable alternatives to plastic, supporting greener practices (Garson, 2023).

Conclusion

According to the report, Olongapo City's food service operations are progressively including environmental stewardship as a fundamental component. In addition to lessening their environmental impact, businesses are strengthening their relationships with the community by giving priority to sustainable practices including eco-packaging, waste reduction, and local sourcing. While waste reduction initiatives increase productivity and cost savings, local procurement improves food freshness and boosts regional economies. These companies are now more in line with customer demands for sustainability thanks to the switch to eco-friendly packaging. However, staff training, continuous execution, and access to trustworthy local suppliers are necessary for these strategies to be successful. Furthermore, a wider societal change toward environmental responsibility is reflected in food operators' propensity to innovate and adjust to sustainability trends. This study demonstrates that, with the right information, resources, and a solid sense of community, even small-scale food enterprises may significantly contribute to environmental conservation.

Recommendations

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), commercial players, and local government units (LGUs) should work together to create support mechanisms for food enterprises in order to build on the momentum of sustainable practices in food operations. This involves implementing regulatory incentives like tax breaks or certification programs for green enterprises, connecting with nearby farmers and eco-friendly packaging suppliers, and providing training sessions on sustainable techniques. Institutions of higher learning can also contribute by include sustainability sections in their culinary and hospitality programs. Consumer support for environmentally friendly companies may also be increased by regular community involvement and public awareness efforts. By cultivating a collective dedication to ecological responsibility, Olongapo City can establish itself as a regional leader in sustainable food production.

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