

THE INTEGRATION OF LOCAL FOOD AND TOURISM: A STRATEGIC APPROACH FOR ECONOMIC WELFARE AND SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract

Indonesia's long-term development strategies emphasize the crucial role of agriculture in ensuring food security and promoting economic growth. This study examines how a rural area in South Sulawesi can enhance its economy and foster sustainable food production by leveraging its abundant agricultural resources, including strawberries and various vegetables. By integrating local food systems with tourism, the region can reduce food waste and create value-added products, such as strawberry jam, fruit peel flour, and canned vegetables, thereby supporting economic resilience and sustainability. Although local rural businesses often face challenges such as limited access to finance and technology, they can benefit from sustainable, green economy-focused practices. This research highlights the importance of incorporating agricultural by-products and eco-friendly products into agritourism to promote local prosperity while preserving the environment. Using a qualitative approach, the study explores how combining food systems and tourism can generate new income, promote a circular economy, and encourage the use of locally sourced, sustainable products. The findings suggest that this rural area could serve as a model for sustainable tourism, where local food production boosts both economic vitality and environmental stewardship.

Keywords: *local food, tourism, sustainability, sustainable agriculture, value-added products.*

INTRODUCTION

The agricultural sector is vital for ensuring food security and achieving national self-sufficiency, playing a significant role in the national economy. This dedication is outlined in Indonesia's long-term development plans, including Law Number 17 of 2007, which pertains to the National Long-Term Development Plan (RPJPN) for 2005-2025, and Presidential Regulation Number 18 of 2020 concerning the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) for 2020-2024. These regulations underscore the importance of agriculture in driving quality economic growth in Indonesia, particularly through sustainable food production. Agriculture is expected to play a crucial role in meeting the nation's food needs and bolstering local economies, particularly in rural areas (Kementerian Pertanian Republik Indonesia, 2021).

A highland area located in the Tinggimoncong District, South Sulawesi, exemplifies Indonesia's agricultural potential through its diverse range of crops that strengthen the local economy. Statistics from the Tinggimoncong District indicate a notable number of individual farm entrepreneurs, whose farming activities focus on various food crops, highlighting their vital role in supporting local economic resilience and food supply security (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Gowa, 2023). The agricultural sector in this region plays a crucial part in the national effort to enhance food security. Local farmers and rural entrepreneurs, however, face persistent challenges in fulfilling this mission. Many entrepreneurs in rural areas establish ventures rooted in agricultural practices, which are essential for sustaining local food systems and the rural economy (Shao et al., 2024). Nonetheless, these rural enterprises often struggle with

limited access to capital, technology, and infrastructure, all of which can constrain their growth and innovation. Insufficient access to financing remains a key barrier, hindering farmers' ability to invest in environmentally sustainable technologies aligned with green economy principles. Moreover, rural entrepreneurs frequently lack the financial capacity to adopt green technologies that enable sustainable farming practices. The absence of adequate training and education on sustainable agricultural methods further restricts their ability to implement environmentally responsible practices (Polas et al., 2023). Addressing these barriers is imperative for advancing agriculture in this part of South Sulawesi and for achieving greater food security while promoting sustainability in the region. This research seeks to identify, explore, and delineate the potential of agricultural and plantation products in this highland area.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainable Agriculture and Local Food Systems

The concept of sustainable agriculture emphasizes the balance between food production and environmental stewardship, ensuring long-term food security while protecting natural resources. Recent studies have highlighted that rural communities play a pivotal role in achieving this balance, but often face barriers such as limited access to capital and insufficient training in sustainable practices (Polas et al., 2023; Shao et al., 2024). The case of a rural highland area in South Sulawesi illustrates how local farming communities can evolve by adopting sustainable practices to create value-added products from agricultural by-products. This approach aligns with the principles of a circular economy by utilizing local resources more efficiently and minimizing waste (Fanzo et al., 2022). However, practical frameworks that guide small-scale rural farmers in consistently scaling up these practices to achieve broader economic objectives remain scarce.

Food Waste Valorisation and Product Development

The transformation of agricultural waste into high-value food products is increasingly recognized as an innovative approach to addressing food loss while generating economic benefits. Research indicates that by-products, such as fruit peels or overripe produce, can be processed into flour, jams, or natural additives, thereby extending shelf life and adding market value (Benvenutti et al., 2025; Villamil-Galindo et al., 2022). Studies further suggest that consumer interest in such upcycled foods is growing, especially when linked to health and sustainability claims (Thorsen et al., 2024). However, despite advances in technology and consumer awareness, a gap remains in systematically integrating these practices into local supply chains, particularly in rural tourism destinations with abundant raw materials but limited processing infrastructure.

Consumer Behaviour Toward Sustainable Food Choices

The shift in consumer behavior toward environmentally friendly, health-conscious products is well documented. As Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al. (2021) and Mahmoud et al. (2022) argue, modern consumers increasingly value food items that combine nutritional benefits with minimal ecological impact. This has led to a rising demand for locally sourced, naturally processed foods, such as jams and preserved vegetables derived from surplus produce. Nonetheless, research suggests that many rural entrepreneurs still struggle to position their sustainable products competitively in the market due to lack of branding strategies and limited market access (Popescu et al., 2024). This indicates a clear need for models that connect rural production with evolving urban consumer demands more effectively.

Linking Agritourism and Local Food Production

The integration of local food systems into tourism offers an innovative approach to enhancing rural economies. Recent work demonstrates that agritourism not only diversifies farmers' income but also raises consumer awareness about sustainability (Baby & Kim, 2024; Pellegrini et al., 2023). Visitors are increasingly drawn to destinations that showcase local food innovations, such as workshops on food waste upcycling or farm-to-table experiences (Thorsen et al., 2024). However, the practical mechanisms for

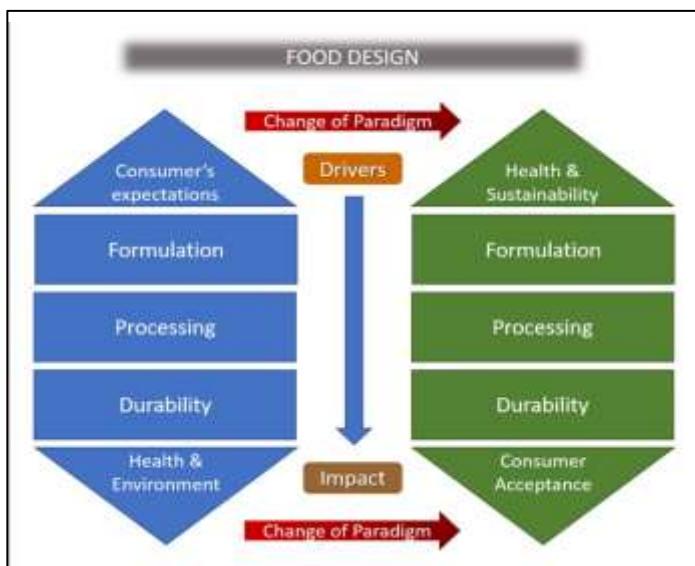
establishing a sustainable link between local food processing (such as fruit peel flour) and tourism experiences remain underexplored, particularly in the context of small villages with limited organizational capacity (Park & Widjanta, 2022; Stalmirkska & Ali, 2023). While prior studies affirm the economic and environmental benefits of integrating sustainable local food systems with tourism, a critical gap remains in practical, scalable models that demonstrate how rural communities can valorize agricultural waste, produce innovative food products, and embed these within tourism experiences to create resilient local economies. This study aims to address this gap by exploring how a rural highland area in South Sulawesi can develop and commercialize value-added products such as fruit peel flour and strawberry jam as part of its sustainable agritourism strategy, thereby contributing new insights into rural economic welfare and sustainability.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative methodology to examine the potential of processed products and tourism sustainability within the framework of the green economy. The qualitative aspect explored field phenomena, particularly those exemplifying significant entrepreneurship and social development concepts in the highland area in South Sulawesi. As noted by Creswell (2014), qualitative methods are particularly advantageous in contexts where concepts are underdeveloped, theories are incomplete, or the phenomena under investigation pose challenges for quantification. The study aimed to understand, analyze, and articulate phenomena to produce theoretical knowledge. Data collection involved observation. The data sources for this study encompassed a diverse range of local communities, including farmers, homemakers, youth, and local government officials, as well as all stakeholders involved in social, political, economic, and environmental activities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A highland area in South Sulawesi is distinguished for its abundant production of fruits and vegetables. Local farmers cultivate a variety of crops, including potatoes, carrots, cabbage, chayote, and strawberries. Over the years, residents' livelihoods have become increasingly diverse, indicating a gradual shift toward a more resilient and varied economic base. This transformation reflects the region's move from traditional farming methods to a model that embraces agritourism and aligns with the principles of a green economy. By capitalizing on substantial strawberry yields, local communities can develop value-added products such as strawberry-based beverages, confections, jams, and other goods, thereby enhancing economic value and creating new employment opportunities. Adopting sustainable practices such as using natural insecticides or producing organic fertilizers from strawberry by-products further supports green innovation goals and reinforces a commitment to environmental stewardship (Ombita et al., 2024). Strawberries are primarily consumed in their fresh form; however, many of the fruit's by-products, including leaves and stems, frequently remain unused. If not managed appropriately, these strawberry by-products may become agricultural waste. Nevertheless, like other agricultural waste, these by-products have the potential to be converted into valuable products. Strawberry leaves and stems, which contain health-beneficial compounds, can be repurposed into various items, including natural additives for food and cosmetics. Furthermore, strawberry waste, such as overripe or unsellable berries, can be transformed into jams, juices, or dried snacks, significantly reducing waste. These value-added strawberry products not only enhance the longevity of the fruit but also present economic opportunities while contributing to waste reduction, thereby maximizing the utility of the entire strawberry harvest (Villamil-Galindo et al., 2022).



Source: (Capozzi, 2022)

The diagram presented illustrates a fundamental shift in food design, highlighting the interconnections among consumer expectations, health, sustainability, formulation, processing, durability, and environmental impact. This model is crucial in creating new products, including strawberry jam, processed goods made from fruit peels turned into flour, canned vegetables, and other items derived from locally cultivated produce in the highland area in South Sulawesi. Consumer expectations have undergone significant evolution in recent years, with an increasing emphasis on goods that prioritize health and environmental sustainability. Contemporary consumers are increasingly aware of the consequences of their purchase decisions and are progressively selecting items that reflect their ideals, particularly in terms of nutrition and environmental stewardship (Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al., 2021; Štofejová et al., 2023). This shift in consumer behavior signifies a broader cultural movement toward better lives, ethical sourcing, and reduced ecological impact. Strawberry jam and canned veggies exemplify items that fulfill these changing expectations. They serve as both delectable and healthy meal choices, playing a significant role in the overarching objective of reducing food waste. Numerous goods use locally obtained, seasonal components, such as strawberries and vegetables, which are often plentiful but may be disregarded or rejected owing to defects or limited shelf life. Transforming these components into value-added goods, such as jam and canned vegetables, substantially reduces waste, aligning with sustainable practices that contemporary consumers increasingly prioritize.

Modern customers value the health, environmental impact, taste, and convenience of food. With more information available, many are opting for farm-to-table options that are locally sourced, minimally processed, and free from harmful additives (Mesías et al., 2021). Strawberry jam and canned vegetables with clear labeling and organic sourcing are gaining popularity due to the demand for natural products. These options are affordable, delicious, and align with the need for healthier, sustainable choices. Strawberry jam made with honey or organic sugar addresses health and environmental concerns. Sustainability in food now includes packaging, farming practices, and production methods. As environmental awareness increases, consumers seek flavorful and sustainable options. Products like jams and preserves from imperfect strawberries help reduce food waste. Consumer perspectives on food production have shifted towards locally sourced and environmentally friendly choices. Strawberry jam offers a taste and consistency that promotes local agriculture and eco-friendly practices. Innovative techniques in strawberry production help mitigate waste. Making jams and preserves from slightly overripe berries extends shelf life and minimizes waste. Consumer-focused strawberry jam and canned vegetables are leading the sustainable food trend, fulfilling nutritional needs while reducing environmental impact and

supporting local economies. Sustainable sourcing, production, and packaging are gaining traction in a transparent, eco-conscious market (Mahmoud et al., 2022; Popescu et al., 2024). The formulation of strawberry jam and preserved vegetables must achieve an appropriate balance of ingredients. These products must comply with health standards, including the use of natural sweeteners, ensuring minimal sugar content, and preserving the nutritional integrity of strawberries and vegetables. The formulation should also prioritize the preservation of the vibrant flavors and nutritional benefits of these locally sourced ingredients while incorporating health and sustainability into the product's design. Furthermore, the development of processed products derived from fruit peels, such as fruit peel flour, necessitates the creation of a balance between employing waste materials (including strawberry, citrus, or other fruit peels) and producing a value-added product that is both nutritious and environmentally sustainable (Benvenutti et al., 2025; Fanzo et al., 2023). In the highland area of South Sulawesi, where fruit production is abundant, utilizing fruit peels to create flour presents significant potential opportunities.

The diagram illustrates that processing is necessary to preserve the health benefits of strawberries and vegetables, while also enhancing their shelf life and ensuring they are safe for consumption. Customers' desire for cleaner and more natural goods may be satisfied by using methods such as drying, cooking, or canning that do not involve chemical preservatives. Furthermore, contributing to the broader objective of achieving sustainability in food production systems is ensuring that strawberries and vegetables maintain their nutritional integrity. The durability of these products, achieved through innovative packaging that extends their shelf life, is crucial to their market appeal. Items like strawberry jam and preserved vegetables must endure prolonged storage without sacrificing taste or quality. Additionally, they address environmental issues by utilizing eco-friendly packaging that minimizes waste, catering to the growing demand for sustainable and environmentally conscious options among consumers.

The success and marketability of fruit peel flour in the highly competitive food sector heavily rely on its durability. To be a viable choice for consumers' pantries, fruit peel flour must retain its nutritional value and freshness over time (Benvenutti et al., 2025). This retention, affected by air, moisture, and light, depends on effective packaging that safeguards the flour's nutritional content, flavor, and texture. A proven method to enhance shelf life is through modern packaging techniques, such as vacuum sealing, which protects against moisture-related spoilage and eliminates air from the package, thereby preventing oxidation and preserving quality. In addition to vacuum-sealing, the importance of environmentally friendly packaging that supports sustainability initiatives is growing (Hussain et al., 2024; Siddiqui et al., 2024). As consumers become increasingly eco-conscious, they seek products that offer nutritional benefits and align with their values on environmental stewardship. Selecting packaging options that utilize recyclable materials and compostable containers can significantly reduce a product's environmental impact. Biodegradable bags resonate with consumers who prioritize waste reduction and support companies committed to environmental responsibility, thereby fulfilling the demand for sustainable products.

Integrating strawberries and locally grown vegetables into jams, canned products, or other value-added items reflects a broader paradigm shift toward food sustainability. By minimizing food waste and maximizing the use of every part of the plant, these products help reduce agricultural waste, a key factor in the product's appeal. As health and sustainability become increasingly important to consumers, these products represent a meaningful shift toward sustainable food production. Finally, the impact of these products is heavily influenced by consumer acceptance. Effective marketing that highlights the health benefits of strawberries (rich in vitamins, antioxidants, and fiber) and vegetables (packed with essential nutrients) and emphasizes their role in reducing food waste can build consumer trust. Producers can attract a broader, environmentally aware customer base by focusing on the innovative and sustainable use of local produce (Reddy et al., 2023). This analysis, supported by the paradigm shift shown in the diagram, underscores how products like strawberry jam, processed products from the use of fruit peels into flour, and preserved vegetables from the highland area of South Sulawesi embody the growing consumer preference for sustainability, health, and innovation in food production while also contributing to the reduction of food waste and fostering environmental stewardship. Incorporating local food systems into tourism through creative goods, such as fruit peel flour, may significantly enhance the economic well-being

and sustainability of the highland area in South Sulawesi (Wani et al., 2023). Given the town's plentiful agricultural resources, particularly fruits, utilizing these resources to create value-added goods enhances the local food chain and provides a strong foundation for environmentally friendly tourism. A highland area of South Sulawesi may offer local businesses and farmers new financial opportunities by converting fruit peel, often discarded as waste, into nutritious products like fruit peel flour. There are numerous advantages to integrating local food systems into travel experiences. Local farmers may reach fresh markets and sell fruit peel flour to nearby food companies or agritourism ventures. Furthermore, the travel industry may offer guests opportunities to personally engage in these sustainable initiatives, such as attending seminars on fruit waste management or visiting factories where fruit peel flour is produced (Baby & Kim, 2024; Pellegrini et al., 2023). Apart from providing direct income for nearby farmers, these projects promote an inclusive economy where innovation and sustainability take center stage.

The integration of fruit peel flour into the tourism industry is closely tied to the Sustainable Development Goals of reducing food waste and promoting environmentally friendly consumption (Khanashyam et al., 2023). Visitors to agritourism sites in the highland area of South Sulawesi are increasingly attracted to locations that stress sustainability. Presenting goods created from locally sourced, recycled food may be an effective marketing technique, enhancing the area's attractiveness to environmentally minded visitors. Furthermore, the community could lower its environmental impact by developing a product that has less impact on the surroundings, such as peel flour produced using sustainable methods. This environmentally friendly strategy also highlights the importance of educating guests on the role of food production in sustainability. By participating in seminars on creating fruit peel flour or other local goods, visitors can contribute to the food manufacturing process (Thorsen et al., 2024). This strategy not only helps the visitors grasp sustainable methods but also incorporates cultural education into the travel experience, linking them with the agricultural customs and inventions. Utilizing agritourism, the highland area of South Sulawesi may highlight its distinctive food systems, offering a chance to encourage locally grown foods, such as fruit peel flour, to a larger audience. Farm tours, hands-on food-making seminars, and gourmet events featuring fruit peel products enhance local food systems and generate additional revenue for the community. Agritourism activities also help. Furthermore, developing a local food culture enhances the overall travel experience by providing guests with a deeper cultural connection, thereby supporting the long-term viability of the tourist sector and local food systems (Linnes et al., 2023; Park & Widyanta, 2022).

Connecting local food systems, such as fruit peel flour, with the travel industry boosts economic growth and enhances environmental sustainability. In a highland region of South Sulawesi, a model of development can be created that preserves local culture, promotes eco-friendly practices, and creates new jobs and innovations by aligning local farming with the increasing demand for sustainable tourism. This approach benefits the local community by fostering a dynamic, sustainable relationship among tourism, food systems, and agriculture. It also enhances tourist experiences and contributes to the global movement toward more sustainable food production and consumption. Thus, promoting fruit peel flour exemplifies the integration of local food systems with tourism to boost economic welfare and sustainability, paving the way for a more resilient, environmentally aware future for both the tourism industry and the community ((Stalmirska & Ali, 2023; Thelen & Kim, 2024)).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this case study highlights how integrating local food systems, such as strawberry jam and fruit peel flour, into agritourism can promote economic development and sustainability. The village's rich agricultural production and innovative approaches, like transforming by-products into value-added goods, meet the rising demand for healthy and eco-friendly foods. Despite challenges such as limited access to capital and technology, entrepreneurs can overcome these by adopting green innovations and leveraging tourism to diversify their income streams. This approach strengthens local farmers and businesses while enhancing the visitor experience through connections to the region's agricultural history and sustainable practices. When effectively implemented, these strategies can enhance food security, promote sustainable

growth, and improve rural livelihoods in Indonesia. Overall, combining agricultural resources with agritourism creates a sustainable model for economic progress and environmental care, fostering a resilient, eco-conscious future for both communities and the tourism industry.

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