The socio-political role of a professional cook: nurturing resilient food systems.

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Resumen

Si cada comida representa una elección sociopolítica, ¿dónde queda el cocinero profesional responsable de preparar cientos de comidas semanales? El impacto de la elección de alimentos va más allá de la salud y el bienestar individuales, afectando los sistemas sociales, económicos y ambientales. Estas opciones van desde apoyar a los agricultores locales hasta abordar problemas globales como el cambio climático, el bienestar animal, las prácticas laborales, el desperdicio de alimentos y la salud pública. Es responsabilidad del chef considerar el impacto de la comida que se sirve, influir y fortalecer el sistema alimentario seleccionando ingredientes de origen local, producidos de manera sostenible y criados éticamente. Este estudio presenta un análisis de base del sistema alimentario actual, mostrando el impacto que las empresas locales y de pequeña escala tienen en la comunidad, desde la fuerza laboral hasta la cadena de producción de alimentos. Reconocer la propia posición como profesional dentro de la comunidad implica comprender que no todas las opciones alimentarias son igualmente accesibles o accesibles para todos y que todos los obstáculos son relevantes. La toma de decisiones informada empodera a los profesionales de los restaurantes para diseñar sistemas alimentarios más resilientes que valoran y priorizan prácticas que mejoran la cultura local, apoyan a la comunidad y promueven actitudes ecológicas.

Resumen

Se cada refeição representa uma escolha sócio-política, onde fica um cozinheiro profissional responsável por preparar centenas de refeições semanalmente? O impacto das escolhas alimentares vai além da saúde e bem-estar individual, afetando os sistemas sociais, econômicos e ambientais. Essas escolhas abrangem o apoio aos agricultores locais e a abordagem de questões globais como mudança climática, bem-estar animal, práticas trabalhistas, desperdício de alimentos e saúde pública. Recai sobre o chef de cozinha a responsabilidade de considerar o impacto da comida servida, influenciar e fortalecer o sistema alimentar, selecionando ingredientes de origem local, produzidos de forma sustentável e criados de forma ética. Este estudo apresenta uma análise de base do sistema alimentar atual, mostrando o impacto que empresas locais e de pequena escala representam na comunidade, da força de trabalho à cadeia de produção de alimentos. Reconhecer a própria posição como profissional dentro da comunidade implica compreender que nem todas as escolhas alimentares são igualmente acessíveis ou acessíveis para todos e que todos os obstáculos são relevantes. A tomada de decisão informada capacita os profissionais de restaurantes a projetar sistemas alimentares mais resilientes que valorizam e priorizam práticas que melhoram a cultura local, apoiam a comunidade e promovem atitudes ecológicas.

Abstract

If every meal represents a socio-political choice, where does one stand as a professional cook responsible for preparing hundreds of meals weekly? The food choices' impact extends beyond individual health and well-being, affecting social, economic, and environmental systems. These choices encompass supporting local farmers and addressing global issues like climate change, animal welfare, labor practices, food waste, and public health. The responsibility lies with the professional cook to consider the impact of the food served and possess the power to influence and strengthen the food system by selecting ingredients that are locally sourced, sustainably produced, and ethically raised. This study presents a background analysis of the current food system, laying out the impact small-scale local businesses represent within the community on the workforce and food production chain. Recognizing one's position as a professional within the community entails understanding that not all food choices are equally accessible or affordable for everyone and that all constraints hold relevance. Informed decision-making empowers restaurant professionals to design more resilient food systems that value and prioritize practices enhancing local culture, supporting the community, and promoting environmentally friendly attitudes.

Introduction

Every food choice, every meal consumed daily, carry socio-political implications that extend beyond personal nourishment or aesthetic decisions. Professional cooks, responsible for preparing hundreds of meals weekly, are uniquely positioned to influence customers' food choices, reflecting how food systems within macro structures, namely socio-economic and environmental, develop. As culinary experts, they have the power to profoundly impact various aspects, ranging from supporting local farmers to addressing critical global issues such as climate change, animal welfare, labor practices, food waste, and public health. Through their informed decision-making, professional cooks play an important role in shaping a more sustainable and equitable food future, allowing nature to thrive. When making food choices, professional cooks have the opportunity to transform the current depleting food system into regenerative models, using circular design, interrupting biodiversity loss, erosive agricultural practices, and unethical raising (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2019, 2020).

Understanding the more comprehensive range of food choices is paramount. Besides gastronomic aspects, customer experience, or even culinary excellence, commercial cooks shall spend time and technique sourcing practices and designing menus. Adopting a holistic perspective, cooks and chefs make the interconnectedness of eating, societal well-being, and environmental sustainability tangible to consumers via their plates (Viljoen, 2012). They hold the means to minimize food loss and waste, effectively transforming these pressing issues into delightful culinary experiences. Each restaurant dish carries a message to the table that can express a broader sense of community and responsibility or, conversely, negligence, flaunting, and waste.

Sourcing local ingredients implies a deeper connection with the territory and requires effort and comprehension from the chef about the surrounding environment, community, and livelihoods. Establishing direct relationships with neighboring farmers enhances ingredient knowledge and deepens the understanding of plant

and animal species and the land's capacity. Such connections foster a bond with food producers, providing insights into their abundance and needs, and ultimately enabling chefs to care for the ingredients they use. The proximity to local producers also strengthens the economy directly and indirectly, celebrating and valuing the produce of the land while promoting cultural preservation and fostering a sense of pride in local gastronomy. Furthermore, sourcing food locally minimizes the environmental impact of long-distance transportation, reducing carbon emissions and enhancing the freshness and flavor of the ingredients. Additionally, favoring sustainable farming practices, such as organic or regenerative agriculture, helps mitigate the environmental impacts of conventional farming, preserves biodiversity, and safeguards ecosystems for the well-being of future generations (Sangiorgi, 2011).

By comprehending the socio-political significance of their food choices and embracing sustainable and community-centered practices, professional cooks can become powerful agents of change, nurturing resilient food systems that cater to individual needs and contribute positively to society, the economy, and the environment. Their culinary creations can shape a world where the joy of eating is harmoniously intertwined with responsible stewardship of the planet (Steel, 2008).

A glance at the current restaurant approach to the food system

The existing food system is a vast and intricate network that encompasses the production, distribution, and consumption of food on a global scale. While it successfully meets the demands of a growing population, it faces significant challenges and shortcomings. Conventional food production and consumption practices dominate this system, relying heavily on large-scale industrial farming, monoculture crops, and extensive use of pesticides and fertilizers. While these practices have increased food production and reduced costs, they have also led to environmental degradation, natural resources extensive use, soil depletion, and biodiversity loss (FAO, 2019a). Similarly, the current system relies heavily on fossil fuels for transportation, processing, and packaging, contributing to a substantial carbon footprint and aggravating climate change.

Professional cooks and food businesses are pivotal in the food ecosystem. As critical decision-makers, they can shape demand, influence sourcing choices, and impact the entire supply chain. By opting for conventionally produced ingredients, restaurants inadvertently support environmentally harmful practices and contribute to the depletion of natural resources. Moreover, the emphasis on convenience and cost-effectiveness has

led to a culture of food waste, where substantial amounts of edible food are discarded daily (Gustavsson et al., 2011). This wasteful approach further strains the already limited resources of the food system.

On the other hand, professional cooks and food businesses have the potential to drive positive change by endorsing sustainable and ethical practices. Sourcing locally from small-scale farmers and producers supports the regional economy, reduces transportation-related emissions, and promotes food diversity. Embracing regenerative agricultural practices and ethical treatment of animals can contribute to environmental conservation and improved animal welfare. Likewise, engaging in community-based initiatives and partnerships strengthens ties with local residents and fosters a sense of food security and pride in regional cuisine.

Small-scale local businesses significantly influence communities and the food production chain. They create a more transparent and accountable supply chain by prioritizing quality over quantity and forging direct relationships with suppliers. Supporting these businesses enables consumers to make informed choices about their food, promoting social, economic, and environmental resilience within local communities.

The current restaurant approach to the food system is at a critical

juncture. Conventional practices have led to environmental degradation, resource depletion, and food waste. Nevertheless, professional cooks and food businesses wield considerable power to nurture more resilient food systems. Making informed decisions, prioritizing sustainability, and supporting small businesses can positively impact the food system's social, economic, and environmental dimensions. A collective effort towards responsible and resilient food system can lead to a more sustainable and equitable future for all (Lancet, 2019; FAO, 2019b).

Socio-Political Impact of Food Choices

Professional cooks' choices regarding the ingredients they use and the sourcing practices they adopt have far-reaching socio-political implications beyond the kitchen's confines. These choices directly influence society, the economy, and the environment. Professional cooks can significantly change the food system by prioritizing locally sourced, sustainably produced, and ethically raised ingredients.

From a societal perspective (Warde, 2016), adopting sustainable and ethical food choices fosters a sense of community and cultural preservation. Supporting local farmers and producers strengthens the regional economy and encourages the preservation of traditional agricultural practices and culinary

heritage. Embracing ethically raised ingredients promotes animal welfare and demonstrates a commitment to responsible stewardship of the environment (Waters, 2017). Additionally, informed decision-making by professional cooks can raise awareness among consumers about the importance of sustainable food choices, leading to a more conscious and empowered dining public.

By sourcing locally, restaurants contribute directly to their communities, supporting small-scale farmers and businesses, which, in turn, bolsters local food systems and reduces dependence on distant supply chains, leading to greater food security and resilience. Promoting sustainable and ethical practices can drive innovation and create demand for environmentally friendly products and services.

The socio-political impact of food choices made by professional cooks is far-reaching, affecting society, the economy, and the environment. By embracing sustainable, ethical, and locally sourced ingredients, they have the power to nurture resilient food systems that prioritize cultural preservation, community support, and environmental well-being. The significance of these choices is underscored by compelling data and statistics, demonstrating that informed decision-making in the kitchen can pave the way toward a more sustainable and equitable food future.

Impact on Community and Consumer

The impact of food choices extends into the community and directly affects consumer well-being. By consciously selecting ingredients that support local farmers and sustainable practices, professional cooks contribute to their communities overall health and resilience. Locally sourced and ethically raised ingredients promote community economic growth and preserve cultural identity and traditional food systems. Sustainable practices can enhance community health by providing access to nutritious fresh produce, addressing food deserts, and supporting local food security initiatives.

Local businesses play a vital role in supporting community resilience. Professional cooks establish direct relationships with local farmers and artisans by sourcing ingredients from nearby producers. These connections foster trust and collaboration, enabling a more transparent and accountable food supply chain. Additionally, investing in local businesses and suppliers helps to circulate wealth within the community, contributing to superior economic stability and social cohesion (Vezzoli & Manzini, 2008). As anchors within their neighborhoods, local restaurants can serve as gathering spaces that foster a sense of belonging and cultural exchange, making

significant contributions to the community's social fabric.

Local business initiatives also collaborate with regional initiatives to reduce food waste and address food insecurity, ensuring surplus food reaches those in need (Jones et al., 2021). Community awareness in the restaurant industry can catalyze positive change, nurturing resilient food systems and prioritizing community health, cultural heritage, and environmental responsibility.

Impact on the Workforce

Within the food industry, practices surrounding food choices and sourcing impact the workforce, often influencing labor conditions and worker well-being. Professional cooks are crucial in advocating for fair labor practices and ethical treatment of workers throughout the food production chain (da Silva et al., 2019). By selecting ingredients that align with sustainability and ethical standards, they can foster a more equitable and supportive work environment for those involved in food production as much as for those inside the kitchen areas. The impact of food choices on the workforce is substantial, especially in industries such as agriculture and food processing. Conventional farming practices may rely on exploitative labor conditions, with workers facing long hours, low wages, and inadequate safety measures. Similarly, laborers

in the food processing sector may be exposed to harsh working conditions, limited benefits, and job insecurity. Such practices can perpetuate social inequality and jeopardize the well-being of vulnerable communities that form the backbone of the food system (Rodrigues & de Melo, 2017).

Food service businesses prioritizing their workforce's well-being unveils the positive influence of responsible and respectful food choices. Ethical restaurants often collaborate directly with farmers and producers, ensuring fair wages and safe working conditions for laborers. Some restaurants even engage in fair trade certifications and adopt transparent supply chain practices to guarantee fair treatment of workers. The impact of food choices on the workforce within the food industry cannot be overlooked. By promoting these values, professional cooks become advocates for a more equitable food industry and contribute to the more significant movement towards socially responsible food practices and a more resilient food system.

Impact on the Food Production Chain

Sustainable restaurants are significant in nurturing resilient food systems by positively impacting the food production chain. These establishments create a win-win situation, enhancing local products, culture, and a sense of belonging

while serving fresher, tastier, and generally lower-cost food. Beyond the immediate benefits for consumers and communities, sustainable restaurant practices address global issues related to food choices, such as climate change, animal welfare, and food waste.

One of the most significant impacts of food choices on the food production chain is their contribution to climate change. Conventional agricultural practices, including large-scale monoculture and intensive animal farming, release substantial greenhouse gas emissions. In contrast, sustainable restaurants prioritize locally sourced ingredients, often requiring shorter transportation distances and reducing carbon emissions. Moreover, embracing regenerative agricultural practices, such as organic farming and agroforestry, helps sequester carbon dioxide in the soil, mitigating the industry's overall impact on climate change (FAO, 2020).

Environmentally, the impact of food choices made by professional cooks is significant. Opting for locally sourced ingredients reduces the carbon footprint associated with long-distance transportation and storage. Sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices promote soil health, biodiversity, and ecosystem resilience, contributing to environmental conservation. Ethically raised ingredients mean supporting farming practices prioritizing

animal welfare, and minimizing environmental degradation (Souza & Oliveira, 2019).

Animal welfare is another critical aspect of choices in the food production chain. Traditional factory farming practices often prioritize high yields and cost-efficiency over animal well-being, leading to overcrowded and inhumane conditions (Pereira & Mendes, 2021). On the other hand, sustainable restaurants prioritize ethically raised and humanely treated animals, practices that allow animals to roam freely and live in more natural environments (da Silva & Costa, 2020). This shift towards ethical sourcing promotes higher animal welfare standards and reduces the suffering associated with conventional farming practices.

Food waste is another significant challenge within the food production chain, contributing to resource depletion and environmental degradation. Restaurants with a more conscious approach actively combat food waste by adopting composting, circular use of ingredients, food donation programs, and careful portion management. These establishments reduce their environmental footprint and contribute to more efficient and responsible resource utilization by optimizing ingredient usage and minimizing waste generation. This business model alleviates adverse environmental impacts by opting for

locally sourced, sustainably produced, and ethically raised ingredients and contributes to a more responsible and ethical food system (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2015).

Designing Resilient Food Systems

When chefs understand the broader impact of their food choices on social, economic, and environmental systems, they can make conscious decisions, prioritizing sustainability and social responsibility, including selecting locally sourced, sustainably produced, and ethically raised ingredients (Manzini, 2010). Additionally, professional cooks can educate themselves and their staff on the implications of different sourcing practices, encouraging a culture of sustainability and responsibility within the restaurant. Informed decision-making empowers cooks to become agents of change in the food industry, driving the shift towards more resilient and equitable food systems. Small-scale local businesses have the potential to invest in sustainable and ethical practices, serving as models for the broader food industry. Such practices promote transparency, accountability, and fair labor practices within the supply chain.

Restaurants can adopt several strategies to enhance local culture, support the community, and promote environmentally friendly attitudes. Seasonal menus featuring local ingredients celebrate the diversity

of the region's culinary heritage while reducing the carbon footprint associated with long-distance transportation. Collaborating with community organizations and farmers can foster partnerships addressing food insecurity and waste. Sustainable practices such as composting and reducing single-use plastic can contribute to environmental conservation efforts.

The significance of community support in building these systems cannot be overstated. Restaurants can actively engage with their patrons, informing them about ingredients' origins and their food choices' positive impact. By involving the community, restaurants build a solid support base for resilient food systems. Community members become more conscious of their food choices and actively support businesses that align with their values. Moreover, community support provides a safety net for small-scale local businesses to face challenges and sustain their commitment to resilient food practices (Manzini & Jégou, 2003).

Measuring Impact and overcoming barriers

To address inequalities and constraints, restaurants can gradually adopt strategies to transition to more sustainable and equitable food systems. Firstly, fostering partnerships with local farmers and suppliers can enhance access to locally

sourced ingredients, contributing to the economic growth of the community and reducing carbon emissions associated with long-distance transportation. Furthermore, implementing transparent pricing practices that reflect the actual cost of sustainable sourcing can create consumer perception and encourage their support for ethically produced food.

Secondly, restaurant professionals can prioritize education and awareness campaigns to inform staff and customers about the importance of sustainable food choices. By highlighting the impact of food decisions on the environment, community, and well-being, restaurants can inspire behavioral change among their patrons and contribute to a more informed and wise consumer base.

Furthermore, embracing innovative technologies and creativity can also aid in overcoming restrictions. Restaurants can explore food preservation techniques, such as fermentation or preserving surplus produce, to minimize food waste and increment ingredient utilization. Shifting the focus from animal-based to plant-based items, allied with seasonal menus, can promote sustainable agriculture and reduce the pressure on scarce resources (Lancet, 2019).

Building resilient food systems requires collaboration and engagement with stakeholders across the food supply chain. Restaurants can actively participate in local food policy initiatives, advocate for fair labor practices, and support community-driven projects that improve food access for all. By integrating these solutions and strategies, restaurant professionals can demonstrate their commitment to addressing disparities and hindrances within the food system and contribute to nurturing resilient, inclusive, and environmentally friendly food practices (UN, 2021).

Various estimation frames have been developed to measure environmental, social, and economic outcomes and may be used to evaluate the impact of sustainable food initiatives. Life Cycle Assessment (LCA), Social Return on Investment (SROI), and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are some examples of evaluation tools (Carlsson-Kanyama & González, 2009). Understanding the business impact can start with relatively simple assessment criteria, ranging from the immediate community (suppliers and consumers) to going through the brigade and general environmental impact.

Effective, sustainable food initiatives are often built on specific design principles that aim to minimize environmental impacts, promote social equity, and enhance economic viability. These principles may include

agroecology, circular economy, regenerative agriculture, and local food systems. Indexing ingredients sources, their relevance in natural resources consumption, and the support it brings to local farmers and businesses are regenerative choices many chefs can pursue. Similarly, evaluating the sustainability practices of suppliers and producers based on criteria such as environmental impact, resource use, and ethical practices shall be targeted.

The community's well-being aligned with the influence of the restaurant food choices on local consumers' diets and overall health can be measured, along with community engagement and partnerships. Appraisal of patrons' feedback regarding their overall experience, food quality, satisfaction with the menu options, and assessment of value perception in the business choices are paramount.

Estimating restaurant staff's satisfaction levels and well-being in the team is indispensable, including work-life balance, benefits, and job satisfaction. Additionally, gauging the restaurant's adherence to fair labor practices, including wages, working hours, and workplace safety, is critical. Another way to measure the global satisfaction of the team is by turnover rate, understanding the restaurant's ability to retain and support its workforce.

The restaurant's general environmental impact of food ingredients used shall be analyzed throughout their entire life cycle, from production to disposal, connected to natural resources and energy consumption, tracking water and energy sources and usage, complemented by logistic choices and their effect on greenhouse gas emissions. Other layers can be scrutinized, like monitoring and measuring food waste generated by the restaurant. That is also important to ensure the business' economic sustainability.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Food Design broad and regenerative approach to the commercial food chain underscores the significance of conscious and thoughtful food choices, placing sustainability and ethics at the forefront of culinary decision-making. By emphasizing the importance of supporting local and artisanal food producers and embracing responsible planning, chefs' decisions enhance the quality and taste of our meals and address pressing global issues, such as climate change and food insecurity. This article has shed light on the immense potential that professional cooks hold in shaping a better food future when they align their values with sustainable practices. However, the actual transformation lies equally in consumer efforts to build resilient food systems that prioritize the well-being of communities, the workforce,

and the environment. By joining hands and working together, a path towards a more sustainable and thriving future can be forged, one plate at a time, making sustainable choices that reverberate positively throughout the food industry, nourishing bodies and the planet for future generations.

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