

Article

# Ready for the «Check-In» of Local Products on Hotel Menus?

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**Abstract:** The link between tourism and the agricultural sector offers, on the one hand, authentic cultural experiences to tourists and, on the other hand, a competitive advantage to tourism businesses seeking to differentiate themselves. This research attempts to empirically investigate the organizational readiness, perceived benefits, and intention of hotels to include local agri-food products in their menus. The data collection was carried out through a questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale and the readiness was evaluated in terms of its three dimensions (organizational culture, organizational climate, and organizational capacity), as well as the perceived benefits in one hundred and twelve hotels of the Regional Unit of Kavala and Thassos in Greece. Following a cluster analysis, three categories of hotels emerged, namely, “Committed”, “Hesitant”, and “Indifferent”. This article uses elements of organizational theory in the hotel industry for the inclusion of local agri-food products in hotel menus, complementing the existing limited literature. The research also has important managerial implications and can be used for policymaking by stakeholders.

**Keywords:** local agri-food products; hotel readiness; hotel menu; perceived benefits; gastronomic tourism

## 1. Introduction

The agri-food sector is increasingly attracting the interest of researchers for its links with tourism, as it has been found to have positive benefits for local communities and lead to economic growth in tourist destinations [1–6].

It is established that tourists’ nutrition is not only about satisfying their dietary needs, but also about their contact with local agri-food products and the local recipes associated with them [5,7–9]. Local agri-food products are part of the culture of the place that produces them [7,10–13] and, thus, through the consumption of such products, tourists get to appreciate the culture.

The link between tourism and the agricultural sector helps the former to offer gastronomic experiences. The consumption of local agri-food products can offer tourists ‘authentic’ cultural experiences [12,14] and is often the main incentive for traveling [9,15]. It is also linked to healthy eating [16–18], the history and culture of the local community and place [7,10–12], and is a comparative advantage of the tourist destination [6,14], because it helps to create its unique identity, giving it and local tourism businesses a competitive advantage [1,7,14]. As for the agricultural sector, it offers new outlets for the distribution of its products to local tourist markets [3,6], and does not require the involvement of large supply chains, because transactions are carried out locally, reducing the gap between the selling and buying prices from producers to consumers [1]. It also helps to increase their exports to international markets [3], because tourists become familiar with them through their daily consumption in tourist destinations. Thus, when they return to their countries, they seek them out to buy [4,19]. At the same time, it has the potential to reduce imports to meet the nutritional needs of tourism enterprises, leading to a reduction in tourist foreign exchange outflows from local economies [6]. In this way, it increases the income of the agricultural sector, creates new jobs, and contributes to the economic development of rural areas [3,6,9]. Food and beverage (F&B) departments are becoming increasingly important



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for hotels, not only because of the economic importance of their share revenue but also because they are an important factor in shaping their image and prestige [2,14] through customer satisfaction [4,14,15]. Moreover, it has been found that these departments contribute to the creation of loyal customers (repeaters) [14,15]. Loyalty can be built through the gastronomic experience hotels offer that reflects the culture of the destination tourists are visiting [4,5,9,14,15]. Local agri-food products are an important component of the dishes that can be included in a menu. They indicate the recipe to be used, the way they will be cooked, and the way they will be presented on the menu [12]. Thus, they open the channel for tourists to communicate with the place and its inhabitants, history, and culture. In other words, they allow visitors to interact with the experience of “tasting the place” [7,12]. It is unthinkable, as Ball [10] points out, to consider a food-related experience “authentic” when a local dish does not contain the local agri-food products traditionally associated with its recipe. After all, every recipe of a traditional local dish has been created according to the raw materials provided by the place, which are necessary in order for it to be considered an ‘authentic’ local dish [10,11]. The value of menus that incorporate local products into dishes, therefore, has the effect of making them more attractive to visitors, as they constitute the ‘authentic’ tourist experience they are looking for. Thus, hotels do not simply sell a menu that will meet the guests’ feeding needs, but a menu that symbolizes the history of the place they visit and its tradition [7,12].

Research so far is mainly limited to investigating the organizational readiness of hotels to adopt innovative practices, such as readiness for Information and Communication Technology introduction or crisis management, etc. [20–26]. Furthermore, Bondzi-Simpson and Ayeh’s [2] research explores the readiness of hotels in terms of deciding on menu content but focuses only on the introduction of local traditional recipes in hotel menus. However, to assess organizational readiness for traditional recipes, local agri-food products must have been previously included in them to define them as local, since they play a key role in their composition [10]. Despite the established importance of the integration of local agri-food products in hotel menus [14], the research on hotels’ organizational readiness for such practices remains very limited. However, in order for a tourist destination to be able to successfully promote the local agri-food products of its region for the development of gastronomic tourism, it must also include hotels in this effort [2], since it is mainly in these hotels that tourists can come into direct and daily contact with agri-foods by consuming them [4,14,19]. Hotels, on the other hand, must be prepared to include local agri-food products in their menus if they are to be able to offer them. The readiness of hotels is an important component for their management because it influences their intentions when making decisions about the content of menus [2], together with the benefits they perceive to be derived [2,14]. Therefore, for the development of gastronomic tourism in a destination, it is important to assess the organizational readiness of hotels in the area to integrate local agri-food products and to record the benefits perceived by their management.

This research aims to address this gap by investigating the integration of local agri-food products in hotels. Understanding hotels’ organizational readiness to include local agri-food products allows for the formulation of targeted policies and the implementation of more effective promotional activities that focus on gastronomic tourism. This research aims to: (a) assess the level of readiness of hotels regarding the integration of local agri-food products in their menus, (b) group the sampled hotels based on their degree of readiness, (c) record the perceived benefits of the integration of local agri-food products in hotel menus, and (d) investigate the intentions to include local agri-food products in the menu.

This research contributes to the extant literature by incorporating the concept of organizational readiness in decision-making in the context of hotel menus. Understanding attitudes, such as readiness, could result in more accurate predictions of actual hotel behavior, which in turn can be used as an indicator of an organization’s future success. Furthermore, this research studies the relationship between organizational readiness and managers’ menu intentions and perceived benefits, putting forward the idea of the integration of local agri-food products as an important tool for gastronomic tourism.

From a practical point of view, the research helps hotel F&B managers understand that in order to decide whether they will include local agri-food products in menus, they must first consider the importance of the hotel's organizational readiness and motivate the hotels' managers to integrate the organizational readiness into their strategy. In addition, through the categorization of hotels according to their readiness, agencies promoting gastronomic tourism or branding a destination can focus on advertising those hotels that have the capacity to provide local agri-food products in their menus, while helping those that are left behind understand their importance.

The article is structured as follows: First, a review of the pertinent literature is presented, followed by a discussion of the methodology used. Then, the data analysis and results are presented, and the paper concludes with a discussion of the main findings and a brief overview of theoretical and managerial implications, followed by an analysis of the main research limitations and avenues for future research.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Organizational Readiness

Organizational readiness in business management has attracted the interest of researchers because it is crucial for the successful introduction and implementation of innovative ideas [2,20,26,27]. According to Bondzi-Simpson and Ayeh [2], it is a multidimensional system that includes three dimensions: the organizational climate, organizational culture, and organizational capacity of the firm (Figure 1). Organizational climate refers to the set of perceptions, feelings, and attitudes that staff have about the fundamental elements of the firm in which they work. It is related to the cohesion of the firm's members, i.e., their sense of belonging, the communication, trust, and cooperation they develop with each other, and the quality of leadership [23,28–30]. Organizational culture includes the values, norms, and behaviors shared by and subconsciously influencing the staff of a company. It is the most important dimension of organizational readiness [2], which influences how the firm's internal environment deals with any obstacles in its external environment [26,28]. Finally, "organizational capacity" is related, as Lehman et al. [23] pointed out, to the firm's resources, which may include facilities, equipment, staff training, staff skills, knowledge adequacy, etc.



**Figure 1.** Dimensions of organizational readiness.

## 2.2. *The Organizational Readiness of Hotels for the Integration of Local Agri-Food Products*

The introduction of local agri-food products by a hotel could potentially improve its value and enhance its competitiveness by expanding its market share [14]. By incorporating local agri-food products in their menus, hotels seek to respond to the increasing demand of guests for authentic tourist experiences linked to the place, thus exploiting the comparative advantage of the gastronomic identity of the tourist destination [12,14].

Kalaitzidakis [14] suggested that the use of local agri-food products in menus as a strategic choice for hotels should be adopted and implemented by senior management, as well as the heads of the catering departments, and supported by all hotel staff. It should also be linked to the company's vision, which stems from pride in the local traditions and culture represented by these products. However, it is impossible to be achieved, as the same author points out, when the attitude of the hotel staff is opposed to or indifferent to the value that these products add to the menus and the business. Consequently, the decision to introduce local products into menus and its successful implementation depend on whether the hotel management can understand and influence the attitude and beliefs of the staff who will be called upon to implement the project.

When deciding to include local agri-food products in the menus, food service managers are required to assess the readiness of the hotel [2], considering factors such as whether staff perceive the added value that local products bring to menus and whether they feel pride in the local identity these products represent, compared to imported ones [14,31]. In addition, managers and supervisors of food service departments can positively influence the staff's mindset regarding this affiliation [2,14]. This, of course, depends on the quality of communication that exists between the firm members and the leadership's abilities to convey the vision of introducing innovation [23,28–30]. Furthermore, they assess the hotel's capacity to support such a venture in terms of necessary facilities, equipment, storage, and cooling space, as well as required human resource competencies and skills [2,14]. To facilitate the integration of local agri-food products, hotels need to develop appropriate networks of partners and suppliers that can support this practice, as the hotel's needs for consistent quality, price, availability, packaging, sourcing, and deliveries of local agri-food products are crucial [1,14].

Bondzi-Simpson and Ayeh [2] identified three groups of hotels: the "Embedded" hotels, which feature local traditional recipes in their menus and perceive many benefits from this integration, the "Interested" hotels, which exhibit a neutral organizational culture, and the "Laggards" hotels, which are in a prospective stage. They found that the "Embedded" hotels are mainly in the low category (1\* and 2\* stars), with the food service manager holding a position high up in the hierarchy of the organization. On the contrary, higher-category hotels (3\* stars), with the food service manager being mainly the chef, tended to be classified as "Laggards". They suggested that this is probably because low-category hotels in Ghana cater mainly to domestic customers who prefer traditional cuisine compared to foreign customers of 3\* star hotels, but also because there is probably a lack of required skills and competencies of chefs to cook local traditional recipes and that people in high-ranking hierarchical positions are more likely to make such a decision.

Similarly, Anderson [1] argued that problems that arise from the integration of such products in hotel menus, such as inconsistent quality, availability, and prices, are mostly related to the hotel size and financial resources adequacy. Contrary to this finding, Torres [32] suggests that mainly hotels of large size and with sufficient financial resources can benefit from small value chains and avoid increased price gaps from the intermediation of intermediaries and transport companies, as they can have their transport means for direct supply of products from local producers.

## 2.3. *Perceived Benefits and Intention to Introduce Local Agro-Food Products in Hotel Menus*

For a firm's leadership to make the most advantageous decision about an idea, they must perceive that benefits accrue [2,26], so managers can consider the cost of introducing the proposed idea about the benefits it may bring to the firm [23].

A significant number of studies [1,4,5,15,32] have highlighted the benefits of integration, such as how tourism increased earnings from meals, allowing hotels to increase their revenue. Several studies illustrate that this practice can reduce menu production costs [1,31] and enable hotels to become more competitive by reducing their prices [2] and attracting price-sensitive consumers [1,3]. Economic benefits further arise from the small supply chains formed by this linkage [1], which blunt the price gap in local products from the limited involvement of intermediaries [1,3,5,32]. This benefits the hotel sector because it achieves more cost-effective ways of sourcing agri-food products, to meet the nutritional needs of its guests [1,5,6,32], particularly where the linkage is achieved through direct contracting between the producer and the hotel [3,5,32].

Furthermore, the use of local agri-food products by hotels helps to increase guests' length of stay in hotels [9,33], increase the occupancy rate, and enhance repeat visits [7,14,31,34]. An additional benefit from this practice includes the potential increase in the hotels' market share, as they can target new tourist groups, including those whose main trip motivation is food [4,15,33], as well as those whose purpose of their trip may not be directly related to food, but are interested in experiencing local agri-food as the "living" intangible cultural heritage of the destination [4,15,35]. As Ji et al. [15] stated, even in the case of tourists who are afraid to try agri-food products and dishes that are foreign to their personality and habits, when presented creatively, they may be persuaded to try them and be satisfied.

The use of local agri-food products by hotels is also an important factor in shaping their image and prestige [2,14]. It can enhance their social image, in that it allows them to develop their corporate responsibility, contributing substantially to the development of the local rural economy. Such an image of a hotel is increasingly appreciated by customers, but also by hotel employees, who feel a sense of pride in their local identity and satisfaction with the business they work for [14], which ultimately leads to an increase in their efficiency [30]. In conclusion, as Thomas-Francois [31] argued, the decision to include local agri-food products in hotel menus is determined by perceived benefits or barriers, but also by the hotel's strategy.

### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1. Research Context and Procedure

The link between the primary sector and tourism was investigated through quantitative research and the use of a questionnaire. The research was conducted in Greece, specifically in the Regional Unit (RU) of Kavala-Thassos (Nuts 3 region), which belongs to the Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace (REMTH) (Nuts 2 region) and includes the island of Thassos [36]. This particular choice was made because the region concentrates the majority of hotels in REMTH [36,37] and has significant agro-food production [38–40]. At the same time, it geographically combines the city of Kavala, which mainly attracts visitors for city breaks and business trips [41], and the island of Thassos, where the mass tourism development model has prevailed [40]. In addition, local stakeholders are pursuing the development of tourism in this region by exploiting the comparative advantage of its agri-food wealth [39].

Out of the 261 registered hotels of the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels [42] for the Prefecture of Kavala and the island of Thassos, 122 hotels were selected to be included in the sample, based on the existence of a restaurant and the provision of main meals by the hotel. Apartments and rooms for rent were not included in the survey, because the offer of meals is usually not included in their basic facilities, and for this reason, they do not serve the research objectives.

The participants of the survey were chosen to be hotel managers. Hotel managers belong to senior leadership and, thus, they are in a position to decide on the strategies implemented by the hotels, shape the organizational climate and culture, and have a holistic knowledge of the organizational capacity, participating directly or indirectly in all decisions made by all supervisors in the hotel [20–25].

A pre-test was conducted with managers of 3 hotels, who were later excluded from the main study. The purpose of the pre-test was only to identify any comprehension problems concerning the questions. For the main study, an email invitation was sent by one of the authors to all hotel managers of the remaining 122 hotels. In total, 112 valid responses were received within a two-month period from April to June. The validity of the data was checked for missing or completion errors, as suggested in the literature [43,44].

### 3.2. Measures

The questionnaire consisted of 4 sections, namely, hotel profile, hotel readiness, perceived benefits, and hotel intention. For the hotel profile, one open-ended question, seven dichotomous questions with a “Yes” or “No” option, and seven questions with predefined choices were formulated. Hotel readiness, as demonstrated in the literature, is a three-dimensional construct, consisting of organizational culture, organizational climate, and organizational capacity, and perceived benefits were also investigated using a 5-point Likert scale (1—strongly disagree to 5—strongly agree), the composition of which was the product of a literature review [2,23]. Finally, the intention of hotels was investigated through a question with predefined choices.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using SPSS (version 27). Hierarchical cluster analysis of hotels’ organizational readiness to include local agri-food products in their menus was then performed using Ward’s method [45], which created clusters with as much homogeneity between them as possible [46,47]. From the resulting hierarchical dendrogram, a non-hierarchical cluster analysis was then performed using the k-means algorithm to confirm the result of the Ward method and further interpret the data [2,45–47]. The results of the non-hierarchical cluster analysis were tested with ANOVA and the F-Test to enhance the internal validity of the results to determine how significant the contribution of each indicator was in shaping the clusters ( $p < 0.05$ ) [46]. To enhance external validity, a one-way ANOVA was conducted with the Welch Test, chosen due to the dissimilarity of the variables in the groups, and the Post Hoc Test [2,45]. Organizational readiness of the hotels in the clusters was used as the independent variable, and two external variables (perceived benefits and intention) were used as the dependent variables. To create the profile of the clusters and to conduct a second test on the intention to include local agri-food products in the hotel menus, a correlation was performed with an  $-X^2$  independence test (Chi-Square Test).

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Hotel Profile

Most of the hotels were established around 16–31 years ago (60%) and are 2\* star rated (35%), hosting foreign customers (85%). Almost all of them offer breakfast (99%), more than half offer lunch (52%), and even more offer dinner (66%). The decision to include products in the menus is mostly made by the hotel manager or owner (82%) and the hotels’ chefs are mostly local (45%) (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Hotels’ profile (N = 112).

		N	%
Area	Thassos	87	78
	Kavala	25	22
Age of the hotel	32+ years old	17	15
	16–31 years old	67	60
	≤5 years old	28	25

Table 1. Cont.

		N	%
Hotel category (stars)	1*	9	8
	2*	39	35
	3*	36	32
	4*	19	17
	5*	9	8
Hotel capacity (rooms)	1–20 rooms (very small)	28	25
	21–50 (small)	58	52
	51–100 (medium size)	17	15
	≥101 (large)	9	8
Hotel opening period	Seasonal	89	79.5
	All year round	23	20.5
Nationality of customers	Foreigners	95	85
	Greeks	17	15
Meals	Breakfast	111	99
	Lunch	58	52
	Dinner	74	66
Meal Service Mode	All-inclusive	8	7
	Buffet	88	79
	a la carte	69	62
Menu decision-makers' position in hotel	Owner/Director	92	82
	Chief	14	12
	F&B Manager	4	4
	Procurement Officer	2	2
The locality of the chef of the hotel	Local	50	45
	Non-permanent resident	32	29
	Permanent resident	15	13
	Unknown locality	15	13

#### 4.2. Organizational Readiness Segment Identification with Multivariate Statistical Analysis

Testing for internal consistency/reliability yielded Cronbach's Alpha values for the scales of organizational readiness (0.958) and perceived benefits (0.922), allowing further statistical analysis of the data.

Ward's hierarchical analysis indicated three clusters of hotels in terms of organizational readiness (Appendix A). This was confirmed by the non-hierarchical analysis with the k-means algorithm after seven iterations (Appendix B), with Cluster I including 12 hotel cases, Cluster II 47 hotels, and Cluster III 53 hotels (Appendix C). The ANOVA test showed that internal validity existed in the cluster analysis, with all indicators of organizational readiness being statistically significant ( $p = 0.001$ ) in differentiating the clusters (Table 2). The k-means of cluster weights (Table 2) showed that the group of hotels in Cluster III have formed a strong organizational culture ( $M = 4.79$ ), appropriate organizational climate ( $M = 4.77$ ), and have the required organizational capacity ( $M = 4.53$ ). For this reason, they can be classified as "Committed" to including local agri-food products in their menus. Hotels in Cluster II show moderate organizational culture ( $M = 3.89$ ), organizational climate ( $M = 3.79$ ), and organizational capacity ( $M = 3.74$ ) and can be classified as "Hesitant". Finally, hotels in Cluster I have a poor organizational climate ( $M = 2.75$ ), weak organizational culture ( $M = 2.17$ ), and a lack of organizational capacity ( $M = 2.58$ ) and can, therefore, be classified as "Indifferent".

**Table 2.** Final clusters center (k-means cluster analysis).

Hotel Readiness Indicators *	Cluster I Indifferent (N = 12)		Cluster II Hesitant (N = 47)		Cluster III Committed (N = 53)		ANOVA	
	Mean	SD **	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	F	Sig
<b>Organizational Culture</b>								
Satisfactorily serves the hotel's target clientele	2.17	0.72	3.87	0.54	4.79	0.41	143.33	0.001
Fits the hotel's image	2.17	0.72	3.89	0.38	4.77	0.42	180.24	0.001
It coincides with the hotel's vision and mission	2.08	0.67	3.83	0.56	4.75	0.48	130.16	0.001
It fits with the marketing strategy of the hotel	2.00	0.60	3.85	0.55	4.70	0.58	115.67	0.001
<b>Organizational Climate</b>								
Food service managers can persuade staff to use and promote agri-food products	2.75	0.87	3.79	0.83	4.77	0.42	55.50	0.001
The staff are willing to learn how to use agri-food products in the menu recipes	2.75	0.75	3.74	0.44	4.62	0.53	77.30	0.001
The staff are willing to show agri-food products on the menu list	2.67	0.78	3.64	0.53	4.60	0.53	74.58	0.001
<b>Organizational Capacity</b>								
The appropriate infrastructure and equipment	2.58	1.00	3.74	0.61	4.49	0.67	42.47	0.001
The necessary networks of partners and suppliers	2.42	0.67	3.60	0.77	4.43	0.57	50.61	0.001
The necessary human resources	2.00	0.74	3.34	0.70	4.53	0.61	87.56	0.001
The required financial resources	1.58	0.67	3.23	0.76	4.19	0.74	66.49	0.001

Notes: \* Measured on a 5-point scale: (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. \*\* Standard deviation.

### Cluster Profiling with External Variables

Chi-Square Tests showed statistically significant differences and correlations ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the organizational readiness of the hotels among the clusters for the following dimensions: hotel category, provision of meals (breakfast, lunch, and dinner), a la carte meals offered in the restaurant, and chef's locality, which suggests that the clusters discriminate based on these characteristics. This finding provides evidence for the external validity of the cluster analysis (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Statistically significant dimensions of hotels' profiles in grouping their readiness (Chi-Square Test).

Variable	Cluster Membership			Chi-Square Test
	I (%)	II (%)	III (%)	
<b>Hotel category (stars)</b>				
1*	33.3	2	8	$p = 0.001$
2*	58.3	45	21	
3*	8.3	41	30	
4*	-	6	30	
5*	-	6	11	
<b>Breakfast</b>	92	100	100	$p = 0.015$
<b>Lunch</b>	-	53	66	$p = 0.001$
<b>Dinner</b>	17	62	77	$p = 0.001$
<b>Offer a la carte meals in the restaurant</b>	25	36	68	$p = 0.020$
<b>The locality of the chef</b>				
Local	58.3	32	53	$p = 0.039$
Permanent resident	8.3	17	11	
Non-permanent resident	-	36	28	
Unknown locality	33.3	15	8	

More specifically, as can be observed in Table 3, the "Indifferent" hotels (Cluster I) are 1\* (33.3%) and 2\* (58.3%) star hotels, they mainly provide only breakfast (92%) to their customers, and although their chefs are mainly local (58.3%), a large part of their management (33.3%) are not aware of the chef's origin. The "Hesitant" hotels (Cluster II) are 2\* (45%) and 3\* star hotels (41%), a few choose to offer their meals a la carte in the restaurant, and their chefs are mostly a person who stays in the area only during the hotel's operating period (36%). Finally, the "Committed" hotels (cluster III) are mostly 3\* (30%) and 4\* (30%) star hotels, as well as the 5\* star category (11%), all of them provide breakfast (100%), and most of them lunch (66%) and dinner (77%), to their guests and offer their

meals a la carte in the restaurant (68%), and their chefs are mostly local (53%), with only a few members of the management team unaware of the chefs' locality (8%).

The external validity test of the cluster analysis with one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference between the clusters of hotels in terms of the correlation between organizational readiness for the inclusion of local agri-food products in their menus and perceived benefits, both by the Welch Test ( $p = 0.001$ ) and the Post Hoc Test (Games–Howell) ( $p < 0.05$ ). The management of “Committed” hotels (Cluster III) perceive many benefits, those of “Hesitant” (Cluster II) perceive fewer, while “Indifferent” hotel managers (Cluster I) find it difficult to identify any benefits from the integration of local products. Surprisingly, all three hotel clusters do not perceive the benefits of the integration of local products in their menus, such as “reduces menu prices” ( $M = 1.33$  to  $M = 2.68$ ) and “reduces menu production costs” ( $M = 1.50$  to  $M = 2.66$ ) (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Hotels' perceived benefits among clusters.

Perceived Benefits Indicators *	Cluster	N	Mean	SD **	Welch's F		Post Hoc Test (Games–Howell)	
					F	Sig.	Clusters	Sig.
Enhances the nutritional value of menus	I	12	3.33	0.65	36.69	0.001	I and II	0.015
	II	47	4.00	0.66			I and III	0.001
	III	53	4.72	0.46			II and III	0.001
Contributes to the positive image and prestige of the hotel	I	12	3.00	1.13	29.74	0.001	I and II	0.040
	II	47	3.94	0.57			I and III	0.001
	III	53	4.66	0.52			II and III	0.001
Shapes culinary experiences for customers	I	12	3.00	0.85	27.55	0.001	I and II	0.003
	II	47	4.09	0.65			I and III	0.001
	III	53	4.64	0.48			II and III	0.001
Gives staff a sense of pride in their “local” identity	I	12	2.75	1.06	24.99	0.001	I and II	0.013
	II	47	3.83	0.84			I and III	0.001
	III	53	4.60	0.66			II and III	0.001
Improves the demand (attractiveness) for menus	I	12	2.83	0.94	32.18	0.001	I and II	0.016
	II	47	3.77	0.79			I and III	0.001
	III	53	4.60	0.57			II and III	0.001
Offers the hotel a competitive advantage	I	12	2.92	0.67	30.82	0.001	I and II	0.004
	II	47	3.77	0.84			I and III	0.001
	III	53	4.51	0.70			II and III	0.001
Helps to increase the repeatability of hotel guests (repeaters)	I	12	2.42	0.80	18.96	0.001	I and II	0.002
	II	47	3.49	0.78			I and III	0.001
	III	53	4.06	0.99			II and III	0.005
Facilitates access to raw materials for menus (short transport distance)	I	12	1.92	1.08	21.76	0.001	I and II	0.002
	II	47	3.32	0.94			I and III	0.001
	III	53	3.96	0.78			II and III	0.001
Reduces the prices of menus	I	12	1.33	0.65	17.93	0.001	I and II	0.001
	II	47	2.40	0.85			I and III	0.001
	III	53	2.68	0.89			II and III	0.261
Reduces the cost of menu production	I	12	1.50	0.91	7.93	0.002	I and II	0.010
	II	47	2.49	0.93			I and III	0.003
	III	53	2.66	0.90			II and III	0.621

Notes: \* Measured on a 5-point scale: (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. \*\* Standard deviation.

One-way ANOVA analysis also revealed a statistically significant difference between clusters in terms of the association between organizational readiness and the intention of food service managers to integrate local agri-food products in their menus, both by Welch's Test ( $p = 0.001$ ) and the Post Hoc Test (Games–Howell) ( $p = 0.001$ ). The intention coding was formulated with values of 1: “I have no intention”, 2: “Sometime in the future (after 5 years)”, 3: “In the next few years (2–5 years)”, and 4: “Immediately (this year)” (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Hotels' intention to include local agri-food products in their menus, among clusters (Welch's F and the Post Hoc Test).

Variable * Intention	Cluster	N	Mean	SD **	Welch's F		Post Hoc Test (Games–Howell)	
					F	Sig.	Clusters	Sig.
The hotel's intention to include (more) local products on the menus	I	12	1.75	0.75	46.55	0.001	I and II	0.001
	II	47	3.06	0.75			I and III	
	III	53	3.75	0.43			II and III	

Notes: \* Measured with: (1) "I have no intention", (2) "Sometime in the future (after 5 years)", (3) "In the coming years (2–5 years)", and (4) "Immediately (this year)". \*\* Standard deviation.

The external validity of the cluster analysis was confirmed by the Chi-Square Test ( $p = 0.001$ ). It emerged that the intention of the "Committed" hotels (Cluster III) is the immediate integration of local agri-food products in their menus (this year) (75%), that of the "Hesitant" hotels (Cluster II) is within the next 2 to 5 years (49%), and that of the "Indifferent" hotels (Cluster I) is in the distant future (after 5 years) (41.7%) or not at all (41.7%) (Table 6).

**Table 6.** Hotels' intention to include local agri-food products in their menus, among clusters (Chi-Square Test).

Hotel Intention	Cluster Membership			Chi-Square Test
	I (%)	II (%)	III (%)	
Immediately (this year)		32	75	$p = 0.001$
In the coming years (2–5 years)	16.7	49	25	
Sometime in the future (after 5 years)	41.7	13		
I have no intention	41.7	6		

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

Hotels can be competitive when they respond to the increased demand for tourism experiences linked to the "taste of place" [12,14,35], and the strategy they implement is important for such a purpose [2,31]. Moreover, tourists' stays can be strongly linked to food, since in hotels, tourists are usually in daily contact with local agri-food products [1,2,4,6,14,31] and when they return to their countries, they are likely to seek them out [4,19]. Therefore, enhancing the dynamic involvement of hotels in promoting gastronomy tourism can be beneficial for the destination [34].

From this study, three groups of hotels emerged, in terms of readiness for the integration of local agri-food products. More specifically, the "Committed" hotels with high organizational readiness are 4\* and 5\* star hotels, that serve breakfast, lunch, and dinner in their a la carte restaurant and are interested in the localness of the chef. Those with neutral organizational readiness, the "Hesitant" hotels, are mainly mid-range 2\* and 3\* star hotels, all provide breakfast, and a significant number provide lunch and evening meals, with a few offering a la carte in their restaurants, and the chefs they choose often only stay in the area during hotel operation. Finally, the hotels that show the lowest organizational readiness, the "Indifferent" hotels, are in the 1\* and 2\* star categories, none of them serve lunch, while very few serve dinner meals in their restaurant, and they do not care to know the locality of the chef they employ.

From the above, it is clear that this study discovered three groups of hotels according to the degree of readiness to include local products in their menus. The resulting groups differed according to the category of the hotel (star category), the number and type of meals they provide, and the locality of the chef. It is understandable that organizational readiness differs according to the category of the hotel, as, for example, is evident from the research of Bonzi-Simpson and Ayeh [2], who found a correlation between the two. In this study, it was found that higher-category hotels (four and five stars) show significantly higher levels of organizational readiness than those in the lower category (one and two

stars). According to the research by Sengal [48], guests staying in hotels of three stars and below show a greater interest in local food compared to their counterparts in higher-rated hotels, and it was expected that lower-rated hotels would be better organized to meet their guests' demand. This may be due to the fact that lower-tier hotels tend to have insufficient resources (financial, human, logistical, etc.) at their disposal compared to those in the higher tiers [2,32]. Additionally, the majority of hotels in the study area—including the lower-category hotels—have foreign guests and, consequently, offer foreign cuisine without being able to understand the need and the importance of incorporating local products in their menus.

It is also noteworthy that the local products of the study area are internationally recognized as part of the Mediterranean diet [10,14,49], which is known for promoting healthy eating [16–18,50], adherence to health and safety rules [51], and the expression of local production, cooking, and eating [52]. This reputation has resulted in foreign customers being particularly interested in these products, seeking them out in high-quality hotels [14].

As far as the managers of the hotels surveyed are concerned, they seem to play an important role in shaping gastronomic experiences. Because, although the survey does not show a statistically significant difference between the clusters in terms of the position of the person who makes decisions on the content of hotel menus, it seems that this person has a high position in the hierarchy and is mainly the manager or owner. Despite the lack of gastronomic knowledge that these individuals may have, the position they hold, however, enables them to influence and make decisions that enhance the gastronomic experiences [2]. For example, the results highlighted a significant correlation between the organizational readiness of hotels and the locality of the chef in high-end hotels. This is a strategic choice that may stem from the knowledge that a local chef prefers local products in menus, appreciating their value to guests [5,8,32]. Chefs are indeed upgrading 'local' in the cuisine and menus they serve, which is often identified by the local and 'fresh products and they are trying to respond to the growing interest of hotel guests in associations with place and 'terroir' in the food they consume. This is an indicator of their regional knowledge of food and cultural capital and is a more deliberate, niche strategy [53]. In contrast, in hotels with low organizational readiness, preferring a local chef does not seem to be a strategic choice, as management seems to be unaware of the chef's origin. This is consistent with the research of Kalaitzidakis [14], which showed that the integration of local products should be supported by all hotel staff, as it is the result of a team effort.

As Kalaitzidakis [14] argued, the policy of including local agri-food products in hotel menus is a strategic decision for high-class hotels, and this could suggest a competitive advantage for these hotels. On the contrary, the policy of low-class hotels, as the research shows, is not favorable in this direction, possibly due to business resources' unavailability, so it is necessary to rethink the strategy they follow in order to become more competitive. As most of them do not offer lunch and only a few provide dinner, locality can be integrated through agri-food products in breakfast, which has a significant nutritional relevance but, most importantly, for the guest, it may have an additional importance because it is the first meal of the day and is often included in the daily rate. In addition, a gastronomic experience can be offered if the local agri-food products at breakfast are described on labels based on their origin and with various cultural elements (for example, reference to the name of the local producer or local farm producing the product, the nutritional characteristics, the date of production to indicate freshness, the variety or quality level of the product, and the place of origin).

It is also important to emphasize the relation between high organizational readiness and the increased offer of a la carte meals in "Committed" hotel restaurants, and this may be due to the existence of a menu catalog, which enables the creative description of local products, enhancing their promotion to customers [14]. Local menu item descriptions in a la carte meals contribute both to guest interest and restaurant sales. Accurate descriptions of menu items are a critically important aspect of meeting guests' expectations and promoting guests' satisfaction [54]. The menu items' description creates an image in the guests' minds

about the hotel as well as raises the perceptions of value [55]. It is also recommended by researchers that hotels operating with an a la carte menu system should include local agri-food products in their menu and display it both visually and in writing [56]. On the contrary, a hotel that does not display a detailed description of the menu items on its restaurant menu represents a lost opportunity in a highly competitive marketplace [57].

In terms of benefits, the results of the survey showed that the “Committed” hotels perceived many benefits from the integration of local agri-food products in menus, the “Hesitant” hotels perceived fewer, while the “Indifferent” hotels perceived no benefits. A noteworthy finding is that no hotel group perceived that economic benefits arise from integration and, more specifically, as many studies claim, neither a reduction in menu production costs [1,2,31] nor a reduction in menu prices [2]. This may be because the hotels have failed to develop strong links with the agri-food sector, thus preventing them from forming synergies and networks to develop small supply chains [1]. The latter blunts the price gap in local agri-food products due to the limited involvement of intermediaries, as other studies have observed [1,3,5,32]. To address this problem, local actors have to play a coordinating role to mitigate the differences between stakeholders and strengthen the supply network [6]. Furthermore, certifying the quality of local agri-food products and joining certification networks can substantially help in this direction as well [35]. Such actions, as mentioned by Karamustafa and Ülker [8], increase the benefits resulting from membership and positively influence the intentions of food service managers in hotels.

Finally, the intention of including local products in their menus for the “Committed” hotels was immediately (within the year), for the “Hesitant” hotels was in the next few years (2–5 years), and for the “Indifferent” hotels was sometime in the future (after 5 years) or not at all.

In conclusion, several researchers have identified the menu as the most important marketing and sales tool for a hotel restaurant [58–60], in that it is an important factor for customer loyalty. Thus, the integration of local products in menu development and marketing is a critical aspect of product development by hotels and is essential to maintain their competitiveness [59,61]. Therefore, hotels should be ready to provide authentic food experiences, which is an upward trend [62] and is rewarded by the market, turning hotel dining venues into great ambassadors of local food traditions [63]. This will satisfy both their guests, who are increasingly seeking local food experiences [64], as well as hoteliers, by increasing their customer base and revenue and lengthening the season [65].

This research provides evidence to the scientific community in order to fill the gap in the existing literature with an in-depth understanding of the link between local agri-food products and hotels in a destination, through the contribution of organizational readiness. Furthermore, the results of the research highlight the importance of the relationship between organizational readiness, benefits, and intentions in all hotel categories.

From a practical point of view, the findings of the research contribute to the hotel industry by highlighting the critical role of the organizational readiness of hotels to include local agri-food products in their menus to be competitive and sustainable. This results in a rethinking on the part of hotels of the strategy they follow in terms of the staff they employ, the formulation of the marketing program they will follow regarding the image, vision, and mission of the hotel, the selection of the target market, and more generally, the customer attraction policy. For the latter, the promotion of hotel menus should be global, but the food experience ought to remain local because gastronomy tourism is about tasting the quality and authenticity of the local agri-food products.

At the same time, the results can also be used by the relevant policymakers for the development of gastronomic tourism promotion strategies and through the hotel sector, considering the organizational readiness, the perceived benefits, and the intentions of the hotels for the formulation and development of incentives, customized educational programs, and synergies.

### *Limitations and Future Research*

No study comes without limitations. One of the main limitations of this study is the focus on a specific region in Greece. Future research could investigate this issue including all of the Greek regions so that scholars and practitioners obtain an in-depth understanding of the link between the primary sector and tourism, assisting in the formulation of a national policy for a more effective link between the primary and the tertiary sectors.

This study examined readiness, perceived benefits, and intentions from the hotels' perspective. Future research could investigate the same issues but from the producer side, to facilitate the link between the primary sector and tourism. In addition, research into the opportunities and obstacles to the creation of synergies between the two sectors would provide a multi-faceted approach that would lead to useful conclusions for all parties.

Finally, the personal characteristics of the managers were not examined, and it would be interesting to investigate the personal characteristics of the decision-makers for the inclusion of agri-food products in the menus and to make possible correlations with the perceived benefits obtained.

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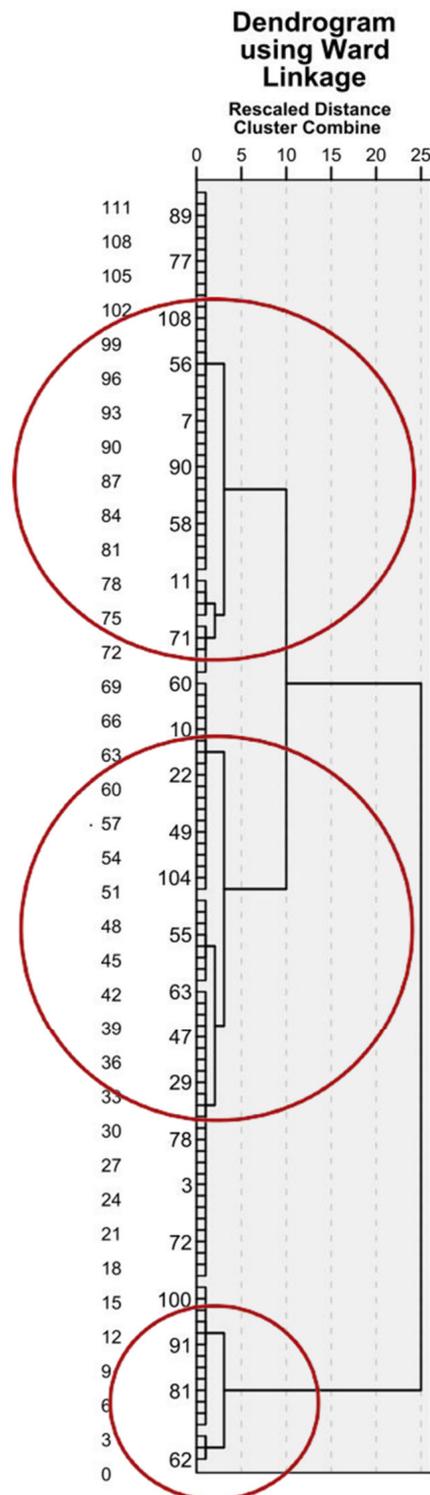
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Appendix A



**Figure A1.** Ward analysis dendrogram in grouping hotels’ readiness to integrate local agri-food products in their menus.

## Appendix B

**Table A1.** Iteration history.

Iteration	Iteration History <sup>a</sup>		
	Change in Cluster Centers		
	1	2	3
1	2.894	3.161	1.915
2	1.398	0.464	0.073
3	0.546	0.366	0.089
4	0.189	0.182	0.079
5	0.000	0.316	0.280
6	0.000	0.077	0.071
7	0.000	0.000	0.000

<sup>a</sup> Convergence achieved due to no or small change in cluster centers. The maximum absolute coordinate change for any center is ,000. The current iteration is 3. The minimum distance between initial centers is 13,266.

## Appendix C

**Table A2.** Number of cases in each cluster (k-means cluster analysis).

1	12.000
2	47.000
3	53.000
Valid	112.000
Missing	0.000

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