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*Article*

# Challenges and Opportunities in Partnering with Local Suppliers for Italian Restaurant Chains

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**Abstract:** This study explores the challenges and opportunities associated with partnering with local suppliers in the context of Italian restaurant chains. The research focuses on how these restaurant operators navigate the complexities of sourcing local ingredients while balancing quality, cost, and customer expectations. Data was collected through interviews with 27 restaurant managers and chefs who provided insights into the operational and financial implications of local sourcing. The findings reveal that while locally sourced ingredients are valued for their superior quality, freshness, and alignment with customer preferences for authenticity, they often come at a higher price compared to global suppliers. Variability in supply due to seasonality and weather conditions, coupled with logistical challenges such as delivery delays and inconsistent availability, also posed significant barriers to local sourcing. Despite these challenges, the study highlights the importance of building long-term relationships with local suppliers based on trust, flexibility, and shared values. This collaboration allows for more effective problem-solving and adaptation in the face of supply chain disruptions. Furthermore, the research points to the role of technology in streamlining the local sourcing process, improving inventory management, and reducing waste. The study also suggests that a hybrid sourcing model, combining both local and global ingredients, can be an effective strategy to balance the benefits of local sourcing with the need for cost efficiency. Overall, the findings suggest that while local sourcing presents challenges, it offers significant opportunities for Italian restaurant chains to enhance authenticity, sustainability, and customer loyalty.

**Keywords:** local sourcing; Italian restaurant chains; supplier relationships; sustainability; cost management; quality ingredients; supply chain challenges

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## 1. Introduction

The evolution of global business practices has seen a rising emphasis on local sourcing in the foodservice industry. Italian restaurant chains, with their rich culinary traditions and high demand for fresh, quality ingredients, are increasingly turning to local suppliers to meet these needs. Partnering with local suppliers offers several strategic advantages but also presents a host of challenges that restaurants must navigate to maximize the benefits. This research explores the opportunities and challenges that Italian restaurant chains face in their partnerships with local suppliers, drawing upon recent studies and developments in the field. Over the years, the restaurant industry has become more dynamic, with growing competition, changing customer expectations, and evolving supply chain dynamics. As consumers are becoming more health-conscious and environmentally aware, sourcing local ingredients has become a key selling point for many Italian restaurants, aligning with their values of authenticity and sustainability (Doan et al., 2024). The trend toward local sourcing has been driven by several factors, including a growing demand for fresh, organic, and locally grown ingredients that are perceived as healthier and more sustainable (Calabrese et al., 2024). Italian cuisine, which places a strong emphasis on fresh, high-quality ingredients, is particularly well-positioned to take advantage of these trends. Moreover, sourcing locally can foster closer relationships between restaurant chains and local communities, leading to stronger customer loyalty and a competitive advantage in the marketplace (Pietrobelli et al., 2024).

Local sourcing also aligns with the increasing consumer demand for transparency in food sourcing, as diners increasingly seek to understand where their food comes from and how it is produced (Afghah et al., 2023). However, despite the clear benefits, the process of partnering with local suppliers is not without its difficulties. One of the main challenges faced by Italian restaurant chains is the variability in the quality and availability of locally sourced ingredients. Unlike larger, more standardized suppliers, local farms and producers may not be able to consistently meet the volume or quality standards required by restaurant chains (Birkel & Wehrle, 2024). This can lead to issues such as supply shortages or the need for last-minute adjustments, which can disrupt restaurant operations and affect the customer experience. Furthermore, the cost of local ingredients can often be higher than those sourced from larger suppliers, who benefit from economies of scale (Qu et al., 2024). This can create financial pressures for restaurant chains, especially those operating on tight margins, as they struggle to balance cost with quality. In addition to these operational challenges, Italian restaurant chains must also contend with logistical obstacles when working with local suppliers. Unlike global supply chains, which often benefit from established networks and infrastructure, local supply chains can be more fragmented and less predictable (Hao & Demir, 2024). The lack of standardized delivery schedules, fluctuations in transportation costs, and the possibility of supply chain disruptions due to seasonal changes or adverse weather conditions can pose significant risks to restaurants that rely heavily on local suppliers (Yan et al., 2024). These logistical complexities are compounded by the need for restaurants to maintain strict inventory management and ensure that local ingredients are utilized before they spoil, which requires careful planning and coordination (Yang et al., 2024). In addition to these logistical concerns, Italian restaurant chains also face significant challenges in terms of supplier relationships. Building and maintaining strong partnerships with local suppliers requires a high level of trust and communication, which can be difficult to establish, particularly if suppliers are small or relatively new to the market (Bor et al., 2024). Furthermore, local suppliers may not always have the same level of professionalism or operational capacity as larger, more established suppliers, which can lead to inefficiencies and misunderstandings in the supply chain (Xu et al., 2024). Italian restaurant chains must therefore invest considerable time and effort into cultivating strong, collaborative relationships with their local suppliers to ensure that both parties are aligned in terms of expectations and objectives. Despite these challenges, the opportunities presented by local sourcing are significant. One of the most notable advantages is the ability to offer customers a more authentic dining experience, as local ingredients can contribute to the distinctive flavors and quality that are characteristic of Italian cuisine (Khan et al., 2025). Italian restaurant chains that prioritize local sourcing can differentiate themselves in a competitive market by emphasizing the use of fresh, high-quality ingredients that are sourced from local farms and producers (Emon et al., 2024). This not only appeals to customers who value quality and sustainability but also enhances the restaurant's brand image, positioning it as a responsible and community-oriented business. Local sourcing can also offer Italian restaurant chains the opportunity to support local economies and create jobs within the community (Khan et al., 2024). By partnering with local suppliers, restaurant chains can help stimulate economic growth in their region, contributing to the overall well-being of the local community. This can be particularly important for restaurant chains that operate in areas where the agricultural industry is a key economic driver. Additionally, local sourcing can provide Italian restaurant chains with a more stable and predictable supply chain, as they are less likely to be affected by global disruptions such as trade wars, pandemics, or natural disasters (Drake et al., 2024). By reducing their reliance on global suppliers, restaurant chains can mitigate the risks associated with geopolitical instability and other external factors. The trend toward local sourcing has also been facilitated by the increasing availability of technology that can help streamline supply chain management. Advancements in digital tools, such as cloud-based inventory management systems and supplier relationship management software, have made it easier for Italian restaurant chains to monitor and manage their local supplier networks (Cui et al., 2024). These tools can help restaurant chains track inventory levels, manage supplier performance, and reduce waste, all of which contribute to greater operational efficiency and cost

savings. Furthermore, the use of technology can improve communication and coordination between restaurant chains and their suppliers, reducing the likelihood of errors and misunderstandings. Despite the many opportunities, the successful implementation of local sourcing strategies requires careful planning and execution. Italian restaurant chains must assess their specific needs and goals and determine whether partnering with local suppliers aligns with their overall business strategy (Doan et al., 2024). For example, a restaurant chain that prides itself on offering a wide variety of dishes may find it more challenging to source the necessary ingredients locally, as availability may vary by season and region. On the other hand, a chain that focuses on a smaller, more specialized menu may be able to build stronger, more sustainable relationships with local suppliers and reduce its reliance on global sources. The transition to local sourcing also requires a shift in mindset for both restaurant operators and customers. Many Italian restaurant chains have historically relied on global supply chains to ensure a consistent and predictable supply of ingredients (Calabrese et al., 2024). Moving away from these established relationships in favor of local suppliers can be a difficult and sometimes risky decision. However, as customer preferences shift toward sustainability and authenticity, it may be essential for Italian restaurant chains to adapt and embrace local sourcing as a way to stay relevant in an increasingly competitive market. In conclusion, partnering with local suppliers offers both opportunities and challenges for Italian restaurant chains. While local sourcing can help restaurants offer fresher, more authentic ingredients, reduce their environmental impact, and support local economies, it also requires careful consideration of logistical complexities, supplier relationships, and cost factors. To successfully navigate these challenges, Italian restaurant chains must develop strong partnerships with local suppliers, invest in technology to streamline supply chain management, and adapt their business strategies to align with the growing demand for locally sourced, sustainable ingredients. As consumer preferences continue to evolve, it is likely that local sourcing will become an increasingly important aspect of the restaurant industry, providing both challenges and opportunities for those who are willing to embrace it. By understanding these dynamics, Italian restaurant chains can position themselves for long-term success in a changing marketplace.

## 2. Literature Review

In recent years, the foodservice industry has increasingly turned its attention to the importance of sourcing ingredients locally, particularly among Italian restaurant chains that rely on fresh, high-quality produce and authentic flavors as cornerstones of their culinary identity. Local sourcing, defined as procuring goods from regional suppliers as opposed to large-scale global distributors, has gained prominence in a variety of industries. However, for Italian restaurant chains, the integration of local sourcing strategies carries both opportunities and challenges that can influence their overall operational success. This literature review aims to explore the key themes, findings, and academic contributions related to partnering with local suppliers, specifically within the context of Italian restaurant chains. The motivation for local sourcing is multifaceted and often deeply intertwined with consumer preferences for quality, sustainability, and authenticity (Doan et al., 2024). As consumers are becoming increasingly aware of the environmental impacts of food production, there is a rising demand for locally grown and produced food (Calabrese et al., 2024). This demand has influenced restaurant chains to seek fresh, organic, and locally sourced ingredients to satisfy evolving consumer expectations (Pietrobelli et al., 2024). In particular, Italian restaurants, known for their emphasis on fresh ingredients, find local sourcing to be an opportunity to enhance their reputation for offering authentic and high-quality food, directly aligning with the expectations of their customers (Afghah et al., 2023). One of the primary drivers behind local sourcing is the perceived quality and authenticity that such ingredients offer. For Italian restaurant chains, this means access to local farms that produce specific ingredients crucial for Italian cuisine, such as tomatoes, basil, and high-quality olive oil (Birkel & Wehrle, 2024). Locally sourced ingredients are often viewed as fresher and more flavorful, which can significantly improve the overall dining experience for customers (Qu et al., 2024). Moreover, the traceability of local ingredients allows restaurant chains to promote a



transparent supply chain, aligning with growing consumer concerns over food origin and production practices (Hao & Demir, 2024). This is especially relevant in a globalized food system where concerns over food safety, ethics, and environmental sustainability are increasingly in the spotlight (Yan et al., 2024). At the same time, sourcing ingredients locally is not without its challenges. One of the most significant difficulties is the reliability and consistency of local suppliers (Yang et al., 2024). Unlike larger, global suppliers that benefit from economies of scale and established supply networks, local suppliers can be prone to variability in the quality and availability of their products. Seasonal fluctuations in availability, the unpredictability of weather conditions, and smaller production volumes can all impact the consistency of the supply chain, potentially leaving Italian restaurant chains at risk of running out of key ingredients or having to compromise on quality (Bor et al., 2024). For instance, local farms may face challenges such as limited storage facilities or insufficient crop yields, which could lead to supply shortages or increased prices for certain ingredients (Xu et al., 2024). The financial implications of sourcing locally are another area of concern for Italian restaurant chains. Although local ingredients can be perceived as more sustainable and of higher quality, they often come at a premium price compared to mass-produced alternatives. The cost of production for local suppliers tends to be higher, partly due to smaller-scale farming practices and the additional logistical costs associated with regional sourcing (Khan et al., 2025). This can strain the profit margins of restaurant chains, particularly those that rely on tight cost controls to remain competitive (Emon et al., 2024). In this context, balancing quality and cost becomes a delicate act, and many restaurants are forced to pass on the additional costs to consumers, potentially affecting their pricing strategy and customer demand (Khan et al., 2024). Logistical challenges also arise when restaurants partner with local suppliers. Local sourcing often entails less predictable delivery schedules compared to larger, global supply chains, which are typically more standardized and reliable (Drake et al., 2024). Local suppliers may not have the same logistical infrastructure or established delivery systems, leading to delays or inefficiencies in the supply chain (Cui et al., 2024). Moreover, the transportation of fresh goods from local farms to restaurants can be fraught with challenges, particularly in regions where infrastructure or access to transportation is limited (Lai et al., 2023). This lack of infrastructure can lead to difficulties in maintaining the freshness of products and, in some cases, result in food waste, which further exacerbates the financial strain on Italian restaurant chains (Nazir et al., 2024). Building and maintaining strong relationships with local suppliers is another critical aspect that can affect the success of local sourcing strategies. Establishing trust and effective communication between Italian restaurant chains and their suppliers is essential to ensure smooth operations and consistent supply of high-quality ingredients (Zhu et al., 2024). However, forming such relationships can be time-consuming and requires considerable investment in terms of time, effort, and resources. Smaller or newer suppliers may lack the operational capacity or professionalism that larger, established suppliers can provide, which could lead to inefficiencies or misunderstandings within the supply chain (Pang & Chen, 2024). Additionally, some local suppliers may struggle to meet the specific quality standards or certifications that restaurant chains require, further complicating the procurement process (Liu et al., 2024). The importance of collaboration between restaurants and local suppliers cannot be overstated, as mutual trust and understanding are key to ensuring the success of local sourcing initiatives (Singh et al., 2023). The shift toward locally sourced food requires that Italian restaurant chains engage in long-term partnerships with suppliers, rather than simply transactional relationships (Maheshwari et al., 2023). This collaboration often entails working together to overcome challenges such as crop variability, transportation delays, and seasonal changes. By developing such partnerships, both parties can benefit from a more stable, reliable, and mutually beneficial supply chain (Koc et al., 2023). Another critical aspect of local sourcing is the growing role of technology in streamlining supply chain management. Digital platforms and tools, such as cloud-based inventory management systems and supplier relationship management software, are increasingly being used by Italian restaurant chains to manage their local supplier networks (Anwar et al., 2024). These tools allow restaurants to track inventory levels in real time, monitor supplier performance, and reduce food waste, all of which help to improve efficiency and reduce costs (Le & Behl, 2024). The use of

technology also facilitates better communication between restaurants and suppliers, enabling quicker responses to supply chain disruptions and more accurate forecasting of ingredient needs (Emon & Khan, 2024). Despite these technological advances, transitioning to a local sourcing model requires a shift in the way restaurant chains approach supply chain management. Traditionally, many restaurant chains have relied on global suppliers to meet their ingredient needs, benefiting from the efficiency and cost-effectiveness that larger suppliers offer (Khan & Emon, 2024). However, the growing consumer demand for sustainability and authenticity has prompted many chains to reevaluate their supply chain strategies and consider the potential benefits of local sourcing (Emon et al., 2025). This shift is not always easy, as it requires changes in procurement practices, adjustments to inventory management systems, and greater emphasis on relationship-building with suppliers (Cammarano et al., 2024). Nonetheless, Italian restaurant chains that successfully make this transition stand to gain competitive advantages in an increasingly crowded and sustainability-conscious marketplace (Al-kahtib et al., 2025). Local sourcing also offers significant opportunities for community engagement and economic development. By partnering with local suppliers, Italian restaurant chains can contribute to the economic well-being of the regions in which they operate, helping to support local farmers and small businesses (Wong et al., 2024). This community engagement can also enhance a restaurant's brand image and customer loyalty, as many consumers are more likely to support businesses that contribute positively to their local economies (Jugend et al., 2024). Furthermore, local sourcing helps to reduce the environmental impact of food production, as it typically involves shorter transportation distances and less reliance on industrial farming practices (Lai et al., 2023). This can be particularly appealing to environmentally conscious consumers who are increasingly seeking sustainable dining options (Nazir et al., 2024). In conclusion, the growing trend toward local sourcing in the foodservice industry presents both significant opportunities and challenges for Italian restaurant chains. While the potential benefits of local sourcing—such as improved ingredient quality, enhanced authenticity, and stronger community ties—are clear, the logistical, financial, and relational challenges cannot be overlooked. By leveraging technological advancements, building strong supplier partnerships, and carefully managing costs, Italian restaurant chains can navigate these challenges and capitalize on the opportunities presented by local sourcing. As consumer preferences continue to evolve, local sourcing is likely to play an increasingly important role in shaping the future of the restaurant industry. However, to maximize its potential, restaurant chains must carefully assess their supply chain needs and make strategic decisions about how to integrate local sourcing into their operations (Doan et al., 2024; Calabrese et al., 2024; Pietrobelli et al., 2024).

### 3. Research Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study aimed to explore the challenges and opportunities in partnering with local suppliers for Italian restaurant chains. To gain in-depth insights into the topic, a qualitative research approach was chosen, focusing on semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in the restaurant industry. A total of 27 participants were selected to participate in the interviews, including restaurant managers, supply chain coordinators, and procurement specialists from a variety of Italian restaurant chains that had experience in sourcing local ingredients. The participants were chosen based on their extensive experience and knowledge of restaurant operations, specifically in managing relationships with local suppliers. The interviews were conducted using a purposive sampling method, ensuring that individuals with relevant expertise in local sourcing were included. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the nuances and complexities of local sourcing practices within the restaurant industry. The semi-structured interview format was adopted to allow for flexibility in exploring participants' views while maintaining a focus on the key themes of the research. The interviews were designed to probe topics such as the benefits and challenges of working with local suppliers, the logistical aspects of sourcing ingredients locally, and the strategies that restaurant chains use to maintain consistent quality and supply. Each interview lasted between 30 to 45 minutes, depending on the depth of the

responses. During the interviews, participants were encouraged to share their personal experiences, examples of successful supplier partnerships, and specific challenges they had encountered. The questions were open-ended, designed to foster discussion and encourage participants to reflect on both the practical and strategic aspects of local sourcing. Additionally, follow-up questions were used to clarify responses and probe deeper into specific areas of interest. All interviews were conducted either in-person or via video conferencing, depending on the participants' availability and location. Prior to the interviews, all participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and their consent was obtained. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission, and detailed notes were taken to ensure accurate capture of responses. After the interviews, the recordings were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method allowed for the identification of recurring themes and patterns in the participants' responses, which were then categorized into key areas related to the research questions. The data collection process was designed to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research topic while maintaining ethical standards. All participants were assured of their confidentiality, and their identities were anonymized in the final analysis. The data was stored securely, and all research activities were conducted in line with ethical guidelines to ensure that participants' rights were respected. The analysis of the interview data provided valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of Italian restaurant chains, contributing to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with local supplier partnerships. The research methodology was aimed at capturing the complexity of local sourcing practices and how these practices affect the operations and strategic decisions of Italian restaurant chains. By conducting in-depth interviews with a diverse group of participants, the study was able to explore a wide range of viewpoints and gain a richer understanding of the factors that influence local sourcing decisions in the restaurant industry. The findings from the interviews served as the basis for further analysis and discussion, which will help to inform the broader understanding of local sourcing in the foodservice industry.

#### 4. Results and Findings

The research gathered insights from 27 interviews conducted with key stakeholders from Italian restaurant chains. These participants were deeply involved in decision-making related to sourcing ingredients locally, offering a unique perspective on the opportunities and challenges in partnering with local suppliers. The findings from these interviews were carefully analyzed to extract key themes that emerged across the data. These themes provide a detailed understanding of how local sourcing is integrated into restaurant operations and how it impacts supply chain management, customer satisfaction, and business strategy. The first major theme that emerged from the interviews was the perception of quality associated with locally sourced ingredients. Many respondents emphasized that local suppliers could often provide superior products compared to mass-produced alternatives. The fresh, authentic ingredients sourced from local farms were considered essential for creating dishes that reflected the true flavors of Italian cuisine. Respondents noted that customers tended to appreciate the authenticity of meals when local ingredients were prominently featured on the menu. Furthermore, local sourcing allowed restaurants to showcase seasonal produce, which varied throughout the year, contributing to a dynamic and unique dining experience. Several interviewees mentioned that sourcing locally helped maintain the traditional aspects of Italian cuisine, making their dishes more appealing to consumers who sought genuine Italian dining experiences. Another prominent theme was the relationship between Italian restaurant chains and local suppliers. Several respondents spoke about the importance of fostering strong, long-term relationships with local suppliers to ensure consistent supply and quality. While larger suppliers may offer convenience and reliability, the ability to communicate directly with local producers created a sense of partnership. Many restaurant operators emphasized the significance of trust in these partnerships, with regular communication ensuring that issues related to product quality, delivery schedules, and availability could be addressed promptly. Local suppliers were also seen as more flexible and willing to accommodate specific requirements, whether it involved adjusting quantities

or providing special ingredients. However, some respondents acknowledged that building such relationships could be time-consuming, and it required constant effort to maintain the quality of communication. In some cases, local suppliers struggled with meeting the restaurant's quality standards or consistency, which posed challenges for restaurants that were accustomed to more standardized global suppliers. Despite the clear advantages of working with local suppliers, several operational challenges were highlighted throughout the interviews. One of the primary difficulties identified was the variability in supply, which could result in disruptions to restaurant operations. The availability of certain products was often subject to seasonal variations, which could affect the ability to provide consistent menu offerings. For example, particular varieties of vegetables or fruits could only be sourced at certain times of the year, making menu planning more complex. This forced restaurant operators to adapt their offerings based on what was available, which sometimes led to customer dissatisfaction when favorite dishes could not be served. Additionally, some suppliers faced challenges with crop yields or were unable to consistently provide the required quantity of goods, which could result in shortages. In such cases, restaurant managers often had to rely on backup suppliers or make last-minute changes to the menu, which disrupted the customer experience. Another operational challenge identified was the logistics involved in sourcing locally. While global supply chains tend to be more efficient, local sourcing often required additional coordination and planning. Local suppliers did not always have the infrastructure in place to ensure reliable delivery schedules, which meant that restaurant operators had to take extra precautions to ensure that deliveries arrived on time. Delays in receiving fresh produce could lead to significant waste if ingredients were not used promptly. The lack of standardization in delivery schedules and transportation practices was a recurring issue. Furthermore, while local sourcing was seen as a way to support the local economy and reduce carbon footprints, the cost of transporting goods over longer distances within a region could still add up, making it a less cost-effective option compared to global suppliers. Another important theme that emerged was the cost implications of local sourcing. Although many respondents recognized the benefits of working with local suppliers, they also pointed out that it came at a premium. Local ingredients were often more expensive than those sourced from large-scale suppliers who could take advantage of economies of scale. The higher cost of local goods was attributed to smaller-scale production, limited distribution networks, and sometimes higher labor costs. For some restaurant chains, this price difference was a significant factor in deciding whether to prioritize local sourcing. Several interviewees mentioned that balancing quality with cost was a constant challenge. Some chains adopted a hybrid approach, sourcing a mix of local and global ingredients to optimize both cost-efficiency and product quality. Others adjusted their pricing strategy to account for the increased cost of local goods, passing some of the price increase onto customers. However, this often led to customer dissatisfaction if they felt that the price increase was not justified by the quality of the food. Despite these challenges, local sourcing presented significant opportunities for differentiation in a competitive market. Several respondents highlighted the growing consumer preference for sustainable and ethically sourced food. Many customers were willing to pay a premium for food that was sourced locally, as it aligned with their values of supporting local economies and reducing environmental impact. Some restaurant operators mentioned that the demand for locally sourced food had become a key selling point, particularly for younger generations who were more conscious of the origins of their food. By emphasizing the local sourcing of ingredients, restaurants could tap into this demand, enhancing their brand image and attracting customers who prioritized sustainability. Additionally, some participants pointed out that local sourcing could be used as a marketing tool to differentiate themselves from competitors who relied on mass-produced ingredients. In terms of supplier relationships, the theme of collaboration emerged as a key factor in ensuring the success of local sourcing. Restaurant operators frequently spoke about the importance of working closely with suppliers to manage challenges such as fluctuating availability and quality. By sharing information about anticipated demand, suppliers were able to adjust their production schedules and plan accordingly, which helped reduce disruptions in the supply chain. This collaborative approach also allowed restaurants to influence the



types of products available from their suppliers, ensuring that the ingredients met the specific culinary requirements of the menu. Some restaurant chains even worked with suppliers to promote sustainable farming practices, such as organic growing methods, which further aligned with the restaurants’ commitment to sustainability and quality. Despite the clear benefits, several participants highlighted the need for restaurants to invest in technology and infrastructure to support local sourcing. Some restaurant chains were found to use digital platforms to manage their local supplier relationships more efficiently. These platforms allowed restaurant operators to track inventory levels, monitor the performance of suppliers, and forecast demand more accurately. By adopting such technologies, restaurants could reduce waste, improve the accuracy of orders, and streamline communication with suppliers. Additionally, digital tools enabled restaurants to better understand the cost dynamics of sourcing locally, helping them make more informed decisions about their sourcing strategies.

Table 1. Perceived Quality of Local Ingredients.

Theme	Description	Examples
Freshness	Local ingredients are considered fresher and of higher quality.	“We get tomatoes that are picked the same day. They’re noticeably better than anything else.”
Authenticity	Locally sourced ingredients reflect traditional flavors.	“Our pasta sauce is made from tomatoes grown just 10 miles from here – it tastes authentic.”
Seasonality	Seasonal produce adds variety and unique flavors to dishes.	“When we use local mushrooms in the winter, the taste is so different; it’s part of the season.”
Local Flavor	Locally grown products enhance the overall flavor profile.	“Local basil has a completely different taste than what you can buy at a big store.”
Variety	Sourcing locally allows access to regional varieties.	“We use heirloom tomatoes that you can’t find in the supermarkets.”

This table shows that the perceived quality of local ingredients was central to the decision to partner with local suppliers. Many restaurant operators found that local products offered superior freshness and flavor compared to global alternatives. This was particularly evident in the seasonality of the ingredients, where consumers enjoyed the variety and richness that local, seasonal products brought to the menu. This emphasis on freshness and authenticity helped the restaurants create a distinct dining experience and align more closely with their branding as purveyors of genuine Italian cuisine.

Table 2. Operational Challenges.

Theme	Description	Examples
Supply Variability	The availability of local ingredients is inconsistent.	“We’ve had to adjust the menu because some ingredients are just not available.”
Delivery Delays	Delays in deliveries can disrupt restaurant operations.	“Sometimes the deliveries arrive late, and we have to adjust quickly to avoid waste.”
Limited Quantity	Local suppliers may not always provide the needed quantities.	“We’ve had times where we had to scramble for ingredients because the local supplier ran out.”
Seasonal Restrictions	Seasonal availability limits ingredient options.	“Certain vegetables are only available in the summer, and it changes the whole menu.”

Supply Chain Flexibility	Need for flexibility to deal with supply interruptions.	"Our local suppliers are more willing to adjust, but that can still be tricky."
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This table highlights the operational difficulties faced when working with local suppliers. Supply variability, seasonal changes, and delivery delays were significant obstacles, requiring restaurant managers to be agile and creative in adapting menus. The challenge of securing a consistent and sufficient quantity of ingredients was a common issue raised by the interviewees, with smaller local suppliers unable to meet the high-volume demands of restaurant chains.

Table 3. Cost and Financial Implications.

Theme	Description	Examples
Higher Prices	Local ingredients tend to be more expensive.	"Locally grown produce is 30% more expensive than what we can get from larger distributors."
Cost vs Quality	Balancing cost with quality is an ongoing challenge.	"Sometimes we have to weigh if the better quality is worth the extra cost for the consumer."
Price Increases	Rising costs of local ingredients put pressure on pricing.	"We had to increase prices to accommodate the higher costs of local sourcing."
Cost Efficiency	Sourcing a mix of local and global ingredients can optimize costs.	"We find a middle ground by using both local and global suppliers for different ingredients."
Economies of Scale	Local suppliers can't provide the same economies of scale as global suppliers.	"The bulk discounts we get from global suppliers aren't available with local vendors."

The data collected from the interviews revealed that local sourcing often comes at a higher cost, which posed a challenge for restaurant chains. While the quality of local ingredients was valued, the price difference made it difficult to maintain profitability. This increased cost sometimes led to higher menu prices, which could impact consumer demand. In response, many restaurant operators used a hybrid sourcing model, combining local and global ingredients to balance quality and cost.

Table 4. Supplier Relationships and Collaboration.

Theme	Description	Examples
Long-Term Partnerships	Developing long-term relationships with local suppliers.	"We've worked with some of our local farms for over five years now, and it really helps us."
Mutual Trust	Trust between restaurant operators and local suppliers is crucial.	"If there's an issue, we know we can rely on our suppliers to make it right."
Flexibility	Local suppliers often provide more flexibility in terms of customization.	"They are happy to adjust to our needs, whether it's on the size of the orders or unique requests."

Shared Values	Alignment with local suppliers' values such as sustainability.	"We love working with farms that practice organic methods."
Collaborative Problem Solving	Close communication and cooperation to resolve issues.	"When we faced a short supply, the farm was quick to offer us alternatives."

This table underscores the importance of fostering strong, collaborative relationships with local suppliers. Trust, flexibility, and shared values were key to overcoming operational challenges. Restaurant operators who had long-term relationships with local producers found that these partnerships provided mutual benefits. In cases where issues arose, a collaborative approach allowed for swift problem resolution, ensuring that restaurant operations continued without major disruptions.

The findings from the interviews with key stakeholders in Italian restaurant chains revealed both significant opportunities and challenges in partnering with local suppliers. One of the primary benefits highlighted by participants was the superior quality of locally sourced ingredients, which were often seen as fresher, more authentic, and reflective of the traditional flavors of Italian cuisine. Local sourcing allowed restaurants to offer a dynamic, seasonal menu, and customers valued the authenticity that came with the use of regionally grown produce. This commitment to quality and authenticity was seen as a way to differentiate restaurants in a competitive market, especially as more consumers increasingly prioritize sustainability and ethically sourced food. However, local sourcing also came with several operational challenges. The variability in supply due to seasonal changes, limited quantities, and inconsistent availability of local ingredients posed difficulties for restaurant operators. These fluctuations often required flexibility in menu planning and forced restaurant managers to adapt quickly, which could disrupt the customer experience. Additionally, logistical issues such as delivery delays and the lack of standardization in transportation methods added complexity to managing local supply chains. This was compounded by the higher cost of local ingredients, which were often more expensive than those sourced from larger, global suppliers. Restaurant operators had to weigh the benefits of quality and sustainability against the financial implications, with some adjusting menu prices to accommodate the increased cost of local sourcing. Despite these challenges, many interviewees emphasized the importance of building strong, long-term relationships with local suppliers. These relationships fostered trust, facilitated collaboration, and allowed for greater flexibility in meeting the restaurant's needs. Through consistent communication and mutual understanding, restaurant chains and local suppliers were able to navigate the challenges of local sourcing together. The findings also highlighted the role of technology in optimizing local sourcing practices, with some restaurants using digital platforms to track inventory, forecast demand, and streamline supplier communication. In conclusion, the study found that while local sourcing offered distinct advantages in terms of quality, authenticity, and sustainability, it also required careful management of supply chain challenges and cost considerations. Restaurant chains that successfully partnered with local suppliers were those that could balance these factors while maintaining a high standard of customer satisfaction. The findings suggest that by fostering strong supplier relationships, leveraging technology, and adopting a hybrid sourcing model, restaurants could mitigate the challenges of local sourcing and reap the benefits of supporting local economies and providing a unique dining experience for customers.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the dynamics of partnering with local suppliers for Italian restaurant chains, revealing both the potential benefits and the obstacles that restaurant operators must navigate. The results indicate that while local sourcing offers clear advantages in terms of product quality, authenticity, and customer satisfaction, it also introduces significant challenges that need to be carefully managed. The perception of superior quality from

locally sourced ingredients was a consistent theme across interviews. Participants expressed that local ingredients, such as fresh vegetables, herbs, and meats, contributed to a more authentic dining experience, which is crucial for Italian restaurants aiming to maintain traditional culinary standards. Customers increasingly demand authenticity, and the use of locally sourced ingredients was seen as an effective way for restaurants to differentiate themselves in a competitive market. However, the benefits of using local suppliers come with practical challenges, particularly around supply consistency. As the study highlighted, local suppliers often face variability in their product availability, which is influenced by seasonality, unpredictable weather conditions, and other agricultural constraints. These fluctuations in supply create difficulties for restaurant managers who rely on a steady flow of specific ingredients. Menu planning becomes more complex, and customers may experience dissatisfaction when their favorite dishes are unavailable due to a shortage of local ingredients. This issue of supply uncertainty not only affects customer experience but also disrupts restaurant operations, as managers are forced to find quick alternatives or make last-minute menu adjustments. This dynamic adds an element of risk to local sourcing that must be managed with careful planning and flexibility. Another challenge that emerged from the study was the higher cost associated with sourcing locally. Restaurant operators frequently noted that local ingredients were more expensive than mass-produced alternatives, primarily due to the smaller scale of local farming and the lack of economies of scale that larger suppliers benefit from. The higher costs of local sourcing often led to increased menu prices, which could alienate price-sensitive customers. The balance between offering high-quality, authentic dishes and maintaining reasonable price points was a delicate one. In some cases, restaurants adjusted their pricing strategies to reflect the higher costs of local ingredients, but this strategy did not always guarantee that customers would accept the price hikes. This presents a dilemma for restaurant operators who must weigh the long-term benefits of local sourcing with the short-term financial challenges it may present. Despite these challenges, the research revealed that fostering strong relationships with local suppliers was key to overcoming some of the difficulties associated with local sourcing. The study emphasized the importance of communication and collaboration in creating successful partnerships between restaurant operators and local suppliers. By maintaining open lines of communication and working together to solve supply chain problems, such as delays or shortages, restaurant chains and local suppliers could build a mutually beneficial relationship. Furthermore, long-term partnerships were often more stable, as both parties developed a deeper understanding of each other's needs and expectations. Trust between restaurant managers and suppliers was crucial, as it allowed for more flexibility and quicker resolutions when issues arose. This trust also extended to the shared values of sustainability and support for local economies, which were frequently mentioned as motivating factors for both restaurants and customers. The study also found that technology played an important role in managing local sourcing. Some restaurants used digital platforms to track inventory, monitor supplier performance, and forecast demand more effectively. These tools helped streamline the ordering process, reduce waste, and improve communication with suppliers. By leveraging technology, restaurants could minimize the operational risks associated with local sourcing, such as supply chain disruptions and waste from overordering. Technology also enabled better cost management, as restaurant operators could assess the financial impact of their local sourcing practices more accurately and make adjustments where needed. This adoption of technology represents an important opportunity for restaurants to increase the efficiency and sustainability of their local sourcing efforts, especially as the industry moves towards greater digitization. In terms of strategic implications, the study found that many restaurant chains adopted a hybrid sourcing model, combining local and global ingredients to balance the benefits of quality with the need for cost efficiency and supply consistency. This approach allowed restaurants to maintain a high standard of quality for signature dishes, such as pizza and pasta, which rely on specific, high-quality ingredients, while also ensuring that less critical items were sourced globally to keep costs down. This hybrid approach was particularly useful for restaurants looking to expand their menu offerings without significantly increasing operational costs. By carefully selecting which ingredients to source locally



and which to source globally, restaurant chains could manage both quality and cost, ensuring that they met customer expectations while maintaining profitability. While local sourcing undoubtedly presents challenges, the research suggests that its benefits far outweigh the drawbacks for Italian restaurant chains that prioritize authenticity, quality, and sustainability. By focusing on building strong, collaborative relationships with local suppliers, restaurant operators can mitigate the risks associated with supply chain variability and cost fluctuations. The findings also point to the importance of investing in technology and infrastructure to improve the efficiency of local sourcing efforts. Ultimately, restaurants that embrace local sourcing are not only enhancing their culinary offerings but also contributing to the local economy and fostering a deeper connection with their communities. This, in turn, helps build brand loyalty and strengthens the restaurant's position in a competitive market where consumers are increasingly looking for dining experiences that align with their values of sustainability and authenticity. In conclusion, the study highlights that local sourcing is an integral part of the strategy for many Italian restaurant chains, offering significant opportunities for differentiation and brand enhancement. However, it also underscores the complexities involved in managing local supplier relationships, particularly in terms of cost, supply variability, and logistical challenges. Restaurant chains must weigh the advantages of quality and sustainability against the operational and financial difficulties of local sourcing. The successful implementation of local sourcing strategies will depend on a restaurant's ability to navigate these challenges effectively, foster strong relationships with suppliers, and leverage technology to optimize supply chain management. As consumer demand for authentic, locally sourced food continues to rise, Italian restaurant chains that successfully integrate local sourcing into their operations will be well-positioned to thrive in an increasingly competitive and values-driven market.

## 6. Conclusion

This study has provided a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by Italian restaurant chains when partnering with local suppliers. The findings highlight that while local sourcing offers significant advantages, particularly in terms of quality, authenticity, and customer satisfaction, it also presents notable operational and financial challenges. Local ingredients are valued for their freshness and the ability to reflect the true essence of Italian cuisine, but their higher cost, availability issues, and logistical constraints can complicate restaurant operations. These challenges often lead to difficult decisions regarding pricing, supply chain management, and menu planning, requiring restaurant operators to carefully balance the benefits of local sourcing with the financial pressures it creates. Despite these challenges, the study reveals that strong, long-term relationships with local suppliers are crucial to mitigating many of these issues. Trust, communication, and collaboration between restaurant operators and suppliers help overcome obstacles such as supply variability and delays. By fostering these relationships, restaurant chains can ensure a steady flow of high-quality ingredients and resolve issues more efficiently when they arise. Additionally, the integration of technology into the sourcing process helps improve inventory management, reduce waste, and streamline communication with suppliers, allowing restaurants to better navigate the complexities of local sourcing. A hybrid sourcing model, which combines both local and global ingredients, emerged as an effective strategy for many restaurant chains. This approach enables restaurants to maintain a balance between high-quality, authentic ingredients and cost-effective sourcing, ensuring that they can meet customer expectations without compromising on profitability. The findings suggest that by strategically selecting which ingredients to source locally and which to source globally, restaurants can manage both quality and cost while maintaining a diverse menu offering. Overall, the research underscores that local sourcing is not just a trend but a strategic approach that enhances the dining experience, supports local economies, and contributes to sustainability. The study highlights the importance of restaurants adapting to the evolving market by embracing local sourcing while addressing the challenges it brings. By doing so, they can differentiate themselves in a competitive landscape, build brand loyalty, and meet the growing demand for authentic, sustainable, and ethically sourced food. The future success of Italian restaurant

chains will depend on their ability to effectively navigate the complexities of local sourcing, leveraging relationships with suppliers and technology to create a resilient and sustainable supply chain that aligns with both business goals and customer values.

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