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Sustainable Food Production and Safety Protocols in Institutional and Flight Kitchens: A Comparative Study

Ms. Padmaja Binakar [1], Chef Naeem Pathan [2], Chef Parth Padval [3], Chef Omkar Bhalekar [4], Chef Rakesh Thakur [5], Ms. Priyanka Kedar [6]

[1234567] School of Hospitality & Tourism Studies, D Y Patil Deemed to be University, Sector 7, Vidyanagar, Nerul, Navi Mumbai

[1234567]Email ID: padmaja.binakar@dypatil.edu , naeem.pathan@dypatil.edu , partha.padval@dypatil.edu , omkar.bhalekar@dypatil.edu , rakesh.thakur@dypatil.edu , priyanka.kedar@dypatil.edu

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ABSTRACT

The resulting large-scale catering services by institutional and flight kitchen have intensified the question of sustainability and food safety due to the massive production volumes, complicated supply chains, and adherence to production schedules. In this paper, comparative analysis will be done on sustainable food production measures and food safety measures which are implemented on the institutional kitchens (including hospitals, schools, and company canteens) and flight kitchens which are operated by the aviation industry. The dimensions of interest brought up by the study include raw material acquisition, energy and water saving, waste disposal, hygiene, hazard control system, regulatory compliance and training practices among the staff. The data was collected through the structured questionnaires, on-site observations and semi structured interviews with the kitchen managers and food safety officers. The findings showed that flight kitchens have higher level of standardization and adherence to regulations specifically with reference to Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) adoption, traceability systems and temperature controlled logistics adoption. On the other hand, institutional kitchens are less rigid in sourcing and menu planning that makes new and imbalanced use of sustainable practices, such as local sourcing and separation of waste. The paper identifies that between the sustainability programs and food safety management in the two contexts, there are significant integration loopholes in the sustainability programs. It concludes that a system integrated through environmental sustainability and effective food safety can enhance functioning of the system, reduce environmental footprint and provide safety to the consumers. The research has given effective recommendations to the policy community, food service management, and quality assurance international that would want to increase viable and secure food procurement of large-scaled catering arrangements..

Keywords: *Sustainable Food Production; Food Safety Protocols; Institutional Kitchens; Flight Kitchens; HACCP; Mass Catering; Environmental Sustainability; Food Service Management*

INTRODUCTION

The international food service industry is undergoing a comprehensive change over the past few decades as a result of the pace of urbanization and the increasing flow of people, the increase in institutional consumption of food, and the sensitivity of consumers towards the quality of food, its security and eco-friendliness in the marketplace. The various branches of this industry such as the institutional kitchens and the flight kitchens are also occupied by the branches which hold a niche of significance since they entail mass production of food, uniform operation and a direct impact on the well being of the people. The population served by institutional kitchens is different in the sense it serves them daily like the case of hospitals, educational facilities, industrial canteens and in government buildings where they are likely to be limited by budgets and infrastructures. Flight kitchens on the other hand cater to extremely obstructing aviation sector, and food quality, consistency and timeliness cannot be sacrificed due to the discrete and sensitive nature of ingesting food in ground. The two setting also has mass catering business though there are notable differences between them in the context of operation area, regulatory tension and their internalization of sustainable practices. Their contrastual character is the reason why it is the most appropriate to concentrate on the issues of sustainable food production and measures of safety in the frame of the comparative research.

The sustainable food production has turned into a central problem within the contemporary food systems bringing the

anxieties about the efficient use of resources, alleviation of environmental implications, ethical sourcing and economic sustainability in the long run. The kitchens are considered as contributors of energy consumption, water consumption, generation of food waste and packaging waste in large scales. In that scale depiction, institutional and flight kitchens can, either directly, cause more harm by worsening the environmental state, or be involved in sustainable change, which may involve responsible procurement policies, energy-saving appliances, minimization of waste, and implementation of the circular economy, which comprise composting and recycling. Social sustainability (e.g. employee welfare,
training, organisational health), and economic sustainability (e.g. cost control and operational performance) have been adopted extensively as sustainable food service management alongside the issue of the environment. Yet only to what extent these sustainability aspects have been applied to the day to day running of the kitchen varies broadly between the institutions and flight catering establishments.

The food safety is yet another pillar regarded as being part of the large-scale production system of food, particularly when a single mishap can result in hundreds or thousands of consumers falling victim. Some of the issues that constantly pose threats to the work of a mass catering are cross-contamination, poor personal hygiene, microbial contamination, poor storage, inadequate cooking, and poor personal hygiene. The infrastructures, overturned employee turnover, insufficient training and inconsistency in regulatory observation have a tendency of compounding the issue of food safety at the institutional kitchens. Flight kitchens on the other hand are reputed to be under strict international and national aviation food safety requirements, and are often required to comply with Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP), ISO standards and airline-but-airline quality requirements. The zero-tolerance of foodborne illnesses in the aviation industry has resulted in excessive degrees of standardization, documentation, and tracing of the food materials served in flights and the flight kitchens have turned into the benchmark of food safety practices implemented.

Even though the analysis of the sustainability initiatives can be seen to differ significantly in terms of their interpretation of the activities, recent research seems to discover the interdependence of the two. Direct improvements to food safety can be in terms of sustained food safety such as inventory management (i.e. proper storage and time controlled storage temperature), reduction of wastes, etc. also, hygiene based, standardized, and process controlled food safety can result in the sustainability of increased efficiency and reduced wastages. However, in the real sense, the two areas are actually treated as two different areas that lead to the splintered application and hence synergy. The focus of institutional kitchens is on cost containment orientation and flight kitchens might evolve extensively in achieving much in coming up with suitability concerning safety regulations without including the sustainability objectives of environmental safety.

These are other problems with the Indian setting and the other developing economies because of the fast track development of institutional dining, air travel growth, and alteration of regulatory frameworks. Increasing demand of safe, nutritive and sustainably produced food has strained food service providers to update their operation. The policymakers and the regulatory bodies are put forward to a greater extent to encourage sustainable practices and consumers and client have a greater understanding of the environmental footprint and ethical standards. However, the research gap is in the lack of empirical studies that comparatively examine sustainability food production and safety associated with different large-scaled kitchen apparatus. Most of research undertaken is either sustainability or food safety in isolation or on a specific type of food service operation.

It is within this background that the current research aims at providing a comparative analysis of the procedures of sustainable food production and food safety on institutional kitchens and flight kitchens. By contrasting them on the differences and similarities in the management of the resources, waste treatment, hygiene systems, conformity to regulatory rules, and staff competencies, the study will seek to determine the best practices and absence of the same in the two settings. Such a comparative approach is precisely what a balanced way should be developed that would allow establishing supportive frameworks and would not compromise the performance of the operations. Lastly, the study makes a contribution to the advancement in the literature in the area of sustainable food service management, besides offering practical recommendations to administrators, policymakers, and practitioners to gain secure, sustainable, and robust system of food production of big food production companies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The massive catering food systems have been of increased academic concern due to the consequences of sustainable food production and food safety on the environment, economy and population health. The prevailing central tendencies of the previous research are usually conclusive in the sense that food service operations, and institutional and aviation catering, in particular, contribute significantly to food waste, the use of resources and environmental damage, and, and more importantly, have raised new food safety issues.

Food waste is one of the biggest issues in the food service setups, and it has been extensively recorded that this is a matter of critical sustainability value. Engstrom and Carlsson-Kanyama (2004) reported the early empirical data in Swedish food service institutions that was found to have considerable losses at every stage of preparation, serving and plate waste cycles. Their findings established that institutional kitchens are among the leading factors of food waste which can be prevented due to their forecasting error, portion size and lack of efficiency in menu planning. Based on this, the proposed research by Betz et al. (2015) has quantified food waste in the Swiss food service industry and indicated that a high potential of reducing waste

in terms of enhancing monitoring and staff awareness, and changing operations is possible. All these researches suggest the scope of the volume of waste in institutional catering and the scope of the interventions which would be based on the issues of sustainability.

Of particular interest in the literature have been kitchens in the hospital and in the public-sector because of their dual mandate of social responsibility and nutritional adequacy. Dias-Ferreira et al. (2015) also established the relationship between food waste production and both the environmental and economic indexes in Portuguese hospital setting and determined that when food waste is reduced, carbon emission and operating costs should also be reduced significantly. Similarly, Eriksson et al. (2017; 2020) also present detailed quantification research work in Swedish restaurants and hospitals of the health sector and revealed that there are problems in the approach to quantifying food waste, and, nevertheless, the nature of standardized assessment tools. They find that institutional kitchens tend to lack any systematic structures of waste measurement and therefore these fail to plan sustainability.

Campbell et al. (2017) suggest that regarding the aspect of environmental systems, the sector justifying planetary boundary transgressions was found to be the area of food production and consumption, including the institutional food services. Their contribution gives credence to their argument that sustainability in large scale catering is not merely the issue of operation but a global environment issue. At that, it turns out to be a saving waste, efficient resource utilisation, and sustainable procurement of kitchens as the key steps towards minimising the ecological impact.

It is also opposite to one of the research studies that make flight kitchens and international airline catering an even fresher research concern, mainly due to the problem of cabin waste and the intricate international regulations. Blanca-Alcubilla (2021) also applied the procedure of life cycle assessment (LCA) to cabin waste in the aviation sector discovering that food waste in the aviation industry was given a disproportionate environmental footprint due to the utilization of packaging material, limitations of how international waste may be addressed, and the necessity to burn. The airline catering food waste was also inspected in relation to designs-based behaviourssustainable behaviours in that the article by Chen (2022) also addresses the demand forecasting and passenger choice model as one of the ways to reduce excessive production of food. It is such studies that provide the clue that though flight kitchens are operated with stern actions in safety consideration, there is still the practice of sustainability integration that is not fully accomplished, but rather restricted to the aviation security and international waste regulations.

Waste management and valorisation pathways is another important branch of the literature. The problem of surplus bread management in Sweden has been compared by Brancoli, Bolton, and Eriksson (2020) such that alternative valorisation opportunities (Bioenergy and animal feed) do produce less environmental impacts than when being thrown away. Although it is not an institutional kitchen setting, their results can be used in the context of the mass catering setting, in which the issue of surplus food remains the same. The challenge here lies in the fact in which the food safety standards will be balanced with the redistribution charter or the valorisation charter particularly in the high risk environment, the flight kitchens.

Food safety literature always puts an emphasis on the risk of the greater danger of mass catering. In the case of flight kitchens in particular, they are operated according to the high international standards due to the devastating consequences of foodborne illnesses occurring in in-flight aircraft. Eleri, Redmond, and Hewedi (2016) considered a problem of cabin crew food safety training and discovered the discrepancy between theoretical and practical aspects. Their exploration findings note that even though there is a great amount of control in any aviation situation, post-training and behavioural reinforcements have a critical role to play in stopping the safety aspects. Nevertheless, it is likely that institutional kitchens are facing inconsistency in the training of staff, infrastructure, and enforcement that can adversely affect the outcome of the food safety.

Research on sustainability and food safety studies on the catering setting takes a qualitative and mixed-method approach pre-eminence. Thematic analysis framework by Braun and Clarke (2006) has been extensively applied in the analysis of both interview and observational data because it enables the researcher to be in a position to record both the practises in operation and perceptions as well as organizational cultures in the kitchens. This paradigm assists in comparative studies due to the fact that it assists in structurally reading complicated contextualized information.

Regulative and policy perspectives also provide additional literature. Based on the report on international catering waste by the Food Control Consultants (2024), it is worthy of mentioning that there exists regulatory fragmentation and risk-based issues on cross-border catering waste especially on the aviation industry. The report recommends the necessity to promote the existence of smarter regulation that would weigh the purpose of biosecurity, food safety, and sustainability. The provided observation is particularly useful whenever performing the comparative analyses because it elucidates the way in which the operational priorities can vary in the case of institutional and flight kitchens due to the regulatory environments.

Overall, the literature that is available indicates that the area of research is relatively underexplored where sustainability and food safety become rather common in being considered as two independent entities but as being influenced in different ways. The factor of institutional kitchens is often seen through the lenses of food waste and the efficiency of the resources, whereas flight kitchens are typically researched in the applications of safety, compliance, and waste off cabin. Limited cross comparison between the two systems of catering concerning the two issues of sustainability and the feeding safety ends up with solutions spanning across the two issues of sustainability and food safety. This gap justifies the significance of the existing work that will integrate the environmental sustainability and food safety guidelines and put both in the same analysis tool, therefore resulting into more integrated and holistic food service work processes.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine sustainable food production practices in institutional kitchens.
2. To analyze food safety protocols followed in institutional kitchens.
3. To assess sustainable food production practices in flight kitchens via Healthy Eating Index (HEI) to ensure nutritional sustainability under constraints.

Hypothesis

H_0 (Null Hypothesis): Flight kitchens do not significantly implement sustainable food production practices in their operations.

H_1 (Alternate Hypothesis): Flight kitchens significantly implement sustainable food production practices in their operations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study design under consideration is a descriptive research design and a comparative research design because it will focus on exploring the regime of sustainable food production and food safety regulations in institutional and flight kitchens. This mixed-method method has been embraced and it involves use of the mixed quantitative and qualitative approach of the data collection method in order to have thorough analysis. Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires that were supplied to the managers of the kitchen, the food safety officers and the people working in the selected institutional and flight kitchens. Semi structured interviews and field observations were also applied in order to make sure that detailed data regarding the working practice, compliance procedures, and the sustainability efforts were documented. The study also applied secondary sources of data like published reports, regulatory guidelines, and scholarly literature because it enabled it to provide a background to the topic and assist in establishing the pace. The purposive sampling method has been adopted to choose the sample such that a represented sample of regardless of the number of operations being made and diversity in the types of menus being offered should be achieved. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data which provided information about sustainability practices and safety measures and a comparison analysis in which the differences and similarities in institutional and flight kitchen were determined. The thematic analysis of a qualitative data has also been utilized in the paper to establish the patterns, gaps and the most appropriate practices in the integration of sustainability and food safety. This type of methodology can assist in the thorough analysis of the level of efficiency, be environmentally friendly, and have a high compliance rate and provide valuable feedback to the stakeholders concerned with the improvement of the large-scale catering operations.

Descriptive statistics

Sustainable Practice	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Frequency of Implementation (%)
Use of locally sourced ingredients	4.2	0.65	85%
Energy-efficient kitchen equipment	4.5	0.52	90%
Water conservation measures	4.1	0.7	80%
Waste segregation and composting	4	0.75	78%
Minimization of single-use packaging	3.8	0.8	70%
Menu planning to reduce food waste	4.3	0.6	88%
Recycling of food by-products or surplus food	3.7	0.85	65%
Staff training on sustainability practices	4.4	0.55	92%

Descriptive Analysis of Sustainable Food Production Practices in Flight Kitchens

Using the descriptive statistics, it is possible to state that adoption of sustainable production practices in the sphere of sustainable food production are characterised by a high level in flight kitchens in a variety of dimensions. The overall agreement will be considered to be of high nature with the mean scores of 3.7 to 4 of the five point likert scale because majority of the staff members will agree that implementation of the practices is done in a manner that is effective. The maximum average of 4.5 was recorded on the use of energy efficient equipment in the kitchen that presupposes that flight kitchens are sensitive with the problem of energy conservation as a component of their operations. Similarly, the significance reviewed on the sustainability practices and menu design to reduce waste on food, mean scores of 4.4 and 4.3, respectively show that staff members were adequately trained on the challenging sustainability practices and menu planning. These practices such as the use of local sourced ingredients (mean = 4.2), water conservation (mean = 4.1) depict moderate consistent effort to introduce the environmental concern to food production. Conversely, recycling of food by-products or food leftover had the lowest minimum mean of 3.7 which suggests that further elaboration can be made in better valorising and utilising the resources in a uneconctic nature. The mean deviations of all practices were 0.52- 0.85 that indicated quite low variability of the responses as well as high degree of consistency between the flight kitchens. Frequency data also talk

in these directions with over three in four of the kitchens adopting all the practices on a regular basis, and staff training and regularity of energy efficiency practices were higher than 0.93 in terms of adoption. Overall, the analysis demonstrates that the flight kitchens exceed the requirements of regulations, moreover, the creation of the sustainable food production activities into the process is implemented proactively by the flight kitchens which has confirmed the second hypothesis that flight kitchens are a significant part of an implementation of sustainable food production practices.

One-Sample Statistics	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Sustainable Practices	50	4.1	0.58	0.082

One-Sample Test	Test Value = 3	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
Sustainable Practices		13.66	49	0	1.1	Lower = 0.94, Upper = 1.26

Analysis of One-Sample t-Test for Sustainable Food Production Practices in Flight Kitchens

The one-sample t-test was used to demonstrate whether there is a great application of sustainable food production practices by the flight kitchens compared to the neutral application of 3 on a five-points likert scale. Such results indicate that the implementation mean of the sustainable practice of the sampled flight kitchens is 4.10 compared to the neutral value that is significantly lower (4.10). Computing t-value of 13.66/49 degrees of freedom = 0.000 and it is considerably less than the table level of significance of 0.05. This provides a considerable statistical cause to reject the null hypothesis(H0) and positively accept the alternative hypothesis(H1) and the null hypothesis states that there is active involvement of the flight kitchens in the active implementation of sustainable food production practices in the operation. The mean disparity of 1.10 also indicates that the implementation level is much more enormous than the level of the neutral, which is a high level of compliance with the measures the use of the energy-saving equipment and staff education, menu planning to reduce the food waste, and water conservation. The low confidence interval (0.94 to 1.26) shows that there is consistency of the responses among the sample and, therefore, there is a possibility that most of the flight kitchens are undergoing identical model of sustainability. Overall, the discussion proves that flight kitchens not only comply with the requirements of the operating process and the rules, but they also transfer the concept of sustainability to their day-to-day operations, which will make the flight kitchen a sustainable large-scale food manufacturer.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the research provide the valuable information regarding the introduction of the sustainable food production and food safety measures of the flight kitchens and touches the strength and the potential improvement. The descriptive and inferential tests confirm that the flight kitchens have hugely adopted the sustainable ways and that the energy saving equipments, employee training and menu planning bear high mean scores that are geared towards reducing food waste. The one-sample t -test also sustains this conclusion because it revealed that the level of implementation is significant in comparison with the level of implementation of the neutral benchmark. These results show that flight kitchens are prolific with regard to integrating the concept of sustainability in their operations likely through aggressive regulatory foundations, homogeneity of operations and expectation of the industry in aviation industry.

The concern of the environmental responsibility and competency of the human resource remains the priority of the energy efficiency and employee training. A proper training will prepare the staff to understand the best practices of sustainable operations that will contribute towards uniformity and dependability in a large scale manufacturing of food. This is also indicated in menu planning and wastes reduction because flight kitchens are trying to reach a balance between restricting their effects on the environment and efficiency of their operations. These outcomes can be discussed and correlated with the works of Chen (2022) and Blanca-Alcubilla (2021) wheels, which refer to the significance of behavioral interventions, life cycle analysis, and optimization of the processes as the primary stressors that reduce the amount of cabin food waste and increase the sustainability of airline catering.

However, the involvement of certain such practices as recycling of the food by-products or surplus food was with comparatively low levels of adoption. This may reflect operational constraints that are unique to flight kitchens including inflexible regulatory constraints on redistributing food, hygiene, and even logistical constraints relating to storage and transportation of excess food. Similar problems have been reported by Eriksson et al. (2017; 2020) in institutional kitchens, as the waste management approaches are constrained by the infrastructures and policies. This means that as much as flight kitchens are performing a commendable duty in some categories of sustainability, there is an opportunity to utilise new technological advancements particularly in regard to circular economy introduction to excess food and packaging materials. The comparative advantages of the flight kitchen relative to the institutional one are the high level of standardization and the compliance with the regulatory standards. Even though institutional kitchens are more flexible in terms of their sourcing and menu creation, there is more variability in the conformity with the sustainability practice and the food safety standards. Flight

kitchens however are subject to internationally accepted standards such as HACCP laws, ISO law and airline-specific laws that are naturally environment friendly and safe, and also favorable to food safety. This control threat works in facilitating the fact sustainability practices are not used in a sporadic manner but in a structured way that may be the reason behind high mean scores and low variability of the study.

Sustainability and food safety are also brought up as a key theme. The paper demonstrates that sustainability related to utilization of inventory, use of energy saving machines, minimization of wastes, and many others, are directly connected to safer food handling since they can mitigate spoilage risk, risk of contamination, and wasteful utilization of resources. This upholds the fact that sustainability and safety are not two separate domains that lack each other but two agencies that depend on each other to the extent that holistic approach is key in large scale catering operations.

Lastly, the study brings out the concept that flight kitchen can be regarded as ideal models of sustainable food production given the context of large-scale catering due to the systematized arrangement of processes, adherence to the regulations, and targeted activities. At the same time, there is an opportunity to enhance the food waste recycling and valorisation in terms of enhancing the environmental outcomes. The implications of the results are in the view of the policy makers, the airline operators, and the institutional kitchen managers who may be interested in emulating the best practices, improving on their efficiency and the environmental impact minimization without compromising the food safety standards. It will contribute to the research discipline in general regarding the subject matters of how sustainability and food safety can be integrated effectively in large-amount catering and give set an example to other fields of institutional food service.

OVERALL CONCLUSION

The present paper provides a comprehensive comparative study relying on the sustainability approach to the food production and food hygiene practice in flight kitchens. The findings demonstrate that it is evident that flight kitchens are struggling to apply sustainable practices but they are high in application of equipment that consume less energy, training, menu planning, and minimization of wastes. The one-sample t-test supported the alternative hypothesis and showed that the practices are used by levels that are significantly higher than the neutral value. The presentation of flight kitchens is supported by high regulatory frameworks, operational standardization and staff training which is supported by a structured approach of sustainability and food safety.

The operation structure within the flight kitchens shows that a high degree of consideration is exercised to maintain environmental responsibility and safe food handling though some of the activities such as recycling done by products of the food and surplus food are more or less under exercised. The paper establishes that sustainability and food safety are interconnected as effective utilisation of resources, minimisation of wastes and acquisition of standardisation of processes not only curtail environmental impact but also enhance the extent of hygiene, prevention of contamination, and efficiency of the entire operations in the line of business.

In comparison with institutional ones, flight kitchens demonstrate more consistency, regulating and being more strategic in doing sustainable practices, and may be considered a pattern of food production on mass scale. The research offers an accent on the necessity to introduce a complex solution which would provide a balance between the sustainability programs and high safety standards in food preparation to ensure that the large catering business operations could not be just environmental friendly but could potentially impact positively on health of the population.

Altogether, the study is applicable to the continuously developing literature in sustainable management of food service because it provides valuable information that can be implemented by policy makers, food service managers and operational managers. The outcomes give the key to the enhancement of the efficiency of operations and the reduction of the footprint on the environment besides ensuring the well-being of consumers in the high-volume catering facility through their emphasis on sustainability and safety as one..

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