

# THE ROLE OF THE 'FARM TO FORK' CONCEPT IN TOURIST SATISFACTION IN GASTRONOMIC TOURISM

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the impact of the 'Farm to Fork' concept on the development of gastronomic tourism in Serbia, with a focus on the integration of local products into the offerings of rural tourist households. Through a survey of tourists, data were collected on their perceptions, satisfaction, and willingness to recommend destinations that apply this approach. The results show that by implementing the 'Farm to Fork' strategy, rural destinations can significantly enhance their appeal, promote sustainable development, and strengthen local identity. The research highlights that this concept plays a key role in creating a competitive gastronomic offering and supporting the economic growth of rural communities. The paper provides recommendations for improving gastronomic tourism through the integration of local products and the development of sustainable practices.

**Key words:** The Farm to Fork Concept, Gastronomy, Gastronomic Tourism, Local Products

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Gastronomic tourism, as one of the most dynamic forms of tourism, has the potential to significantly contribute to the economic and cultural development of rural areas [1,2]. In this context, the 'Farm to Fork' concept emerges as a key strategy that fosters connections between local producers and the hospitality sector, creating an authentic and sustainable gastronomic offering [3,4]. This approach not only promotes the use of local ingredients but also supports the economic growth of rural communities, reduces the carbon footprint, and enhances the quality of gastronomic experiences for tourists [1,5]. Tourists visiting rural households in Serbia increasingly value the authenticity, quality, and sustainability of food, underscoring the importance of integrating local products into gastronomic offerings [2,6]. The 'Farm to Fork' concept plays a crucial role in creating a competitive advantage for these destinations while offering opportunities to strengthen local identity and culture [4]. The aim of this research is to examine the impact of the 'Farm to Fork' concept on the development of gastronomic tourism in Serbia, with a focus on tourists visiting rural households. Through a survey of tourists, the study explores their perceptions, satisfaction, and willingness to recommend destinations that implement this concept. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the potential of the 'Farm to Fork' approach in enhancing rural tourism in Serbia and fostering sustainable tourism practices.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. The 'Farm to Fork' Concept

The 'Farm to Fork' concept represents a holistic approach to a sustainable food supply chain, encompassing all steps from food production to consumption [1,2,4]. This concept aims to promote the use of local, organic, and seasonal ingredients, reducing dependence on imported products and fostering the development of the local economy [2,7]. Research indicates that this approach contributes to environmental preservation and raises awareness of the importance of sustainability. Studies suggest that integrating the 'Farm to Fork' approach into gastronomic tourism not only creates authentic tourist experiences but also supports the development of local communities by aiding small farmers and producers [2,3,7]. Gastronomic tourism plays a significant role in stimulating rural development, offering opportunities for economic enhancement, cultural heritage preservation, and the adoption of sustainable practices [8]. This type of tourism encourages tourists to explore local traditions and cultures through food, resulting in increased interest in authentic experiences. According

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to the UNWTO report (2019), gastronomic tourism is among the fastest-growing forms of tourism, with increasing interest in local and organic products [9]. Beyond its economic aspect, this type of tourism offers opportunities to strengthen social cohesion in rural areas through interactions between tourists and local residents [10].

The use of local products in gastronomic tourism is a key element of sustainability and quality [11]. According to researchers, utilizing local ingredients allows for better quality control, reduces transportation costs, and contributes to environmental protection [11,12]. Additionally, the use of local products preserves traditional production methods and recipes, which are important aspects of cultural heritage [13,14]. Research indicates that promoting local products sparks tourists' interest in learning about the origins of food and its preparation processes, thereby enriching the gastronomic experience [5,14].

## 2.2. The Connection Between the 'Farm to Fork' Concept and the Tourist Experience

Research increasingly highlights the strong connection between the application of the 'Farm to Fork' concept and the enhancement of tourists' gastronomic experiences [15]. This concept not only influences the quality of meals but also shapes the overall tourist experience, as visitors increasingly value authenticity and complete transparency in the food supply chain [16]. Knowing that food comes directly from local producers and is prepared in accordance with sustainability principles makes the tourist experience unique and unforgettable. Destinations that implement the 'Farm to Fork' concept often enjoy greater visitor loyalty. Tourists appreciate the effort invested in environmentally sustainable practices, high-quality products, and responsibility toward the local community [17]. This approach allows tourists to develop a deeper connection with the destination, offering them the opportunity to interact directly with producers and learn about local culture and traditions [18,19]. Moreover, the 'Farm to Fork' concept enables tourists to feel like part of the community they are visiting. This sense of belonging and involvement significantly enhances their overall satisfaction and often creates an emotional bond with the destination that is not easily forgotten. In this way, destinations that adopt this model are recognized for their authenticity and innovative approach to the tourist experience, making them particularly appealing to both domestic and international visitors [20,21].

## 2.3. Case Studies - Examples from Practice in Europe and Serbia

The Tuscany region is renowned for its successful integration of local products into its gastronomic offerings, which has contributed to an increase in tourist numbers and economic development. Research indicates that local restaurants and wineries in Tuscany have become key drivers of tourist attraction, offering authentic experiences that combine food, culture, and history [22,23]. Basque cuisine utilizes the 'Farm to Fork' approach as a central element of its tourism strategy, resulting in high tourist satisfaction. According to authors, this region is known for innovative ways of integrating local ingredients into modern gastronomy, attracting gastronomic enthusiasts from around the world [24,25].

In Serbia, the 'Farm to Fork' concept is gradually being implemented in gastronomic tourism, but there are already significant examples of successful practices. Rural households in the regions of Western Serbia, such as Zlatibor and Tara, actively use local products in the preparation of traditional dishes, attracting tourists seeking authentic experiences. According to research, these regions show great potential for further development of the 'Farm to Fork' concept through producer education and the promotion of local specialties [26].

Based on the previously reviewed literature, the following two research questions have been formulated:

**RQ1.** Are tourists willing to recommend destinations that apply the 'Farm to Fork' concept?

**RQ2.** Which demographic groups of tourists show the highest satisfaction in the context of the 'Farm to Fork' concept?

## 3. METODOLOGY

The research methodology relies on a quantitative approach aimed at examining the impact of the 'Farm to Fork' concept on the development of gastronomic tourism in Serbia. Data were collected

through a survey questionnaire, which covered key aspects such as the demographic characteristics of tourists, their perception of the concept, and their willingness to recommend destinations that apply this approach. The sample comprised 264 respondents visiting rural tourist households known for integrating local products into their gastronomic offerings, selected using a random sampling method. The sample included tourists with diverse demographic profiles, such as gender, age, education level, and place of residence, enabling a comprehensive analysis of their attitudes and behaviors.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics to present the basic characteristics of the sample, including mean values, standard deviations, and frequencies, providing a clear overview of demographic and other relevant parameters. Additionally, t-tests and ANOVA were employed to compare mean satisfaction levels and willingness to recommend among different groups of tourists, such as those defined by gender and age categories. To examine the association between categorical variables, such as destination choice and the application of the 'Farm to Fork' concept, the Chi-square test was utilized. This combination of methods enabled a thorough examination of the relationship between tourists' perceptions and their intentions to recommend destinations. Data processing was performed using SPSS software, ensuring accurate and reliable statistical analysis. The results of this research provide a detailed insight into the role of the 'Farm to Fork' concept in enriching tourists' gastronomic experiences and enhancing tourism offerings in Serbia.

#### 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

Regarding the gender of the respondents, the majority are male, with a total of 154 participants (58.33%), while women make up a smaller portion of the sample, with 110 respondents (41.67%). This distribution indicates a slight predominance of male participants in the study. The analysis of the age structure shows that the largest group of respondents belongs to the 30 to 49 age category, comprising 94 individuals (35.61%). The next largest group is young adults aged 18 to 29, with 66 participants (25.00%). Respondents aged 50 to 59 constitute 21.97% of the sample (58 individuals), while the smallest group is those aged 60 and older, with 46 respondents (17.42%). This age distribution indicates diversity within the sample, with the highest representation among middle-aged individuals. In terms of educational attainment, the majority of respondents have completed secondary education, accounting for 37.50% of the sample (99 individuals). A similar proportion belongs to the group with higher education, including university degrees, with 36.36% of respondents (96 individuals). Participants with completed master's degrees make up 21.21% of the sample (56 individuals), while those with doctoral degrees are significantly fewer, totaling 9 respondents (3.41%). Notably, there were no respondents without formal education, and only 4 individuals (1.52%) had completed primary school. This educational structure indicates a relatively high level of qualification among the sample, given the significant proportion of respondents with advanced educational credentials.

*Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of Respondents*

		N	%
Gender	Male	154	58.33
	Female	110	41.67
Age	18 - 29 year	66	25.00
	30 - 49 year	94	35.61
	50 - 59 year	58	21.97
	+60 year	46	17.42
Education	No formal education	0	0
	Completed primary school	4	1.52
	Completed secondary school	99	37.50
	Completed higher education or university degree	96	36.36
	Completed master's degree	56	21.21
	Completed doctoral degree	9	3.41

Based on the presented map of the Republic of Serbia (Figure 1), which illustrates the research area with marked municipalities and the number of respondents, the following conclusions can be

drawn: The research was conducted in several municipalities across Serbia, with the number of respondents in each varying from 3 to 11. The study included municipalities such as Arandelovac, Bela Crkva, Dimitrovgrad, Loznica, Priboj, Sombor, and others, clearly marked on the map with the corresponding numbers of respondents. The number of respondents per municipality is indicated in parentheses, and each municipality is displayed in a different color for easier identification. The map shows the geographical distribution of the research sample, covering various regions of Serbia, from northern areas (Sombor, Subotica) to the southern parts of the country (Raška, Novi Pazar). This distribution allows for the analysis of territorial differences and specificities related to the research topic. The data on the map were created using QGIS software, enabling precise visualization and clear representation of territorial data. This map represents a key component of the research methodology, as it provides insight into the spatial distribution of respondents and municipalities included in the study. Displaying the number of respondents per municipality aids in assessing the proportionality and representativeness of the sample, which is crucial for interpreting the results and drawing research conclusions.

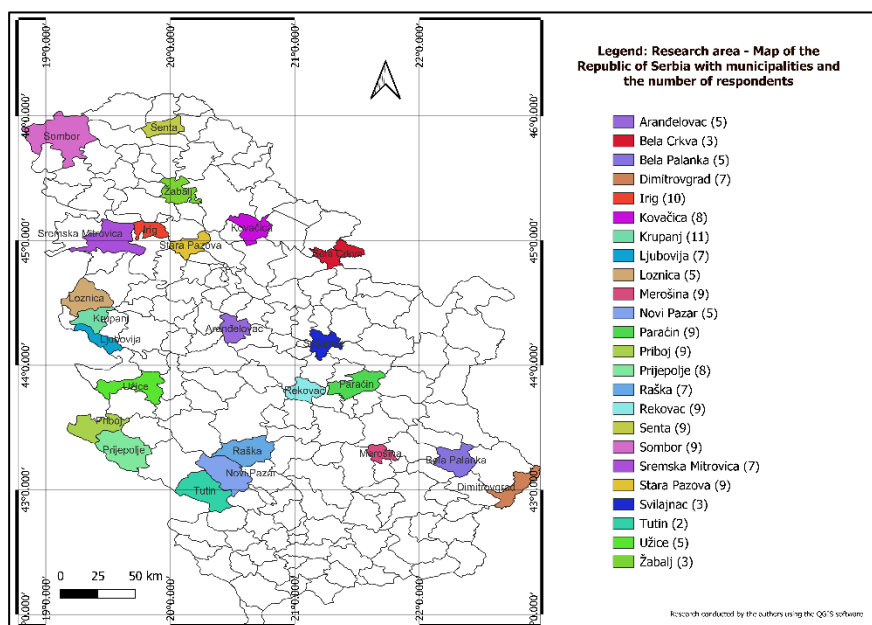


Figure 1. Research area

The research results on the perception of the 'Farm to Fork' concept (Table 2) indicate a highly positive attitude among respondents toward the key aspects of this approach in gastronomic tourism. The first statement, "Local products enhance the gastronomic experience," received strong support, with 45% of respondents fully agreeing and 35% agreeing. This suggests that most tourists recognize the significance of local products not only as high-quality ingredients but also as part of the cultural and gastronomic identity of a destination. Only 5% of respondents expressed a negative attitude, while 15% were neutral, indicating that a small portion of tourists may not be fully aware of the impact of local products on their overall experience. The second statement, "Sustainability is important in gastronomic tourism," was also rated highly, with 50% of respondents fully agreeing and 30% agreeing. This demonstrates that tourists increasingly value ecological and sustainable practices in gastronomy, as well as the efforts of destinations to minimize their environmental impact. Only 5% of respondents expressed disagreement, indicating that sustainability is widely recognized as an important factor contributing to the attractiveness of a destination.

The third statement, "The authenticity of food impacts destination choice," highlights the importance of local and traditional elements in creating a tourist experience. A total of 80% of respondents either agreed or fully agreed with this statement, showing that food authenticity is one of the main criteria when deciding to visit a specific destination. Only 5% of respondents expressed a negative attitude, suggesting that the majority of tourists value food as a way to connect with the

culture and traditions of a destination. These results clearly demonstrate that tourists highly value the aspects of the 'Farm to Fork' concept, including local products, sustainability, and authenticity. The positive perception of these elements underscores the need for further development of strategies that promote local and sustainable practices in gastronomic tourism, contributing to the competitiveness of destinations and tourist satisfaction. This analysis provides a solid foundation for future recommendations and the development of the 'Farm to Fork' model as an integral part of gastronomic tourism.

*Table 2. Perception of the 'Farm to Fork' Concept Among Tourists*

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Local products enhance gastronomic experience	45	35	15	4	1
Sustainability is important in food tourism	50	30	15	3	2
Authenticity of food impacts destination choice	40	40	15	4	1

The research results on tourists' intention to recommend destinations applying the 'Farm to Fork' concept (Table 3) indicate a very positive attitude among the majority of respondents. The largest proportion of respondents, 55%, expressed a strong intention to recommend such destinations, selecting the response "Definitely recommend." This reflects a high level of satisfaction and a positive experience gained by tourists visiting destinations that implement this concept. An additional 30% of respondents expressed a likely intention to recommend these destinations, which, together with the first group, constitutes a total of 85% of respondents with a positive attitude. This result suggests that the 'Farm to Fork' concept significantly influences tourists' perception and their willingness to promote these destinations.

On the other hand, 10% of respondents took a neutral stance, which may indicate that some tourists were not sufficiently engaged or that their experience was not prominent enough to inspire a strong intention to recommend. Negative responses were minimal, with only 4% of respondents unlikely to recommend the destinations and just 1% completely excluding the possibility of a recommendation. These data indicate that the 'Farm to Fork' concept has a significant impact on tourist satisfaction and loyalty. The high percentage of positive responses reflects the potential of this approach in creating a competitive advantage for destinations and enhancing their recognition in the gastronomic tourism market. This result further supports the need for the promotion and development of the 'Farm to Fork' model in rural and gastronomic destinations.

*Table 3. Tourists' Intention to Recommend 'Farm to Fork' Destinations*

Response	Percentage (%)
Definitely Recommend	55
Likely Recommend	30
Neutral	10
Unlikely Recommend	4
Definitely Not Recommend	1

Table 4 presents the results of the ANOVA analysis that examined differences in the average satisfaction level of tourists (on a scale from 1 to 5) based on respondents' gender. The analyzed data include the mean satisfaction level, standard deviation, and sample size for male and female respondents, as well as the overall statistical parameters of the analysis. The results show that males have an average satisfaction level of 4.2 with a standard deviation of 0.6 in a sample of 154 respondents, while females have a slightly higher average satisfaction level of 4.5 with a standard deviation of 0.5 in a sample of 110 respondents. Differences between these groups were confirmed by statistical testing, yielding an F-value of 4.87. The p-value of 0.03 indicates that the difference in mean satisfaction levels between males and females is statistically significant, as it is below the conventional significance threshold ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ).

These results indicate that there are significant differences in tourist satisfaction levels based on gender. Females exhibit higher levels of satisfaction compared to males, which may reflect differing priorities, perceptions, or experiences in gastronomic tourism. This is particularly important for destinations implementing the 'Farm to Fork' concept, as it suggests that females may place greater value on aspects such as authenticity, local products, or sustainability.

This analysis provides valuable insights into the needs and expectations of different tourist groups. The results can serve as a foundation for creating targeted tourist offerings that better address the specific needs of males and females, thereby increasing tourist satisfaction and loyalty to destinations. These findings underscore the importance of the 'Farm to Fork' concept as a key element in the development of gastronomic tourism.

*Table 4. ANOVA Analysis of Tourist Satisfaction by Gender*

Gender	Mean Satisfaction (1-5)	Standard Deviation	Sample Size (N)	F-Value	p-Value
Male	4.2	0.6	154	4.87	0.03
Female	4.5	0.5	110		

## 5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The research results provide a clear insight into tourists' perceptions, satisfaction, and their willingness to recommend destinations that apply the 'Farm to Fork' concept, confirming two research questions:

RQ1. Are tourists willing to recommend destinations that apply the 'Farm to Fork' concept?

RQ2. Which demographic groups of tourists show the highest satisfaction in the context of the 'Farm to Fork' concept?

In the context of the intention to recommend destinations, the results show that the majority of tourists (85%) are positively inclined to recommend, with 55% of respondents expressing a strong intention to recommend such destinations and an additional 30% likely to recommend. These data indicate a high level of tourist satisfaction and their connection to the 'Farm to Fork' concept, confirming research question RQ1. The low rate of negative responses (only 5% of respondents are not inclined to recommend) further emphasizes the success of destinations implementing this approach.

Regarding tourist satisfaction, the analysis reveals significant differences between males and females. Females exhibit higher levels of satisfaction (mean value 4.5) compared to males (4.2), which was confirmed by statistically significant results ( $p = 0.03$ ). These findings support research question RQ2, indicating that demographic factors, such as gender, influence tourists' perceptions and satisfaction. The difference in satisfaction suggests that females may be more inclined to value local products and authenticity in gastronomic tourism.

Overall, the research results highlight that tourists highly value the 'Farm to Fork' concept, which positively impacts their satisfaction and willingness to recommend. The confirmation of both research questions underscores the importance of this approach in gastronomic tourism and provides guidelines for developing tourism strategies aimed at meeting the satisfaction of specific demographic groups, thereby further increasing the competitiveness of destinations implementing the 'Farm to Fork' model.

## 6. IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The results of this research have significant theoretical and practical implications that can contribute to the improvement of gastronomic tourism and the application of the 'Farm to Fork' concept. On a theoretical level, the research expands existing knowledge about the role of the 'Farm to Fork' concept in tourism, emphasizing the importance of local products, sustainability, and authenticity in creating a positive tourist experience. The findings show that these aspects significantly influence tourists' perceptions and satisfaction, enriching theoretical models that link gastronomy with tourist experiences. The research also provides insight into demographic differences, such as gender,

which affect satisfaction levels, further enhancing studies on variability in tourist attitudes. Additionally, the results underscore the importance of sustainable approaches in tourism, offering a foundation for further research into the integration of sustainable practices in various aspects of tourism.

On a practical level, the research results provide guidelines for developing strategies to enhance gastronomic tourism. Destinations can use these findings to improve their offerings by emphasizing local products, authenticity, and sustainability, which significantly contribute to tourist satisfaction and their willingness to recommend a destination. Differences in perceptions between men and women allow for the creation of specific marketing strategies targeting different tourist groups. Campaigns aimed at women, for example, can highlight aspects of authenticity and sustainability, which are more important to this group. The research also highlights the need for greater investment in supporting local communities, strengthening the economy by increasing demand for local products and traditional gastronomic practices. Furthermore, tourism organizations can focus on educating tourists to raise awareness about the importance of sustainability and authenticity, thereby enhancing the overall tourist experience. The findings can also serve as a basis for developing performance indicators for destinations implementing the 'Farm to Fork' concept, enabling managers to monitor tourist satisfaction and the effects of their practices. Overall, this research provides valuable insights for both the academic community and tourism practitioners, offering guidelines for improving gastronomic tourism through the integration of the 'Farm to Fork' concept while simultaneously strengthening sustainability and local economic development.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The results of this research clearly demonstrate the significance of the 'Farm to Fork' concept in gastronomic tourism, emphasizing its impact on tourist satisfaction and their willingness to recommend destinations. The research questions were successfully confirmed, highlighting the strong connection between the tourist experience and the characteristics of destinations implementing this approach. Tourists are largely willing to recommend destinations that integrate local products into their offerings, with 85% of respondents expressing a positive attitude toward recommendation. This result indicates that the 'Farm to Fork' concept is a powerful factor in tourist satisfaction and loyalty. The research also reveals that demographic factors, such as gender, influence tourists' perceptions and satisfaction levels. Women, who report higher average satisfaction levels compared to men, represent an important target group for further improvement of tourism strategies.

The findings provide valuable guidelines for the development of tourism offerings. Destinations implementing the 'Farm to Fork' model should continue to emphasize local products and authenticity as their key strengths. At the same time, marketing campaigns and tourism programs should be tailored to different demographic groups to increase satisfaction and the number of recommendations. Overall, this study underscores the importance of the 'Farm to Fork' concept as a strategic element in the development of gastronomic tourism, highlighting its potential to strengthen tourism offerings, enhance satisfaction, and foster long-term tourist loyalty. The research results can serve as a foundation for further studies and the application of this approach in various tourism contexts.

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