

Review

# Is Buying Local Food a Sustainable Practice? A Scoping Review of Consumers' Preference for Local Food

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**Abstract:** Access to healthy food and the introduction of sustainable nutrition practices are two important issues today. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new challenges to food security but it has also provided opportunities for local food production. The discussion on local food has been gaining attention in recent years, but there is still a lack of clear understanding of the term 'local food' in the literature. The relationship between local food and sustainability issues is still unclear and has various connotations. This discordance leads to further discussions on whether buying local food should be considered a sustainable behavior and whether consumer preference for local food can be perceived as a sustainable practice. A scoping literature review was conducted in order to fill this gap and to shed light on the main tendencies of the scientific literature regarding this topic. The outcomes of the research revealed three dimensions of 'local food' definitions in the literature: geographical, geopolitical, and organic; while the problem of a unified local food definition remains open. The studied literature did not show any sound evidence for sustainability attributes in the definition of local food and consumer perception of local food.



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**Keywords:** local food; local food definition; sustainable lifestyle; consumer preferences; scoping review

## 1. Introduction

Improving the quality of life of the population and introducing sustainable practices into people's daily life has appeared on the agenda of global society [1]. Access to healthy food and the introduction of sustainable nutrition practices are two important challenges today. The growing interest in sustainable practices and high-quality and healthy products is reflected in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): goal 2, 'end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture' [2]. Support of short food supply chains (SFSC) may be one of the solutions to achieve this goal. SFSCs are considered as drivers of sustainable development, as they increase sustainability in all its dimensions; they reduce economic uncertainties, ensure fairness and trust between consumers and producers, and minimize pollution [3]. SFSCs are often associated with the concept of 'local food' and 'local food systems' but the connection between these concepts remains unclear [3–5]. Furthermore, the factors influencing consumer preference towards local food have obtained limited attention among scholars [6].

The application of sustainable practices is important and beneficial for SFSC stakeholders: producers, buying organizations, local governments, and consumers. Indeed, local food has been promoted by governmental and civil society organizations for decades [7]. Raising awareness of local food consumption as a sustainable practice among stakeholders could contribute to the further promotion of local food production and distribution.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new challenges for food security and social and economic systems, but at the same time, it has provided opportunities for local food production. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has conducted a survey among different cities in order to monitor local food system status during the

COVID-19 pandemic. About 40 percent of the cities that responded to the survey indicated that restrictive measures on human mobility introduced during the pandemic have led to a shortage of labor in local agriculture and food-related activities. The respondents further stated that the shortage of labor negatively affected local food production [8]. In this report, the FAO identified five main areas to support local food production and create resilient local food systems. One of these areas is promotion of local food production and providing SFSCs with a greater degree of self-sufficiency. The new barriers to, and opportunities for, local food production during the COVID-19 pandemic have been studied in the scientific literature. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced both customers and restaurants to shift their food habits to more locally grown products; therefore, purchasing local food products has become one of the most notable sustainable practices [9]. The COVID-19 pandemic will have long-lasting effects on food supply chains, including the growth of online grocery shopping and the extent to which consumers will prioritize 'local' food supply chains [10]. While in some countries the COVID-19 pandemic significantly restricted local food systems and created more food insecurity, in other countries local food systems continued to operate and were even strengthened by higher social capital and adaptive capacities [11].

Despite local food gaining attention in recent years, at both scientific and public policy levels (not least, because of COVID-19 pandemic), there is still a lack of clear understanding of the term 'local food' in the literature [7,12,13]. Furthermore, the relationship between local food and sustainability issues is still unclear and has various connotations, depending on the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainability [14,15]. This discordance leads to further discussions about whether buying local food is considered a sustainable behavior and whether consumer preference for local food can be perceived as a sustainable practice. A scoping literature review was conducted, in order to fill this gap and to shed light on the following problems:

1. What are the main characteristics and tendencies in the scientific literature regarding consumers' preference for local food?
2. Is there evidence about local food sustainability and is the consumers' preference for local food considered as sustainable in the studied literature?

The choice of the research questions was conditioned by the expected theoretical relevance of the research. The research was aimed at providing a space for a discussion on the topics of local food definition, the interplay between local and organic food attributes, and the role of sustainability attributes in consumers' preference for local food. In order to answer the research questions, the authors of the study chose a scoping literature review as a research method. The scoping review helped to assess the state of affairs of the above-mentioned topics, as well as to determine the main directions for further studies. The paper is organized as follows. The methodology applied in the study is explained in Section 2, which provides details of the steps of the review process, inclusion criteria, and literature selection. Section 3 provides results and discussion on the topic. This section presents an explanation and analysis of the main research trends revealed in the studied literature and evidence about the sustainability issues of local food found in the studied literature. Conclusions are presented in Section 4.

## 2. Research Methodology

A scoping review was chosen as research method to conduct the study. This method was introduced by Arksey and O'Malley in 2005 [16]. Unlike a systematic review, which usually focuses on a well-defined question and provides answers from a relatively narrow range of quality assessed literature, a scoping review addresses broader topics and does not attempt to address very specific research questions or to assess the quality of the included studies. A scoping review usually performs a qualitative synthesis of the studied literature [16–18]. Scoping reviews help to identify the gaps in the evidence base, as well as summarizing and disseminating research findings [16]. The subject areas where this research method is used most are medicine and nursing, but it has been gaining popularity in social science research in recent years. According to the methodological framework

introduced in [16], a scoping review comprises five stages: (1) identifying the research question; (2) identifying relevant studies; (3) study selection; (4) charting the data; and (5) collating, summarizing, and reporting the results.

In the first stage (identifying the research question) of the review, the research questions were formulated after rigorous examination of the context of the investigated domain. The research questions are presented in the introduction section of this study and highlight its purpose. Since a scoping review is aimed at performing a qualitative summary of trends in a topic, the research questions of this study were designed to identify the main characteristics and tendencies in the scientific literature regarding consumers' preference for local food and to reveal sustainability issues presented in the retrieved sample.

The identification of relevant studies stage included the formulation of inclusion criteria, presented in Table 1, and keyword combinations. The combination of keywords used in the research was 'consumer preferenc\*' and 'local food'. The limited number of keywords was chosen to purposely concentrate on a certain, very limited literature sample, as the main purpose of the research was to unravel the existence of sustainability attributes of consumer preferences for local food. No keywords including 'sustainability' and its derivatives were used, for the same purpose. The research was based on the analysis of journals that are peer-reviewed. In order to assure the academic quality of the studied literature, databases that guarantee peer-reviewing of the articles were chosen (Scopus and Web of Science). Despite the fact that the first studies on consumers' preference for local food appeared more than 20 years ago, the authors agreed to explore papers published between 2011 and 2021, in order to study the state-of-art in the literature on the topic in a 10-year period. Interest in local food issues surged in the scientific literature in 2013, when we observed a significant increase of the number of papers on the topic, compared with the previous years. However, the year 2011 was marked by a food crisis, when The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization food-price index rose to a record high [19]. The social and economic impacts of this crisis could possibly have drawn more attention to local food issues. Taking these points into consideration, the authors found it interesting to study the development of the topic starting from the year 2011.

**Table 1.** Inclusion criteria.

Type of Inclusion Criteria	Characteristic of Inclusion Criteria
Document type	Articles and research papers
Time period	From 2011 till July 2021
Language	English
Geography	Worldwide
Databases	Scopus, Web of Science

The study selection stage of the scoping review included two rounds of paper screening and exclusion. In the first screening, the abstracts of the papers were thoroughly read. At this stage, 66 papers were chosen. In the second screening the authors focused on the full text, and all the articles were read twice, to ensure that the remaining articles met the researcher's requirements. After the second round of the selection process, 54 articles remained, these articles formed the basis of the research.

In the fourth stage of the research, data charting was conducted using content analysis. The categories chosen for the content analysis aimed to reflect the research questions posed in the first stage of the research. The categories included author name(s) and location, year of publication, study location, type of food studied, purposes of study, methodology, and results. When the above-mentioned categories were identified, each article was read again, in order to elicit data for each category of the content analysis.

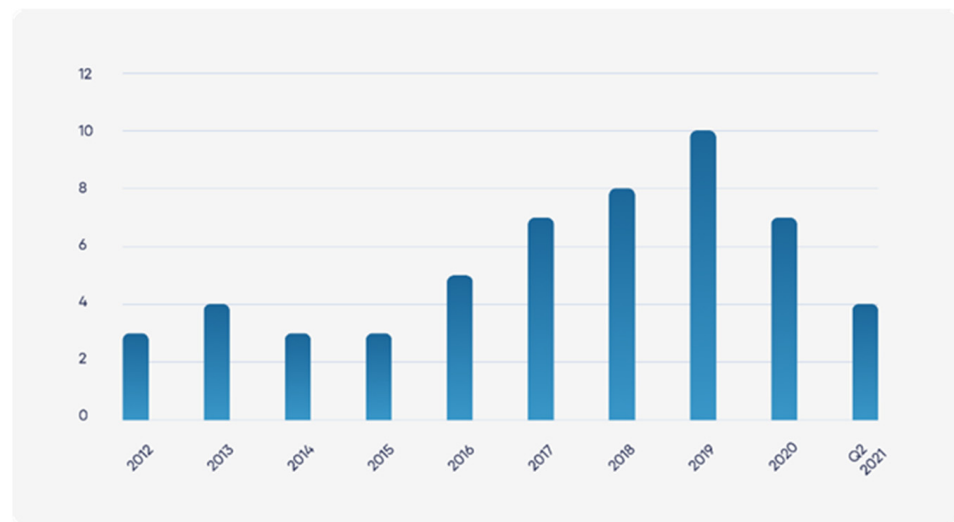
In the fifth stage, collating, summarizing, and reporting of the results was conducted; in order to do so, the data extracted by means of content analysis was analyzed. In Section 3 of this paper, the outcomes of the study are presented.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The study of the scientific literature on the consumers' preference for local food has revealed some tendencies that will be discussed in the following paragraph.

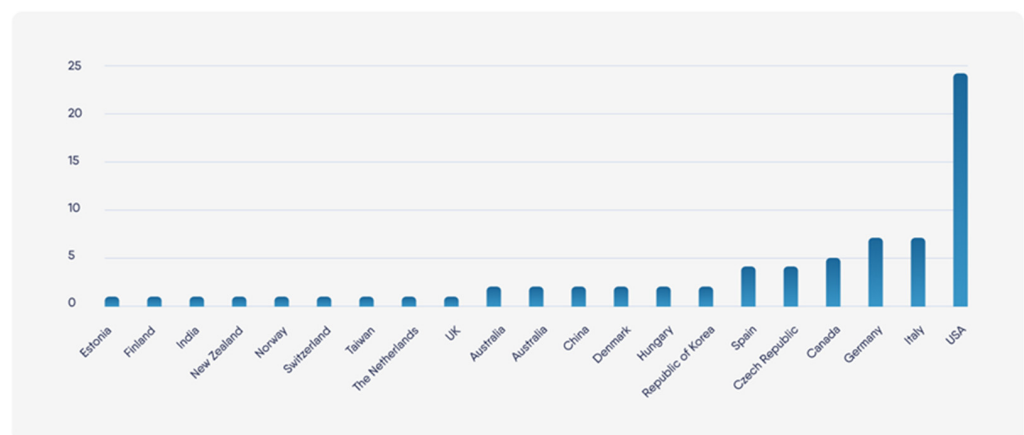
#### 3.1. Study Characteristics

The literature retrieved shows a steady growing trend of the research in the field of consumers' preference for local food starting from 2016 (Figure 1). Although we observe a slight decrease in the studies in the year 2020, the decrease can be explained by the COVID-19 pandemic. Given that almost all the studies were conducted using surveys the lockdowns made it impossible to conduct the research properly. The literature sample comprises 2 quarters of the year 2021 and as we can see the number of literature publications in 6 months of 2021, we may expect that the total number of the studies in 2021 will approach the pre-COVID period.



**Figure 1.** Literature publications per year.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the literature works by the countries which the researchers whose papers we examined in this study belong. The leader of research on consumer preference for local food is the USA, with 24 papers on the topic. Italy and Germany have seven papers each, which make them European leaders in research in the field of consumer preference for local food. We also observed the presence of research from Canada (5 papers), and Czech Republic and Spain (4 papers).



**Figure 2.** Distribution of the literature by country.



Table 2. Cont.

	Australia	Canada	Denmark	Estonia	Finland	Germany	Guadeloupe	Hungary	India	Italy	New Zealand	Spain	USA
seaweed salad													/
steak						/							
strawberries													/
tomatoes						/					/		/
wine						/							
yams							/						

Table 3 represents the distribution of the keywords used in the studied papers by frequency, in a numerical expression and in percentage. A significant finding of this analysis was that the only keywords that included the word ‘sustainable’ or its derivatives were ‘sustainable food’, which was mentioned twice [20,21] in the studied literature, which amounts to ‘sustainable food’ only being included in 3.92% of all the keywords used; and with ‘sustainability’ being mentioned three times, 5.88% [22,23]. This outcome underlines that sustainable issues were not widely studied in the literature sample.

Table 3. Distribution of the keywords by frequency.

Word Combination	Frequency	%	Rank
local food	29	56.86	1
willingness to pay	14	27.45	2
consumer preferences	13	25.49	3
organic	13	25.49	3
choice experiment	11	21.57	5
analysis	7	13.73	6
attributes	6	11.76	7
consumer behavior	5	9.80	8
consumer preference	4	7.84	9
local foods	4	7.84	9
oysters	4	7.84	9
regional food	4	7.84	9
latent class	3	5.88	13
marketing	3	5.88	13
perception	3	5.88	13
product	3	5.88	13
sustainability	3	5.88	13
branding program	2	3.92	18
choice experiments	2	3.92	18
choice-based conjoint analysis	2	3.92	18
cider	2	3.92	18
class segmentation	2	3.92	18
component analysis	2	3.92	18
conjoint analysis	2	3.92	18
consumer behavior	2	3.92	18
consumer demand	2	3.92	18
country of origin	2	3.92	18
credence attributes	2	3.92	18
discrete choice experiment	2	3.92	18
economics	2	3.92	18
experiments	2	3.92	18

Table 3. Cont.

Word Combination	Frequency	%	Rank
farm	2	3.92	18
farmers	2	3.92	18
field experiment	2	3.92	18
food miles	2	3.92	18
food origin	2	3.92	18
food system	2	3.92	18
health	2	3.92	18
horticulture	2	3.92	18
latent class segmentation	2	3.92	18
logistic regression	2	3.92	18
market	2	3.92	18
organic production	2	3.92	18
price	2	3.92	18
principal component analysis	2	3.92	18
production	2	3.92	18
quality perception	2	3.92	18
seafood	2	3.92	18
supply chain	2	3.92	18
sustainable food	2	3.92	18
tomatoes	2	3.92	18

Figure 3 represents a word cloud of the keywords of the studied papers. As in Table 4, we see the common presence of the keyword combinations ‘local food’, ‘consumer preferences’, and ‘willingness to pay’, which is obvious for this research, since these keywords were used to retrieve the sample. Other noticeable keywords are related to the research and analysis methods applied in the studies: ‘choice experiment’, ‘principal component analysis’, and ‘logistic regression’. Another interesting finding was the frequent presence of the keyword ‘organic’, which stresses the link between local and organic food concepts, and which we will discuss later in the paper.



Figure 3. Keyword word cloud.

Table 4. Research method.

Paper	Methodology
Holmes and Yan 2012 [24]	hypothetical choice experiment
Lesschaeve et al. 2012 [25]	online survey
Carroll et al. 2012 [26]	choice experiment
Grebitus et al. 2013 [27]	experimental auction, non-hypothetical Vickrey auction
Kalabova et al. 2013 [28]	online/offline questionnaire survey
Rikkonen et al. 2013 [29]	online questionnaires or/and phone interviews
Tempesta and Vecchiato 2013 [30]	choice experiment
Denver and Jensen 2014 [31]	choice experiment
Gracia 2014 [32]	real choice experiment
Moor et al. 2014 [33]	Survey
Barlagne et al. 2015 [34]	an economic experiment
Hasselbach and Roosen 2015 [35]	Interviews
Meas et al. 2015 [36]	choice experiment
Aprile et al. 2016 [37]	Survey
Hempel and Hamm 2016a [38]	survey, choice experiment
Hempel and Hamm 2016b [39]	offline survey, choice experiment
Lim and Hu 2016 [40]	choice experiment
Schifani et al. 2016 [41]	face-to-face questionnaire
Berg and Preston, 2017 [42]	online and offline survey
Ferrazzi et al. 2017 [43]	Survey
Kecinski et al. 2017 [44]	dichotomous choice field experiment
Mugera et al. 2017 [45]	random utility discrete choice model framework
Palmer et al. 2017 [46]	focus groups, survey
Sanova et al., 2017 [47]	Survey
Singh et al. 2017 [48]	semi-structured and structured interviews
Arsil et al. 2018 [49]	Survey
Brayden et al. 2018 [50]	online survey, choice experiment
Byrd et al. 2018 [51]	online survey, choice experiments
Hashem et al. 2018 [52]	semi-structured interviews, survey
Picha and Skorepa 2018 [22]	Survey
Picha et al. 2018 [53]	offline survey
Printezis and Grebitus 2018 [54]	hypothetical online choice experiment
Wenzig and Gruchmann 2018 [55]	Survey
Annunziata et al. 2019 [20]	self-administered questionnaire
Denver et al. 2019 [56]	quantitative survey, choice experiment
Fan et al. 2019 [57]	economic experiment
Farris et al. 2019 [58]	discrete choice experiment
Meyerding and Trajer 2019 [59]	survey, choice experiment
Meyerding et al. 2019 [60]	survey, choice experiment
Profeta and Hamm 2019 [61]	Interviews
Richard and Pivarnik 2019 [62]	Survey
Skallerud and Wien 2019 [63]	Survey
Werner et al. 2019 [64]	focus groups
Chen et al. 2020 [21]	online survey
Kiss et al. 2020 [65]	online survey
Li et al. 2020a [66]	framed field experiment
Li et al. 2020b [67]	incentive-compatible framed field experiment
Oravec et al. 2020 [68]	personal interview by a paper-based questionnaire with open and decisive questions
Sanjuan-Lopez and Resano-Ezcaray 2020 [23]	hypothetical and real choice experiments
Yang and Leung 2020 [69]	hedonic price model
Attalah et al. 2021 [70]	choice experiment
He et al. 2021 [71]	Experiment
Jensen et al. 2021 [72]	online survey
Moreno and Malone 2021 [73]	a discrete choice experiment, the open-ended survey



Table 4 shows the methodologies applied in the studied literature. Since, all the articles studied consumer preferences for local food, in most of the cases, quantitative methods of analysis were applied: offline and online consumer surveys with open-end and closed-end questions and choice experiments. Some research works applied qualitative methods, such as focus groups and interviews, in order to gather evidence.

### 3.2. Evidence on Consumer Preference for Local Food

#### 3.2.1. Research Trends

As was previously mentioned, local food is a relatively new concept, and the criteria for local food are still not clear [7,12]. Despite this fact, a number of studies have analyzed consumer preferences for local food products in the last decade. Some scholars studied the motives of consumers regarding local food preference; examining general and subjective attributes of local food that influence consumer choices [36,44,70]. Furthermore, with the growing consumer interest towards local food, the issues of introducing local food to market and local food producer positioning have emerged and represent a motive for further studies of local food and consumer attitudes towards it.

The studies in the field were conducted in various directions, and were mostly focused on (1) consumers and their motives and attitudes towards local food (possible research questions: Who chooses local food? Why choose local food?); and (2) local food and its attributes (possible research questions: What is local food? What food characteristics strengthen the intention to buy local food?). Apart from the generic investigation of consumer preferences for local food, usually for a certain product type, the main research directions in the studied literature could be divided into five categories:

Comparison of consumer preferences for local and organic food:

1. Understanding the motives underlying consumer behavior when buying local food.
2. Consumer segmentation and characteristics, according to their preference for local food or initial division of consumers into groups, in order to reveal differences in consumer behavior.
3. Study of food attributes influencing consumer attitudes towards local food (e.g., marketing channels, quality attributes, labelling strategies, certification status, etc.).
4. Consumer perception and definition of local food.

A further analysis of research objectives of the corpus of the studied literature may shed light on the main research trends in the domain of consumer attitude towards local food.

#### Local vs. Organic

Local vs organic food preferences were compared in several papers. A group of scholars claimed that consumers prefer products with both local and organic attributes; those consumers who prefer conventional products to local or organic appear to be price and 'habit' driven [24]. Another research work [31] revealed that the positive perception of organic products affects the preference for locally produced products positively. In [34], the researchers studied consumer preferences for yam and found that the consumers were supportive of both local and organic yam. Scholars in [35] found similar motives for organic and local food choices. The results of another study [36] confirmed a positive willingness to pay (WTP) for both organic and local attributes; the study also found strong substitution effects between organic and local production. The results of [38,39] revealed that consumers prefer locally produced food to organic food. It was stated in [50] that consumers are predisposed to pay more for local production than for organic certification. Households with children and those with a higher degree of adherence to the Mediterranean diet had higher probabilities of buying both organic and local products, while increasing household size reduced the likelihood of buying local products, in [20]. Another research work [21] showed that locally produced fresh produce receives the highest preference ranking, while organic products receive the highest price premium.

Some evidence of the role of natural attributes was found in the literature. Consumers pay increasing attention to natural production practices, as well as to organic ones [36].

The majority of respondents (60.4%) in [37] agreed that local food is more natural, in terms of being grown without pesticides. The participants of the surveys in [59,60] who were concerned about food quality preferred to buy natural food of local origin. In [21], ‘naturally grown’ was seen as one of the value-added characteristics of a product, together with organic and locally produced. This topic is of interest for future studies.

### Consumer Motives

Consumer motives for buying local food vary, from altruistic, to the most pragmatic. The main consumer motives to buy local food in [24] were support of the local economy and local farmers. Socio-demographic characteristics, perceptions of freshness, taste, and food safety, as well as support of the local economy impact WTP for local foods; at the same time, environmental attitudes do not affect WTP for local food [27]. Food safety, better taste, and altruistic motivation to support the local economy are among the motives of consumers for choosing local products [33]. Among the motives for buying local food, another research study [35] mentioned natural, animal welfare, sensory appeal, health, and price. One of the reasons consumers purchase organic or local products is to support small or family-owned farms [36]. The main motive for buying locally was the solidarity towards local communities, in the research of [41]. Supporting the local and regional economy was reported as an important reason to purchase local food in the study of [46]. A group of researchers [48] suggested a special role for local products in saving traditional food culture. The main motives for purchasing local products in [49] were price, food quality, saving money, money for other things, time for other things, sense of accomplishment, and happiness. The research of [52] revealed that the consumers who choose local products were more altruistically and hedonistically motivated. Moral norms play an important role in the intention to buy local food [55]. In another research work [63], local patriotism influenced the preference for local food. In [64], maintaining local farmland and supporting the local economy were named as the main consumer motives for buying local food. Consumers in the following research, [73], associated local products with their local food identity.

### Consumer Segmentation

Consumer segmentation and characteristics help to obtain a more accurate picture of the consumer. The researchers in [25] described the consumers as ‘confident in Ontario produce’, ‘organic buyers relying on visual signals’, and ‘socially responsible locavores’. A moderate dependence of the respondent’s decision-making process on occupation, education, age, and regional differences was revealed in [28]. With regard to the frequency of buying local products, consumers were divided into habitual buyers (45%), occasional buyers (43%), and unusual buyers (7%) in the research of [37]. Consumer’s WTP for local food is positively associated with age and income [42]. There are two main segments of local food consumers: value-for-money, and health benefits [49]. The purchase of local products was more significant for consumers from smaller settlements and villages than those from cities [65]. A group of scholars [67] compared the buying behavior of locals and tourists, and found out that both groups were willing to pay more for local oysters than for nonlocal ones.

### Local Food Attributes

Local food attributes that influence the positive attitude of consumers towards local food were also studied in the literature. Logos certifying region of origin were among the main attributes that drive the interest and willingness to pay of consumers [25]. The consumers in the following study, [26], were more concerned about the location attributes of the products than production methods. In another research work [29], consumers preferred to buy products directly from farmers or via small distributors rather than from large chain-stores. About half of the respondents preferred a certain local milk mode (milk produced on the plain and not on the mountains) in the research in [30]. Consumers positively valued both ‘locally grown’ and the type of meat attributes in [32]. The researchers in [37]

supported this idea, as buying directly from farmers or producers assured the consumers on the source of production. In the research of another group of scholars [44], respondents showed no preference for a specific location and did not exhibit preferences for 'local' product. The local attributes of the products in the following study, [45], were associated with high-quality products. Participants of the survey in [46] especially mentioned the social attributes of local food. The respondents who preferred local food, looked for food from environmental-friendly and socially-responsible producers in [22]. The attributes that drive consumer choice of local food are higher quality, complying with their requirements, and habits, as stated in [53]. According to [54], consumers were not willing to pay premiums for local food that is sold at farmers markets. Information stating that the product was locally grown had a positive effect on both consumer WTP and quality perception of local foods [57]. The scholars in [61] revealed high consumer WTP for animal products produced with local feed. The majority of the consumers in the following research, [62], preferred local seafood if they could easily find it in the market and if they could trust the brand to help identify product choices. Consumers preferred to purchase local honey products directly or indirectly from the beekeepers in [68]. Some consumers in the research of [71] associated local products (strawberries) with improved nutritional quality, safety, and food safety.

In the next section the sustainability attributes of consumer preference for local food will be discussed in detail.

### 3.2.2. Sustainability Attributes of the Consumers' Preference for Local Food Sustainability Attributes of Local Food

In order to analyze the sustainability attributes of consumer preference for local food, it is important to get an understanding of what local food is, what is its definition, as presented in the literature, and whether these definitions embrace sustainability attributes. As was previously mentioned, there is no universal definition of local food in the scientific literature. Past studies and studies that did not meet our selection criteria have previously attempted to define the concept of local food. For example, some scholars define local food from a geographical point of view, basing their definition on distance the local food products were transported to a customer [74–76]. Other scholars associate local food with organic, stressing the importance of environmental issues for local production [77,78]. The systemization of the definition of local food presented in the literature in the last decade is important, to formulate the nature of the concept and to obtain evidence about sustainability attributes. Table 5 represents a list of definitions of the term 'local' in chronological order. The timeline of the definitions also helps to trace the development of the term 'local' in the last decade.

According to the evidence we have gathered, we can draw conclusions on the three main attributes of the term 'local' in the literature; we have divided them into three dimensions:

- (1) Geographical: the term 'local' is described through the geographical proximity of the product to a customer. In this case, localness is measured by the distance (in miles or kilometers) from the customer.
- (2) Geopolitical: when a 'local' product derives from the state or region of the customer's residence. In this case, 'local' can be defined as the opposite of national or foreign. In some cases, it is associated with the traditions of the region or a protected geographical indication.
- (3) Organic: in some cases the term 'local' and 'organic' are merged in the literature.

Table 6 shows the geopolitical dimension of 'local products' is the most accepted definition in the studied literature. The organic dimension is less diffused, it can be explained by the ongoing discourse on the interconnection between local and organic, and, hence, there is no clear delineation between these two concepts. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that the consumer definitions of 'local' in the studied literature were mostly guided by the researchers who conducted the study, as they proposed their definition of

'local' products in the surveys, or the researchers themselves initially determined which product was considered local, in order to conduct the research.

**Table 5.** Definitions of local food in the literature.

Paper	Definition of Local Food
Holmes and Yan 2012 [24]	Produced, grown, or raised as close to one's home as possible
Lesschaeve et al. 2012 [25]	Produced in the province
Carroll et al. 2012 [26]	New organic
Grebitus et al. 2013 [27]	With less food miles
Kalabova et al. 2013 [28]	Produced within the region
Denver and Jensen 2014 [31]	Organic and local food is ambiguous in the consumers' perception
Hasselbach and Roosen 2015 [35]	Produced in the state, county or the place of residence
Meas et al. 2015 [36]	Produced in the cross-state region, state boundary, sub-state regions.
Aprile et al. 2016 [37]	Produced within certain political boundaries (regions and state)
Hempel and Hamm 2016a [38]	Opposed to national
Hempel and Hamm 2016b [39]	Opposed to food from neighboring countries or non-EU countries
Lim and Hu 2016 [40]	Produced in 160-km radius
Schifani et al. 2016 [41]	Produced within the region
Ferrazzi et al. 2017 [43]	Regional
Mugera et al. 2017 [45]	Produced within the state (region)
Palmer et al. 2017 [46]	Regional
Sanova et al., 2017 [47]	Purchased from farmers' markets, with a regional or national food label, protected geographical indication, protected designation of origin and traditional specialty guaranteed
Byrd et al. 2018 [51]	Originated 10–50 miles from home
Hashem et al. 2018 [52]	Closely related to organic. The average distance for 'local' food: 24 miles (from 8 miles to about 100 miles)
Denver et al. 2019 [56]	Specific dimensions are geographical distance, type of supply chain, and size of company
Farris et al. 2019 [58]	Produced from within the same state as where the consumer resides
Meyerding and Trajer 2019 [59]	If it is sold in the same state as it was grown
Meyerding et al. 2019 [60]	If it is sold in the same state as it was grown
Kiss et al. 2020 [65]	'Products of local (small) producers' and 'foods from local producers'
Li et al. 2020a [66]	Harvested in a watershed from the same state of the purchase location
Li et al. 2020b [67]	Harvested within 100 miles of the experiment location
Sanju an-Lopez and Resano-Ezcaray 2020 [23]	From the local producing area
Yang and Leung 2020 [69]	The food grown within the state (on the Hawaiian Islands)
Attalah et al. 2021 [70]	Three levels of localness: (1) produced in their state, (2) in the Great Lakes region, (3) and in the US
He et al. 2021 [71]	Produced within 100 miles
Jensen et al. 2021 [72]	From the state of origin

#### Sustainability Attributes of the Consumer Preference for Local Food

There is not much evidence about sustainability as an attribute of localness in the studied literature, and the relationship between local products and sustainability issues is

still controversial. Local food may be produced in a sustainable or organic manner, but it may also be produced using a non-organic method [24]. Sustainable development is an important goal for local food production [29]. Another group of scholars [34] supported this idea, stating that developing local organic food is a promising way to achieve the sustainable development of resilient food systems. In [52], local organic food is a more environmentally sustainable alternative to the mainstream food system, and local small organic farming is more sustainable. Both organic and local food choices are sustainable and linked with Mediterranean dietary patterns in [20]. The following study, [21], was in line with the idea of considering both organic and local food as sustainable products. The supporters of local food suggest that its consumption is good for health and enhances the sustainability of the communities, by stimulation of local economies [69]. On the other hand, it was revealed that the sustainability factor, together with healthiness, environmental friendliness, tradition, transparency, and security are less associated with local foods than many other items under consideration [60]. The respondents in the study by [58] linked local foods principally with a short transport distance, but not necessarily with either environmental friendliness or sustainable production.

**Table 6.** Dissemination of definitions of ‘local’ food by dimension.

		Dimensions of Local Food Definitions		
		Geographical	Geopolitical	Organic
Papers			Lesschaeve et al. 2012 [25]	
			Kalabova et al. 2013 [28]	
			Hasselbach and Roosen 2015 [35]	
			Meas et al. 2015 [36]	
			Aprile et al. 2016 [37]	
			Hempel and Hamm 2016a [38]	
			Hempel and Hamm 2016b [39]	
		Holmes and Yan 2012 [24]	Schifani et al. 2016 [41]	
		Lim and Hu 2016 [40]	Ferrazzi et al. 2017 [43]	
		Byrd et al. 2018 [51]	Mugera et al. 2017 [45]	
		Hashem et al. 2018 [52]	Palmer et al. 2017 [46]	
		Denver et al. 2019 [56]	Sanova et al., 2017 [47]	
		Li et al. 2020b [67]	Farris et al. 2019 [58]	
		He et al. 2021 [71]	Meyerding and Trajer 2019 [59]	
			Meyerding et al. 2019 [60]	
			Kiss et al. 2020 [65]	
			Sanju an-Lopez and Resano-Ezcaray 2020 [23]	
		Yang and Leung 2020 [69]		
		Attalah et al. 2021 [70]		
		Jensen et al. 2021 [72]		
			Carroll et al. 2012 [26]	
			Denver and Jensen 2014 [31]	
			Hashem et al. 2018 [52]	

Buying local is not considered as sustainable behavior, or is simply not examined from this point of view, in the studied literature. However, there are some links between sustainable behavior and choice of local food in the literature. Therefore, the concept of local food is related to the attributes of sustainable food products and is easily understood by consumers [38]. Consumers with a higher educational background have more knowledge of the concepts of sustainability and may choose to buy local food; feeling that in doing so they can make a difference to the society [55]. How consumers have recently become more concerned about food safety and sustainability is considered in relation to the consumption of local food products in [68].

#### 4. Conclusions

One of the main goals of this research was to determine the attributes of ‘local food’ definitions, to find evidence for sustainability attributes in the presented definitions. Moreover, this research was aimed at filling the gap in the discussion on whether buying local

food is considered a sustainable behavior and whether consumer preference for local food can be perceived as a sustainable practice. In order to achieve these goals, a literature sample compiling papers on consumer preferences for local food was retrieved. The outcomes of the research revealed three dimensions of 'local food' definitions: geographical, geopolitical, and organic; while the problem of a unified local food definition remains open. Furthermore, the studied sample did not show any good evidence of sustainability attributes in the definition of local food and consumer perceptions of local food. Only a few studies have discussed the relationship between sustainable behavior and consumer preference for local food; suggesting that consumers are aware of the link between sustainability and local food products, and that a knowledge of sustainability issues may persuade customers to buy local food.

The results of the research conducted have several scientific implications. First, the methodology applied to the study has proven its efficiency and can be applied in future studies on the topic. Second, since no sound evidence on sustainability issues was found in the study, the main scientific implication of the research lies in the formulation of the dimensions of 'local food' definitions: geographical, geopolitical, and organic. This outcome can be a starting point for the further investigations of the concept of local food, in order to formulate a unified definition of the term 'local food'; it may also provide a platform for a discussion on the topic. Third, the findings may not only contribute to a debate on the interplay between local and organic food attributes, but also on the interconnection between local, organic, and natural food characteristics. Finally, another interesting issue for the scholars was the lack of a strong interconnection between the preference for local food and sustainable behavior of the consumers.

The sustainability attributes of consumer perception of local food also represent a managerial contribution from the research. The stakeholders of the FSCs, policymakers, and related industries may consider the lack of evidence on sustainability issues in consumer behavior towards local food as a possible direction for the application future efforts, in order to promote knowledge on sustainability among the population. The formulation of a unified definition of the local food would also cause significant changes in the managerial field, since it would help to better define policies towards local food popularization and elaborate strategies for local food promotion, on both local, regional, and national levels.

The main limitation of the study is the specificity of the studied literature, as it reflected local food issues in studies aimed at the revelation of consumer preference towards local food, and could not necessarily contribute any evidence on sustainability issues. This choice of literature was made on purpose, in order to understand the soundness of the evidence regarding sustainability, within the literature on the topic. Another limitation of the study lies in its nature as a scoping review, which did not permit the authors to apply further theoretical analyses to it.

Further research should be conducted, in order to supplement the outcomes of the study. The authors see possible future research directions in the application of different literature samples, in order to obtain more evidence on the sustainability issues affecting consumer behavior, as well as in relation to the differences in consumer perception of local food, before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, future studies will be aimed at the conduction of round table discussions and interviews with practitioners in the sector, which will provide new evidence for the definition of local food from a practical perspective.

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