



Research Article

**THE ROLE OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS IN ESTABLISHING GASTRONOMIC
IDENTITY**

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to determine the role of agricultural products in creating gastronomic identity. For this purpose, the agricultural product potato, which is mostly grown in Niğde province in Turkey and given importance to its production and development, has been evaluated in terms of gastronomic identity. The research was carried out with the help of interview questions by telephone between 1-10 July 2021. As a result of the research, the participants chose the Niğde potato in terms of gastronomic identity; contribution to the development of gastronomy tourism, increase in agricultural production, sustainability, and economic contribution. They stated that due to the climate and soil structure of Niğde province, Niğde potato is different from other potatoes in terms of taste, variety, nutrition, and health. For the protection and sustainability of the Niğde potato, they stated environmental protection and soil analysis, finding a market for the farmers, improvement studies-supervision and support to the farmer. In addition, to highlight the Niğde potato as a gastronomic identity; They made suggestions on advertising/promotion, festival, gaining popularity/branding, and the need for support from local governments.

Keywords: Gastronomic Identity, Agricultural Products, Niğde

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1. Introduction

Considering the environment and culture component; general geographical features, climate, microclimates, culture, history, traditions, beliefs, values and local products are the elements that make up the gastronomic identity (Harrington, 2005). The gastronomic products that are grown, produced and presented in the region with the food and beverage culture in the region, and presented with the methods specific to the region, form the gastronomic identity (Başat, Sandıkçı and Çelik, 2017). It is important to determine the destination values and potentials of destinations in creating a gastronomic identity (Batu, 2016; Başaran, 2017; Akyol, 2018; Yıldırım-Saçılık, Çevik and Toptaş, 2018). Gastronomic identity, which is one of the most important factors in the transfer of the cultural structure and cultural heritage of the regions (Çalışkan, 2013), is on its way to becoming the most important phenomenon of the future in the tourism sector (Karakulak, 2016).

In gastronomic tourism, the travel motivations of tourists include tasting the agricultural products specific to the region, seeing the cultivation of local products and cooking stages, and visiting food producers (Öner, 2014). Answering the questions of "what, how, why and when" the produced local products, which are a component of identity, are produced and consumed, reveal the characteristic features of those products (Başat, et al., 2017: 65) identifying regions with certain food and beverage, gastronomic identity specific to that region. (Haven-Tang and Jones, 2006). Therefore, gastronomic identity is an important tool to highlight the awareness of destinations (Karakulak, 2016).

The production of local agricultural products with traditional methods in destination centers contributes to the promotion of the regions internationally and nationally (Durlu-Özyaka and Can 2013; Yıkılmış and Ünal, 2016; Karaca, 2016). The limited number of studies examining the role of agricultural products in creating gastronomic identity, depending on the relevant literature, reveals the importance of the research. However, the province of Niğde is blended with the language, culture, and art of the civilizations it has hosted for centuries has endemic plant species that grow only in this region due to its geographical location and is a province that should be evaluated not only in terms of cultural tourism but also in terms of alternative tourism (Alpaslan and Tutar, 2013) made it necessary to carry out this research. In addition, in-depth analysis using the qualitative research method in this research is a methodological contribution. Therefore, determining the role of agricultural products in creating a gastronomic identity constitutes the purpose of the research. For this purpose, first of all, the related literature of the variables was searched and the conceptual framework was revealed. Afterward, qualitative analyzes were made within the scope of the research and the results were interpreted.

2. Conceptual framework

Every kitchen in the world differs from each other in terms of its features. The elements that make a difference between the cuisines are stated as "culture, religion, beliefs, animal species-specific to the region, plant assets of the region". These characteristics of societies enable gastronomy to become an identity over time (Beşirli 2010:160). The gastronomic identity is explained by the phrase 'terroir'. Terroir is derived from the French word "Terre" meaning soil and refers to the relationship and interactions of a vineyard with the environment as it grows (Harrington, 2005; Bowen and Zapata, 2009;). Gastronomic identity which defined as "a phenomenon that is used to describe the characteristics of a society, related to the way of nutrition, production, preparation and consumption of food, unique enough to describe the culture and self of the society, and identified enough to distinguish it from others" (Diker and Deniz, 2017: 191).

Agricultural products are important in terms of both gastronomic tourism and the formation of the gastronomic identity of cities. Gastronomic tourism (Aksoy and Sezgi, 2015), which provides an advantage in the marketing of cities, is also important in terms of agriculture and food policies and tourism image (Hjalager and Corigliano, 2000). In addition, local flavors and local agricultural products are among the motivations of tourists to participate in tourism activities (Durlu-Özkaya and Can 2013). Therefore, it is important to determine the potential of agricultural products by evaluating them in terms of gastronomic identity.

When looking at the ranking of food consumed in the world, the most consumed food item after cereals is potatoes. Potato is an important food that will contribute to problems such as hunger and malnutrition in the world in terms of being able to grow in all kinds of climates. The trade volume of fresh and frozen potatoes in world trade was 47.5 million tons in 2019 and \$26.9 billion in monetary value (T.R. Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2020). Our country ranked 14th in world potato production with a share of 1.24%. In 2020, it was produced "5.2 million tons on an area of approximately 148 thousand hectares in 72 provinces". The

degree of qualification is “104.1% and per capita consumption is 50.6 kg” (T.R. Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2020)

Potato in our country; Niğde is the province where it grows the most with approximately 800 thousand tons on an area of 210 thousand decares. (TUIK, 2020). Potato production and sustainability are given importance in Niğde province. For example, 2 potato varieties that are resistant to potato diseases and provide high yields have been developed by the Potato Research Institute registered in 2019 by the Potato Research Institute of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry were given the names NIĞDE SARISI and SARUHAN by popular vote. Nearly half of the potato production is used fresh in various ways, such as "baking, boiling, frying", while the other parts are used as processed food, "frozen French fries and chips" or "animal feed, industrial starch, and seed". The worthless wastes of potatoes are used for ethanol production (T.R. Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2020). Therefore, the main problem of the research is to evaluate the Niğde potato in terms of gastronomic identity and to determine its potential.

3. Methodology

The ethics committee permission document required to collect the data used in this study were obtained with the decision number 07 of the Ethics Committee of Niğde Omer Halisdemir University dated 28.01.2021 and numbered 02. In this study, the phenomenology design, one of the qualitative study designs that we are aware of but do not have in-depth knowledge of, was used (Cresswell, 1994). The aim of the research is to evaluate the Niğde potato in terms of gastronomic identity and to determine its potential. For this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought.

1. What are your views on the Niğde potato in terms of gastronomic identity?
2. What are the different aspects of Niğde potato from other potatoes?
3. What can be done to protect and sustain the Niğde potato?
4. Please indicate your suggestions for promoting the Niğde potato as a gastronomic identity.

Working group

The population of the research consists of individuals living in the province of Niğde. Non-probability sampling was used in the study. Niğde province in Turkey is the province where potato production takes place the most. In addition, there are studies on the sustainability of potato products in Niğde province. Therefore, the most suitable 17 samples from the people of Niğde province were selected by the researcher for the purpose of the research.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Occupation
P1	Man	45	Provincial Directorate of Agriculture (Officer)
P2	Woman	49	Potato Research Institute (Agricultural Engineer)
P3	Man	49	Public Works (Officer)
P4	Man	51	Faculty Member (Agricultural Sciences and Technology)
P5	Man	54	Lecturer (Tourism and Hotel Management)
P6	Woman	35	Lecturer (Cookery)
P7	Man	55	Hotel Management (Manager)
P8	Woman	35	Hotel Management (Staff)
P9	Man	50	Restaurant Manager
P10	Man	47	Restaurant Manager
P11	Man	55	Restaurant (Waiter)
P12	Woman	60	Farmer
P13	Woman	45	Farmer
P14	Woman	43	Farmer
P15	Man	70	Farmer
P16	Man	39	Farmer
P17	Man	37	Farmer

When Table 1 is examined, the majority of the individuals participating in the research are male and consist of individuals between the ages of 35-60.

Data Collection

In this study, an interview form was used as a data collection tool used in qualitative research methods to obtain in-depth information. The interview form was created with semi-structured open-ended questions. For the interview questions, a literature review of the relevant studies was conducted, and it was formed by obtaining the approval of 1 restaurant owner, 1 farmer, and 2 academicians. The research was carried out by the researcher himself between March and May by telephone and face-to-face interviews. In addition, for the participants who accepted the interview to respond more easily and not to worry, no personal data about the participants were obtained and the data was recorded in the computer environment. In the research, P1, P2, P3,...P17 codes were given to the participants, and interpretations were made with these codes throughout the research.

Analysis of Data

In this research, to reflect the truth in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data; interviews were conducted and the validity of the research was tried to be ensured by making direct quotations. In the research, "content and descriptive analysis" methods used in qualitative research were applied. In this direction, the stages of coding the data with content analysis, determining the themes of the coded data, organizing the codes and themes, defining and interpreting the findings were carried out (Tavşancıl and Aslan 2001: 22). In addition, the "descriptive analysis technique" was used by making direct quotations from the obtained data and interpreting it within the framework of cause and effect relationship (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016).

4. Findings

In the analyzes made with the data obtained from the interviews, his views on the evaluation of Niğde potato in terms of gastronomic identity and determination of its potential are presented below.

Table 2. Opinions of The Participants About Niğde Potato in Terms of Gastronomic Identity

Themes	P 1	P 2	P 3	P 4	P 5	P 6	P 7	P 8	P 9	P 10	P 11	P 12	P 13	P 14	P 15	P 16	P 17
Gastronomy Contribution	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Increasing agricultural production	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sustainability	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Economic Contribution	X			X	X		X			X	X		X		X		

In this part of the research, what are your views on the Niğde potato in terms of gastronomic identity? question was posed. The opinions of the participants according to their answers are given below.

The participants stated that the Niğde potato *products identified with the cities are important P3 and that since the potato is the most produced agricultural product in Niğde province, this situation will be beneficial in terms of gastronomy tourism if it is evaluated both economically and gastronomically. P4* In addition, they stated that the tourists who come to buy local products from their places and this situation makes the tourists happy. *Tourists would be happier if they came here to collect potatoes in the field and take them away, so tourism will develop in Niğde. P11*

Table 3. Opinions on The Difference of Niğde Potato from Other Potatoes

Themes	P 1	P 2	P 3	P 4	P 5	P 6	P 7	P 8	P 9	P 10	P 11	P 12	P 13	P 14	P 15	P 16	P 17
Flavor	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Variation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Feeder	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Healthy	X			X	X		X			X	X		X		X		

When Table 3 is examined, the participants participating in the research; They stated that Niğde potato is different from other potatoes, *it is more delicious and nutritious P1-P7 is healthier P12*. In addition, they are

of the opinion that the variety of potatoes grown in Niğde province is high and *the purple potato, which is high in antioxidants, is more healthy and nutritious P6-10* compared to other potatoes.

Table 4. Opinions on The Protection and Sustainability of Niğde Potatoes

Themes	P 1	P 2	P 3	P 4	P 5	P 6	P 7	P 8	P 9	P 10	P 11	P 12	P 13	P 14	P 15	P 16	P 17
Environmental protection and soil analysis	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Finding a market			X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Breeding and Supervision	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X			X	X	X	X
Support to the Farmer			X		X		X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

When Table 4 is examined, the participants in the research are of the opinion that the themes of environmental protection and soil analysis, finding a market, improvement studies, and support to farmers will contribute to the protection and sustainability of the Niğde potato.

The participants are of the opinion that in order for the potato to be produced in a healthy way, *it must first be watered correctly P17*, the soil structure is deteriorated as the climate changes, *the natural environment should be protected and the sustainability of the Niğde potato will be ensured P14* through inspection/breeding studies. In addition, they argued that they had difficulty in finding a market to sell their products, they wanted to buy products at a lower price than the cost of the intermediaries, and *that in order to ensure sustainability, the farmer must first be satisfied P15, electricity expenses for irrigation and fuel expenses should be supported. P17*

Table 5. Suggestions for Highlighting The Niğde Potato As a Gastronomic Identity

Themes	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P 10	P 11	P 12	P 13	P 14	P 15	P 16	P 17
Advertising/Promotion	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Festival/Festival	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Popularization/Branding	X		X		X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Support of Local Governments					X		X			X	X		X		X		

Participants stated that *festivals such as Advertising and promotion P5 can be held in order to bring Niğde potatoes to the forefront, P13 festivals, marketing activities (peanut festivals) can be held P8* to gain popularity. In addition, they stated that *the support of local governments should be P9* for the realization of these festivals.

5. Conclusion and Evaluation

The purpose of this research is to determine the role of agricultural products in creating gastronomic identity. For this purpose, the agricultural product potato, which is mostly grown in Niğde province in Turkey and given importance to its production and development, has been evaluated in terms of gastronomic identity. In the research, firstly, the concept of gastronomic identity and why the Niğde potato should be evaluated in terms of gastronomic identity were focused on. The focus here is to emphasize that Potatoes can be grown anywhere, but the Niğde potato is different. For this reason, literature reviews on Niğde potatoes were made and the conceptual framework was revealed. As a result of the research, the participants chose the Niğde potato in terms of gastronomic identity; They evaluated gastronomy as contribution to the development of tourism, increase in agricultural production, sustainability and economic contribution. They stated that the Niğde potato is different from other potatoes in terms of taste, variety, nutritiveness and health, and that Niğde is different due to the climate and soil oil. For the protection and sustainability of the Niğde potato, they stated environmental protection and soil analysis, finding a market for the farmers, breeding studies and inspection and support to the farmer. In addition, they made suggestions on advertising/promotion, festival/festival, popularity/branding and local governments' support in order to bring the Niğde potato to the forefront as a gastronomic identity.

The main inference that should be emphasized in this research is the evaluation of agricultural products in terms of gastronomic identity. Studies evaluating agricultural products in terms of gastronomic identity are

limited in the literature. However, studies have concluded that agricultural products are the locomotive of the tourism sector, that they act together and that agricultural products are important for sustainability (Durlu-Özkaya and Can 2013; Yıkımsı and Ünal, 2016; Karaca, 2016; İbiş, 2021). In addition, it is stated that bringing agricultural products to the forefront for gastronomy tourism is important for sustainable gastronomy (Scarpato, 2002). Evaluation of Niğde potato in terms of gastronomic identity and determination of its potential constitute the main problem of the research. The findings obtained in line with this problem support the theoretical framework and assumptions of the study. For this reason, it is thought that the study will contribute to the theory in terms of the role of agricultural products in creating a gastronomic identity.

In order to provide diversity in the tourism sector, to use resources effectively and to benefit from tourism revenues all year, touristic mobility must be ensured. People provide touristic mobility in that destination by tasting the region-specific products grown in a region and participating in activities. Therefore, it is thought that the potential of agricultural products in creating a gastronomic identity in destinations with low tourism mobility will contribute to that region. In addition, agricultural products should be brought to the fore in terms of the protection of natural resources and the sustainability of the tourism sector. In this manner it is important that sector representatives and local use local agricultural products as a gastronomic identity element and carry out promotional and marketing activities in this.

When the relevant literature is examined, it has been determined that agricultural products have not been adequately researched in terms of gastronomic tourism. This study enables us to see that agricultural products are important in terms of the sustainability of the tourism sector in an academic sense. However, this research was carried out in Niğde province and on Niğde potatoes. Therefore, a different agricultural product can be evaluated in terms of gastronomic tourism or these studies can be compared by discussing its importance in creating identity. It is thought that by considering different samples and different regions, it will contribute to both the relevant literature and sector practitioners.

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