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Conference or Workshop Item:

Feng, Keyou and Huaccho Huatuco, Luisa Delfa (2020) Sustainable Purchasing Practices Implementation in Fresh Food Small and Medium Enterprises in the UK. In: e-LRN2020 Special Web Conference, 09-11 Sep 2020.

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SUSTAINABLE PURCHASING PRACTICES IMPLEMENTATION IN FRESH FOOD SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN THE UK

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Purpose

Purchasing plays an important role in achieving sustainability in the supply chain. The purpose of this paper is to investigate: *How do small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the fresh food sector in the UK implement sustainable purchasing practices?* As well as how they deal with the pressures and incentives they face when carrying out this implementation.

Research Approach

This paper follows a natural resources-based view theoretical background, then employs mixed methods. These comprise of semi-structured interviews with farmers, retailers and wholesalers in five fresh food SMEs, supplemented by eleven responses to a survey questionnaire. Interview transcripts were analysed and interpreted using qualitative methods and the survey questionnaire responses were analysed using quantitative methods supported by MS Excel.

Findings and Originality

The results highlight that owners' personal commitment on sustainability provides incentives for SMEs to implement sustainable purchasing practices. Whilst brand reputation, pressures from consumers and government policies are also important drivers underpinning the implementation of sustainable purchasing practices. Although most of these fresh food SMEs consider environmental and social factors to a great extent in their purchasing decisions, the lack of financial and human resources are the main barriers that affect their sustainable purchasing decisions. However, there is also evidence to suggest that most SMEs do not require certification from their suppliers, but they have strong relationships with small and independent suppliers and often monitor them in terms of environmental and social issues. It is also found that local sourcing is a priority for most of the fresh food SMEs considering both environmental and economic dimensions of sustainability.

Research Impact

This paper provides some new insights on the frameworks typically used in sustainable purchasing practices. Furthermore, it adds the additional focus on fresh food SMEs, considering both the drivers and barriers for the effective implementation of these sustainable purchasing.

Practical Impact

This paper supports that purchasing managers should work more closely with their suppliers and local community on implementation of sustainable purchasing practices. It also suggests that fresh food SMEs require more financial and human resources in order to achieve effective sustainable purchasing practices.

Keywords

Purchasing, Sustainability, Fresh food, SMEs, Supply Chain.