Saffron

Student's Name

Institutional Affiliation

Saffron

Introduction

Food is closely associated with culture, identity, consumption, production, and issues regarding sustainability. According to Hall and Mitchell (2000), cuisine is a central element of tourism; thus, it plays a pivotal role in localization and globalization. Notably, most Middle Eastern dishes explode with flavour due to the numerous ingredients that individuals in the region utilize. The food is diverse while still displaying a significant degree of homogeneity. In 2017, individuals considered Middle Eastern cuisine to be the fastest growing and the most popular ethnic foods in the United States (Price, 2017). In essence, saffron is one of the primary Middle Eastern ingredients, and has been subject to multiple interacting factors.

Findings

What is Saffron?

Saffron denotes a spice that comes from the flower of *Crocus sativus*, which many refer to as saffron crocus. Individuals usually harvest and dry the herb's intense cerise styles and stigmas and utilise them in seasoning cuisine, among other purposes. According to Hill (2004), saffron is the most exorbitant seasoning globally in terms of weight. Indeed, its iodoform and taste emanate from such constituent chemicals as safrana and picrocrocin. Saffron also carries crocin, a carotenoid tincture that conveys a dense, golden-yellow tinge to textiles and dishes (Hill, 2004).

Figure 1: Saffron plant. Source: “History of Saffron,” (2007)

Notably, a seventh-century B.C. Assyrian exposition that was composed during the reign of Ashurbanipal certifies the length of the spice’s recorded history. Individuals have traded and utilized saffron for over four thousand years. Today, Iran produces roughly ninety-per cent of the spice’s global yield (Fulton, 2017). Overall, saffron is an essential Middle Eastern ingredient with a global impact.

History of Saffron

The spice possesses a long and convoluted history of usage and cultivation that spans more than three centuries, continents, cultures, and civilizations. The ingredient is indigenous to Southwest Asia, but people first discovered it in Greece (“History of Saffron,” 2007). Traditionally, human cultivators would breed the wild precursor of the domestic saffron crocus by choosing plants with uncharacteristically extended stigmas. During the Bronze Age, one distorted form of saffron crocus, *Crocus sativus*, emerged. People first documented the spice in a seventh-century B.C. Assyrian botanical record that was written under Ashurbanipal’s regime (“History of Saffron,” 2007). In the following centuries, traders disseminated the spice across Eurasia and, later on, throughout Oceania, America, and Africa. Saffron was a vital spice during the Greco-Roman Empire, whose residents used it in seasonings, herbal remedies, perfumes, and

ointments. During the era, the Phoenicians widely traded in saffron across the Mediterranean. Rivalling theories assert that the Avignon papacy restored saffron to France during the eighth century AD (“History of Saffron,” 2007). Overall, saffron has a long, convoluted history.

Uses of Saffron

People utilise saffron for many purposes. Individuals use the plant’s petals and stigmas to produce linctus for curing sore throat, asthma, and pertussis, and to loosen phlegm. The reason is that saffron acts as an expectorant (“Saffron,” 2019). Additionally, it helps to remedy insomnia, atherosclerosis, flatulence, queasiness, anxiety and depression, Alzheimer’s disease, memory loss, hemoptysis, indigestion, pain associated with parturition, dry skin, and psoriasis, as well as aid exercise performance and recovery (“Saffron,” 2019). Women employ the substance to mitigate premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and ease menstrual cramps. Similarly, males utilise saffron in curbing sterility and premature ejaculation. The substance also stimulates sweating, increases the sex drive because it acts as an aphrodisiac, and boosts blood sugar echelons in schizophrenic people (“Saffron,” 2019).

Figure 2: Saffron has numerous health benefits. Source: **“**Organic Greek saffron,” (n.d.)

Individuals use saffron in cases of alopecia to mitigate baldness. In food, people use the substance as a spice that imparts a yellow shade and serves as a condiment for the cuisine ("Saffron," 2019). In manufacturing, saffron extract acts as a fragrance in perfumes and as dye for clothes. On the whole, it is a multipurpose substance.

Three Period Changes of Saffron History

Saffron has undergone multiple transformations throughout its long history. The first wave of change involved its trade routes. Several competing theories attempt to elucidate the origins of saffron. The first theory claims that the herb originated in Egypt, where Pharaohs utilized it as a seductive and aromatic essence, and in making ablutions in sacred places. Nevertheless, since Egypt lacked suitable weather conditions to support flower cultivation, saffron must have come from the Persian Empire. A second theory asserts that saffron originated in the Fertile Crescent between the Euphrates and Tigris, where the first recorded civilization emerged (Mousavi & Bathaie, 2011). Another theory states that the substance came from the Zagros Mountains, while others claim that mutant forms of it appeared in Crete during the Bronze Age. Saffron first spread globally due to the establishment of trade routes, which allowed the herb to reach North Africa, North America, and Oceania. According to Hall and Mitchell (2003), the first instances of the internationalization of cuisine occurred between the 1400s and the 1800s. The period marked the beginning of the globalization of food. Hence, during this dispensation, Saffron moved to Pennsylvania, and the region's inhabitants began to cultivate the plant. Willard (2002) notes that the German Evangelical Church acquired and spread saffron to Spain. In general, the development of trade routes marked the beginning of saffron's globalization.

The second wave involved cultural hybridization. Between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries, the herb experienced more significant dissemination. According to Hall and Mitchell (2000), the worldwide phenomenon of immigration during the period fueled the globalization process. During that time, France began to produce large quantities of saffron, and individuals in Europe and North American started to use it for cooking, as a colouring agent, and in medicine (Willard, 2002). The herb's popularity declined significantly during the eighteenth century, but it later peaked during the twentieth century. This reduction resulted from individuals using adulterated samples, which resulted from mixing portions of saffron with honey and marigold petals. In addition, cultivating saffron was labour-intensive, which discouraged individuals in England from attempting to do so. The globalization of food in the 17th century resulted in "an influx of additional spices from Eastern lands due to the growing spice trade [which] meant that the English, as well as other Europeans, had more seasonings to choose from" (History of Saffron the Most Valuable Spice in the World," n.d.). Unlike in England, Saffron had been incorporated into the local cultures of France, Spain, and Italy; thus, continued cultivation in these nations revamped the herb's global status.

The third wave entailed the creation of modern cuisine. In this regard, Hall and Mitchell (2000) assert that the final shift in culinary culture occurs when transportation, technology, and tourism have a significant influence on food manufacturing. Today, novel technological tools shape the way individuals produce food and the type of cuisine they manufacture. The incredibly widespread use of saffron has rendered the global production methods insufficient to satiate the growing worldwide demand (Nehvi et al., 2007). However, some countries, such as India, have adopted scientific methods, including genetic manipulation, to develop high-yielding saffron

varieties to satiate the global demand. Besides, the nations have embraced *Integrated Nutrient Supply and Management* (INSAM) to increase the fertility and productivity of soils and post-harvest technology for "flower picking, separation of pistil and quick reduction of moisture to facilitate the production of a superior product (Kumar, Singh, & Ahuja, 2012). In sum, technology and new scientific methods significantly influence the contemporary cultivation of saffron.

In addition, decent transportation infrastructure alongside knowledge about efficient supply chain management has facilitated the diffusion of saffron to different corners of the world. Food tourism has also helped promote the ingredient's globalization as individuals share their experiences of cuisines in various parts of the world. Although Iran is the largest saffron producer in the world, the global supply chain has supported the product's international diffusion. For the most part, technology, conveyance and food tourism have facilitated the complete globalization of saffron.

Conclusion

Since its discovery more than four centuries ago, Saffron has, through the influence of numerous forces, become one of the costliest spices in the world. In particular, the establishment of trade routes, cultural hybridization, globalization, technological advances, cultural changes, transportation, and food tourism have shaped the evolution of Saffron and enabled the ingredient to diffuse universally. Despite a decline in the production and consumption of saffron in the eighteenth century, its continued cultivation, dissemination, and involvement in food tourism have supported its internationalization. Today, Iran produces and sells the majority of this Middle Eastern ingredient.

References

Fulton, A. (2017, May 3). The secret history of the world's priciest spice. *National Geographic*. Retrieved from www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2017/05/history-origin-of-saffron-spice-iran/

Hall, C. M., & Mitchell, R. (2000). We are what we eat. *Tourism Culture & Communication*, *2*(1), 29-37.

Hill, T. (2004). *The contemporary encyclopedia of herbs & spices: Seasonings for the global kitchen*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishers.

History of saffron the most valuable spice in the world. (n.d.). *Eden Aromata*. Retrieved from http://edenaromata.com/About/AllAboutSaffron/HistoryofSaffron

History of saffron. (2007). *McGraw-Hill*. Retrieved from www.cs.mcgill.ca/~rwest/wikispeedia/wpcd/wp/h/History_of_saffron.htm

Kumar, R., Singh, M. K., & Ahuja, P. S. (2012). Effect of planting depth and spacing on dry matter accumulation, size and yield of saffron (Crocus sativus L.) corms in North-Western Himalayas. *Progressive Horticulture*, *44*(1), 71-79.

Mousavi, S. Z., & Bathaie, S. Z. (2011). Historical uses of saffron: Identifying potential new avenues for modern research. *Avicenna Journal of Phytomedicine*, *1*(2), 57-66.

Nehvi, F. A., Wani, S. A., Dar, S. A., Makhdoomi, M. I., Allie, B. A., & Mir, Z. A. (2007). New emerging trends on production technology of saffron. In *II International Symposium on Saffron Biology and Technology 739* (pp. 375-381). doi: 10.17660/ActaHortic.2007.739.49

Organic Greek saffron. (n.d.) *Oliveology*. Retrieved from https://oliveology.co.uk/product/organic-greek-saffron/

Price, E. (2017, October 27). Taste for Middle Eastern food goes global. *The National*. Retrieved from www.thenational.ae/lifestyle/food/taste-for-middle-eastern-food-goes-global-1.670609

Saffron. (2019). *WebMD*. Retrieved from www.webmd.com/vitamins/ai/ingredientmono-844/saffron

Willard, P. (2002). *Secrets of saffron: The vagabond life of the world's most seductive spice*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.