

Upcycling fruit and vegetable peels into high-value functional food products: Physicochemical characterization, nutritional profiling, and consumer acceptability of novel culinary and nutraceutical ingredients

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ABSTRACT

Food waste generated from fruit and vegetable processing represents a critical yet underutilized resource within global food supply chains, particularly in developing economies where post-harvest losses compound nutritional insecurity and environmental degradation. In the Philippines, agri-food processing by-products—including peels, seeds, and fibrous husks—constitute a substantial fraction of institutional and municipal waste streams that currently receive minimal valorization. This study investigated the systematic upcycling of four locally abundant by-products into high-value functional food ingredients through an integrated experimental framework encompassing physicochemical characterization, proximate nutritional analysis, sensory evaluation, consumer behavioral modeling, and economic feasibility assessment.

Four novel products were developed and evaluated: banana peel infusion tea (*Musa acuminata* cv. Lakatan), breadnut seed flour (*Artocarpus camansi*), arrowroot-cassava fortified pandesal (*Maranta arundinacea/Manihot esculenta*), and calcium-enriched pasta formulated with green-lipped mussel shell powder (*Perna canaliculus*). Physicochemical parameters—including total phenolic content (TPC), 2,2-diphenyl-1-picrylhydrazyl (DPPH) radical scavenging activity, water activity (aw), and proximate composition—were quantified following standardized AOAC International (2019) and Folin-Ciocalteu protocols. Sensory acceptability was evaluated using a nine-point Hedonic Scale administered to $n = 100$ purposively sampled Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management (BSHM) students at St. Dominic College of Asia (SDCA). Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to assess the psychosocial determinants of consumer adoption intention, while a cost-benefit analysis (CBA) provided economic feasibility evidence.

Results demonstrated that all four products achieved mean overall acceptability scores ranging from 7.9 to 8.5 on the nine-point Hedonic Scale, with statistically significant inter-product differences confirmed by one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with Tukey's post-hoc comparison ($p < 0.001$). Banana peel tea exhibited the highest total phenolic content (TPC = 18.4 ± 1.2 mg gallic acid equivalents [GAE]/g dw) and DPPH scavenging activity ($72.3 \pm 2.1\%$), while mussel shell pasta achieved a calcium content of 312 ± 18 mg/100 g—representing approximately 31% of the recommended daily intake. The SEM revealed that environmental sustainability attitudes significantly predicted purchase intention ($\beta = 0.71$, $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.68$), with food neophobia as the primary inhibiting construct ($\beta = -0.43$, $p < 0.001$). Production cost analysis indicated reductions of 38–44% relative to conventional ingredient equivalents, with gross margins ranging from 31.4% to 47.2%. These findings provide an empirically grounded, multi-dimensional framework for

institutionalizing food waste upcycling within academic food service contexts and establish a scalable model applicable to Philippine agro-industrial food systems.

Keywords: Food waste upcycling; Functional food ingredients; Circular bioeconomy; Nutraceutical innovation; Sustainable food systems; Sensory evaluation; Physicochemical analysis; Philippines

1. INTRODUCTION

The global food system generates approximately 1.3 billion metric tons of food waste annually, representing nearly one-third of all food produced for human consumption (FAO, 2019). This systemic inefficiency carries profound consequences across environmental, economic, and food security dimensions: wasted food is estimated to account for 8–10% of global greenhouse gas emissions while occupying approximately 1.4 billion hectares of land and consuming 250 km³ of fresh water per annum (Poore and Nemecek, 2018; UNEP, 2021). Within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region, the Philippines ranks among the highest per-capita generators of organic food waste, with estimates indicating fresh produce losses exceeding 308 kilotons annually, driven by inadequate cold chain infrastructure, post-harvest handling deficiencies, and prevailing consumption patterns (Gustavsson et al., 2011; SEARCA, 2020).

Fruit and vegetable peels constitute the largest single recoverable fraction of food processing by-products in both domestic and institutional environments. These materials harbor concentrated bioactive phytochemicals—including polyphenols, carotenoids, dietary fiber, and essential minerals—that are progressively degraded or entirely lost through conventional disposal routes such as composting and landfill (Sagar et al., 2018; Ayala-Zavala et al., 2011). The strategic transformation of such by-products into value-added functional ingredients aligns with the principles of circular bioeconomy and constitutes a scientifically rigorous response to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12.3, which targets a 50% reduction in per-capita global food waste by 2030 (UN, 2015).

Within the food science literature, upcycling has been formally defined by the Upcycled Food Association (2021) as the use of ingredients that otherwise would not have gone to human consumption, processed and manufactured into food products with verifiably traceable supply chains. This definition encapsulates both the valorization potential and the traceability requirement that differentiates scientifically-driven upcycling from ad hoc repurposing (Moshtaghian et al., 2021). Despite growing literature on the functional properties of individual by-products, a significant gap persists regarding the integrated development, sensory validation, and institutional feasibility of multi-product upcycled food systems within academic and food-service environments in Southeast Asia. Most existing studies focus on single by-product valorization under laboratory conditions without addressing broader consumer acceptability dynamics or organizational integration challenges (Goodman-Smith et al., 2023; Grasso et al., 2022).

This study addresses these lacunae by employing a convergent mixed-methods experimental design to: (i) develop and physicochemically characterize four functional food products from selected Philippine agri-food processing by-products; (ii) evaluate their sensory acceptability using a validated hedonic instrument; (iii) investigate psychosocial determinants of consumer adoption using structural equation modeling; and (iv) assess economic feasibility for integration into an institutional food service context. The theoretical contributions extend the application of Circular Economy Theory (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2013), the Food Waste Recovery Hierarchy (Morone et al., 2019),

and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) to the domain of institutional food sustainability in a Southeast Asian academic context.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1. Research design and epistemological framework

This study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018), integrating experimental food science methodologies with quantitative survey-based consumer behavioral research and qualitative institutional feasibility assessment. The experimental component followed a completely randomized design (CRD) with three replications per product formulation, ensuring statistical replicability of physicochemical and sensory measurements. The quantitative survey component employed a cross-sectional design with purposive sampling, while the qualitative component utilized semi-structured focus group discussions (FGDs) with institutional stakeholders.

2.2. Raw material procurement and preparation

All by-product raw materials were sourced from verified suppliers conforming to Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) standards. Banana peels (*Musa acuminata* cv. Lakatan) were obtained fresh within 24 hours of fruit harvesting and subjected to immediate blanching (85°C, 3 min) to inactivate polyphenol oxidase and preserve phenolic integrity, followed by low-temperature oven drying (50 ± 2°C, 12 h). Breadnut seeds (*Artocarpus camansi*) were manually dehulled, dried (50 ± 2°C, 18 h) to a target moisture content of ≤8% (wet basis), and milled using a laboratory hammer mill (0.5 mm screen). Green-lipped mussel shells (*Perna canaliculus*) were collected from a certified aquaculture facility, cleaned, calcined (900°C, 2 h) to eliminate organic contaminants, and pulverized to ≤75 µm. Arrowroot tubers were freshly grated, wet-sieved, and drum-dried to yield standardized starch flour; cassava peels were washed, enzymatically detoxified via HCN reduction (24-h water soaking), dried, and milled.

2.3. Product formulation and development

Product formulations were developed iteratively using a D-optimal mixture design to optimize ingredient ratios prior to final prototype selection. The four products were: (i) Banana Peel Infusion Tea—dried, comminuted banana peel blended with lemongrass and ginger at 70:20:10 (w/w), encapsulated in heat-sealed filter bags (2 g/bag); (ii) Breadnut Seed Flour—standardized to 11% protein, 14% dietary fiber, ≤8% moisture; (iii) Arrowroot-Cassava Fortified Pandesal—formulated at 25% arrowroot/10% cassava peel flour substitution in a standardized bread formula; and (iv) Mussel Shell Calcium Pasta—extruded semolina pasta incorporating 2% (w/w) calcined mussel shell powder, with calcium content verified by atomic absorption spectrophotometry (AAS).

2.4. Physicochemical and nutritional analysis

All proximate compositions were determined in triplicate following official AOAC International methods (AOAC, 2019): moisture (Method 925.09), crude protein using Kjeldahl digestion (Method 2001.11), crude fat by Soxhlet extraction (Method 920.39), crude fiber (Method 962.09), and ash (Method 923.03). Total phenolic content (TPC) was determined using the Folin-Ciocalteu colorimetric method, expressed as mg GAE/g dw (Singleton and Rossi, 1965). Antioxidant activity was evaluated via the DPPH free radical scavenging assay and expressed as percent inhibition relative to ascorbic acid standards (Brand-Williams et al., 1995). Water activity (*a_w*) was measured using a calibrated chilled-

mirror dewpoint hygrometer (AquaLab Series 4, Decagon Devices, USA). Calcium content was quantified by flame AAS at 422.7 nm.

2.5. Sensory evaluation

Hedonic sensory evaluation was conducted with $n = 100$ participants purposively selected from the BSHM program at SDCA, constituting a trained student-expert panel. All participants provided written informed consent in accordance with SDCA Research Ethics Board Protocol No. REB-2024-011. A nine-point Hedonic Scale (1 = dislike extremely; 9 = like extremely) was used to evaluate five attributes: appearance, aroma, taste, mouthfeel/texture, and overall acceptability. Products were presented monadically under standardized white fluorescent lighting with required palate cleansing between samples. Panel calibration was conducted one week prior to formal evaluation using reference products of known acceptability.

2.6. Consumer behavioral survey and structural equation modeling

A structured self-administered questionnaire was developed to assess psychosocial determinants of purchase intention, drawing on validated scales for environmental attitudes (Dunlap et al., 2000), food neophobia (Pliner and Hobden, 1992), perceived sustainability benefits (White et al., 2019), and purchase intention (Ajzen, 1991). All items used a five-point Likert response format. Scale reliability was assessed via Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha \geq 0.70$ threshold), and convergent and discriminant validity were established through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted using AMOS 26.0, with model fit evaluated using: comparative fit index (CFI) ≥ 0.95 , Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) ≥ 0.95 , root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) ≤ 0.06 , and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) ≤ 0.08 .

2.7. Economic feasibility analysis

A cost-benefit analysis (CBA) was conducted to assess the economic viability of integrating upcycled food products into the SDCA institutional cafeteria. Direct production costs (raw materials, processing energy, packaging) were compared against market prices of conventional ingredient equivalents. Gross margin analysis and break-even volume estimation were performed for each product. FGDs with cafeteria management ($n = 2$), SDCA food industry advisory board members ($n = 5$), and Department of Science and Technology–Industrial Technology and Development Institute (DOST-ITDI) officers ($n = 2$) provided qualitative triangulation of quantitative cost data.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Physicochemical and proximate composition

Table 1 presents the physicochemical and proximate composition profiles of the four upcycled functional food products. Banana peel infusion tea demonstrated the highest TPC (18.4 ± 1.2 mg GAE/g dw) and DPPH radical scavenging activity ($72.3 \pm 2.1\%$), attributable to the high concentration of hydroxycinnamic acid derivatives and condensed tannins retained through the blanching and low-temperature drying protocol. Water activity across all products was maintained at $a_w \leq 0.60$, indicating microbiological stability and compliance with standard shelf-life requirements for ambient-stable food products. Breadnut seed flour exhibited notably high dietary fiber content ($14.8 \pm 0.6\%$ dw) and protein content ($11.2 \pm 0.4\%$ dw), confirming its functional utility as a nutritionally enhanced partial wheat flour substitute. The mussel shell calcium pasta demonstrated a calcium content of 312 ± 18 mg/100 g, significantly exceeding the calcium content of

conventional semolina pasta (28 ± 3 mg/100 g, $p < 0.001$). All physicochemical parameters differed significantly across products (one-way ANOVA, $p < 0.001$).

Table 1 Physicochemical and proximate composition of upcycled functional food products (mean \pm SD, n = 3 replicates per product).

<i>Product</i>	<i>Moisture (%)</i>	<i>Crude Protein (% dw)</i>	<i>Crude Fiber (% dw)</i>	<i>TPC (mg GAE/g dw)</i>	<i>DPPH (% Inh.)</i>	<i>aw</i>	<i>Ca (mg/100 g)</i>
Banana Peel Tea	5.2 ± 0.3	5.8 ± 0.4	12.4 ± 0.5	18.4 ± 1.2^a	72.3 ± 2.1^a	0.41 ± 0.02	98 ± 6
Breadnut Seed Flour	7.8 ± 0.4	11.2 ± 0.4	14.8 ± 0.6	9.6 ± 0.8^b	48.7 ± 1.8^b	0.52 ± 0.03	62 ± 4
Arrowroot-Cassava Pandal	28.4 ± 0.9	8.3 ± 0.3	6.2 ± 0.4	4.1 ± 0.5^c	31.2 ± 2.3^c	0.87 ± 0.01	44 ± 3
Mussel Shell Calcium Pasta	8.6 ± 0.5	12.8 ± 0.5	3.4 ± 0.2	2.9 ± 0.3^c	19.8 ± 1.6^d	0.55 ± 0.02	312 ± 18
p-value (ANOVA)	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001

Note: TPC = total phenolic content; GAE = gallic acid equivalents; dw = dry weight; DPPH = 2,2-diphenyl-1-picrylhydrazyl radical scavenging activity; aw = water activity; Ca = calcium. Different superscripts within TPC and DPPH columns indicate statistically significant differences (Tukey’s HSD post-hoc test, $p < 0.05$).

3.2. Sensory acceptability

Sensory acceptability scores are presented in Table 2. All four products achieved mean overall acceptability scores exceeding 7.8, placing them within the ‘like moderately’ to ‘like very much’ range on the nine-point Hedonic Scale. Banana peel tea attained the highest mean overall acceptability (8.5 ± 0.3), demonstrating particularly strong scores for aroma (8.6 ± 0.4) and taste (8.7 ± 0.3). Green-lipped mussel shell pasta recorded the lowest overall acceptability (7.9 ± 0.5), with texture receiving the lowest individual attribute score (7.6 ± 0.6), suggesting that further optimization of extrusion parameters is warranted. One-way ANOVA confirmed statistically significant differences across products for all sensory attributes except appearance ($p = 0.096$), as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2 Sensory acceptability scores of upcycled functional food products (nine-point Hedonic Scale, mean \pm SD, n = 100 panelists).

<i>Product</i>	<i>Appearance</i>	<i>Aroma</i>	<i>Taste</i>	<i>Mouthfeel/Texture</i>	<i>Overall Acceptability</i>
Banana Peel Tea	8.4 ± 0.4	8.6 ± 0.4	8.7 ± 0.3^a	8.3 ± 0.5^a	8.5 ± 0.3^a

<i>Product</i>	<i>Appearance</i>	<i>Aroma</i>	<i>Taste</i>	<i>Mouthfeel/Texture</i>	<i>Overall Acceptability</i>
Breadnut Seed Flour	8.2 ± 0.5	8.1 ± 0.5	8.4 ± 0.4 ^a	8.2 ± 0.4 ^a	8.3 ± 0.4 ^a
Arrowroot-Cassava Pandesal	8.0 ± 0.5	7.9 ± 0.6	8.2 ± 0.5 ^{ab}	8.1 ± 0.5 ^{ab}	8.1 ± 0.5 ^{ab}
Mussel Shell Calcium Pasta	8.1 ± 0.5	7.8 ± 0.6	8.0 ± 0.5 ^b	7.6 ± 0.6 ^b	7.9 ± 0.5 ^b
F-statistic	2.14	6.83	9.47	11.32	8.65
p-value	0.096	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001

Note: Different superscripts within each column indicate statistically significant differences (Tukey's HSD post-hoc test, $p < 0.05$).

3.3. Structural equation model of consumer behavioral determinants

The final SEM model demonstrated acceptable fit to the observed covariance structure (CFI = 0.963; TLI = 0.951; RMSEA = 0.052 [90% CI: 0.041–0.063]; SRMR = 0.061). All hypothesized factor loadings were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), with standardized loadings ranging from 0.61 to 0.89. Table 3 presents the standardized path coefficients and significance levels for all hypothesized structural relationships. Environmental sustainability attitudes emerged as the dominant direct predictor of purchase intention ($\beta = 0.71$), while food neophobia exerted the strongest negative effect ($\beta = -0.43$). The model explained 68% of the variance in purchase intention ($R^2 = 0.68$).

Table 3 Structural equation model path coefficients for consumer purchase intention of upcycled food products.

Hypothesis	<i>Structural Path</i>	β (Std.)	SE	C.R.	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Supported</i>
H1	Environmental Attitude → Purchase Intention	0.71	0.06	11.83	< 0.001	Yes
H2	Environmental Attitude → Perceived Sustainability	0.68	0.07	9.71	< 0.001	Yes
H3	Food Neophobia → Purchase Intention	-0.43	0.05	-8.60	< 0.001	Yes
H4	Subjective Norm → Purchase Intention	0.39	0.06	6.50	< 0.001	Yes
H5	Perceived Sustainability → Purchase Intention	0.58	0.06	9.67	< 0.001	Yes

Note: β = standardized path coefficient; SE = standard error; C.R. = critical ratio (t-value); Model fit: CFI = 0.963; TLI = 0.951; RMSEA = 0.052; SRMR = 0.061; R^2 (Purchase Intention) = 0.68.

3.4. Economic feasibility

The cost-benefit analysis demonstrated that upcycled ingredient production costs ranged from PHP 18.50 to PHP 42.00 per 100 g, representing reductions of 38–44% relative to conventional market equivalents (Table 4). Gross margin projections for institutional cafeteria integration ranged from 31.4% (mussel shell pasta) to 47.2% (banana peel tea), with all products achieving positive contribution margins. Break-even volume calculations indicated viability at production levels of 25–60 units/day, well within the SDCA cafeteria's estimated daily throughput of 180–250 units.

Table 4 Economic feasibility analysis: production costs and gross margins for upcycled food products versus conventional equivalents (PHP = Philippine Peso; 2024 price base).

<i>Product</i>	<i>Production Cost (PHP/100 g)</i>	<i>Conventional Equivalent (PHP/100 g)</i>	<i>Cost Reduction (%)</i>	<i>Gross Margin (%)</i>
Banana Peel Tea	18.50	33.00	43.9	47.2
Breadnut Seed Flour	24.00	40.50	40.7	40.8
Arrowroot-Cassava Pandesal	28.00	46.00	39.1	38.5
Mussel Shell Calcium Pasta	42.00	68.00	38.2	31.4

Note: Production costs include raw materials, processing energy, and primary packaging. Conventional equivalent prices sourced from Philippine wholesale market surveys (Metro Manila, Q1 2024).

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Functional and nutritional significance of by-product valorization

The physicochemical characterization data constitute the first systematic multi-product comparison of these four Philippine agri-food by-products within a unified functional food development framework. The exceptionally high TPC and DPPH activity observed for banana peel tea (18.4 mg GAE/g dw; 72.3% inhibition) exceed values reported for *Musa cavendish* peel extracts in comparable studies from other banana-cultivating regions: González-Montelongo et al. (2010) reported TPC values of 8.2–16.7 mg GAE/g dw, while Someya et al. (2002) documented DPPH inhibition of 62.4%—both below the values obtained herein, potentially attributable to cultivar-specific phytochemical profiles of the Lakatan variety and the phenolic-preserving blanching protocol employed in this study. The calcium content of the mussel shell calcium pasta (312 mg/100 g) merits particular attention within the context of Philippine public health nutrition. The Philippine National Nutrition Survey (NNS, 2019) indicates that calcium intake among Filipino adolescents and young adults remains at approximately 60% of the recommended nutrient intake

(RNI), representing a nationally significant nutritional gap. The development of a culturally accessible staple food fortified with locally derived shellfish waste-derived calcium thus represents a contextually targeted biofortification strategy with meaningful population-level applicability—one that simultaneously advances food system sustainability and nutritional equity objectives.

4.2. Consumer acceptance and behavioral architecture

The high sensory acceptability scores achieved across all four products (range: 7.9–8.5) are particularly noteworthy given that participants were explicitly informed of the waste-derived origins of ingredients prior to evaluation—a disclosure condition that typically triggers negative affect and suppresses hedonic scores in experimental settings (Hartmann and Siegrist, 2017; Grasso et al., 2022). The absence of a significant acceptability penalty under full disclosure conditions suggests that BSHM students, by virtue of their culinary training and embedded sustainability education, constitute a consumer segment with substantially reduced waste neophobia compared to general population samples—a finding with important implications for identifying early adopter market segments and designing sustainability-oriented culinary curricula.

The SEM results provide critical structural insights into the determinants of adoption intention. The strong positive effect of environmental sustainability attitudes ($\beta = 0.71$) is consistent with White et al.'s (2019) meta-analytic findings across 27 sustainable consumption studies and confirms the central mediating role of pro-environmental identity in upcycled food adoption. Conversely, the significant negative loading of food neophobia ($\beta = -0.43$) suggests that product communication strategies emphasizing familiar sensory characteristics, recognizable ingredient origins, and transparent processing methods may effectively attenuate neophobic resistance—a practical implication for packaging design, point-of-sale labeling, and marketing communications strategy.

4.3. Institutional scalability and policy implications

The economic feasibility data provide a compelling quantitative basis for institutional integration of upcycled food products. The 38–44% cost reduction relative to conventional equivalents is directly attributable to the near-zero acquisition cost of by-product raw materials within the institutional supply chain—a structural cost advantage that conventional food manufacturers cannot replicate without dedicated by-product collection infrastructure. The gross margins projected (31–47%) are competitive with, and in several cases exceed, industry benchmarks for specialty functional food products in the Philippine market (Philippine Food and Beverage Association, 2023), suggesting that SDCA's upcycling initiative carries genuine commercial scalability potential beyond its institutional context.

The alignment of this initiative with the DOST Technology Transfer and Business Development framework creates a pathway for formal intellectual property protection and government-supported commercialization through the Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines (IPO-Philippines). The strategic co-development of products by BSHM and Bachelor of Science in Tourism Management (BSTM) students serves a dual function: generating high-quality product development capacity at low cost while embedding sustainability competencies within the professional formation of hospitality graduates—a curricular integration model with transferability potential to other academic institutions pursuing SDG-aligned educational missions.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that the systematic upcycling of fruit, vegetable, and shellfish processing by-products into functional food ingredients is both scientifically feasible and institutionally viable within an academic food service context in the Philippines. The principal conclusions are as follows:

- All four upcycled products exhibited physicochemical properties indicative of genuine functional food potential, particularly the high TPC and antioxidant activity of banana peel tea (18.4 mg GAE/g dw; 72.3% DPPH inhibition) and the calcium biofortification capacity of mussel shell-enriched pasta (312 mg Ca/100 g).
- Consistently high sensory acceptability scores (7.9–8.5 on a nine-point Hedonic Scale) under full ingredient disclosure conditions confirmed consumer viability of the developed products among a trained culinary student panel.
- Environmental sustainability attitudes were the dominant behavioral determinant of purchase intention ($\beta = 0.71$; $R^2 = 0.68$), with food neophobia as the primary inhibiting variable ($\beta = -0.43$), providing actionable evidence for communication strategy design.
- Production cost reductions of 38–44% relative to conventional equivalents, combined with gross margins of 31–47%, established positive economic feasibility for institutional integration.
- The integrated multi-dimensional framework developed in this study—combining circular economy principles, the Food Waste Recovery Hierarchy, and the Theory of Planned Behavior—provides a replicable model for institutionalizing food waste upcycling within Southeast Asian academic food systems.

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