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Acceptability and Economic Value of Squash (Cucurbita maxima) - Based Sauce

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ABSTRACT

This study developed squash (Cucurbita maxima)-based pasta sauce and examined its sensory acceptability, observed ambient-storage deterioration, and perceived economic value in Camarines Norte, Philippines. A descriptive research-and-development approach was used to produce three formulations and obtain sensory and economic evaluations from purposively selected teachers, students, and entrepreneurs. The evaluators rated the samples using structured checklists; weighted means summarized judgments, and the dissertation reported one-way analysis of variance and Tukey comparisons for formulation differences. Formulation 3 obtained the highest overall formulation rating (combined weighted mean = 4.74), compared with Formulation 2 (4.32) and Formulation 1 (4.29). The reported omnibus comparison was statistically significant, $F(2, 87) = 5.860$, $p = .004$; Tukey results distinguished Formulation 3 from the other two variants, but not Formulations 1 and 2. All variants received favorable sensory evaluations. During ambient storage, no visible mold was observed at 24 or 48 hours, initial mold growth appeared at 72 hours, and pronounced deterioration was recorded at 96 hours. Economic-value statements received favorable ratings (overall weighted mean = 4.78), particularly for reasonable small-scale production costs, although this was a perception-based appraisal rather than a profitability analysis. The product demonstrated promising acceptability in the study setting, but shelf-life validation, food-safety testing, and detailed costing remain essential before any commercial recommendation.

Keywords: *Cucurbita maxima; squash-based pasta sauce; sensory acceptability; food product development; shelf-life observation; perceived economic value*

INTRODUCTION

Locally abundant agricultural crops can serve as ingredients for new food products when processing methods are matched to consumers' sensory expectations and practical constraints. In the Philippines, squash (Cucurbita maxima) offers a readily available vegetable base for value-added food preparation. Its use in a pasta sauce may diversify household food choices and provide opportunities for small-scale food innovation. Nevertheless, product promise must be distinguished from demonstrated nutrient composition, microbial safety, and business profitability: each requires its own form of evidence. Research on sustainable food formulation emphasizes the importance of balancing product quality, affordability, nutrient considerations, and storage stability (Drewnowski et al., 2022; Dwyer & Drewnowski, 2017).

Studies of pumpkin and squash have documented potentially useful nutrients and bioactive constituents in the plant material, although composition varies by plant part, processing, and variety (Jahan et al., 2023; Kulczyński et al., 2020). Product development studies also show that sensory response is central to acceptance of foods incorporating alternative plant ingredients (Biao et al., 2020; Branco et al., 2017). Evidence from sauce research reinforces the need to evaluate formulation and packaging, rather than assume that the favorable characteristics of an ingredient are automatically retained in a finished product (Giménez et al., 2022).

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The source thesis identified a local gap in product-level evidence about squash-based pasta sauce, particularly regarding the comparative performance of different recipes, their acceptability to varied evaluator groups, observed storage changes, and perceived economic value. Conducted at Camarines Norte State College–Abaño Campus, Daet, during academic year 2025–2026, the study developed three variants and used sensory testing to select a preferred formulation. By linking product development with a preliminary economic appraisal, it addressed a practical question relevant to home economics education, local enterprise planning, and agricultural value addition.

Accordingly, the study sought to document a feasible preparation procedure, compare three formulations, test the reported differences in sensory evaluation, describe acceptance across the attributes of color, taste, aroma, texture, and appearance, observe changes during ambient storage, and assess perceived economic value. This article presents those outcomes in journal form, retaining the dissertation's original measures while interpreting the evidence within its stated design and limitations.

Literature Review

Squash Composition, Food Innovation, and Product Development

Squash-based foods derive part of their appeal from the versatility of the crop. Jahan et al. (2023) described compositional and antioxidant properties across edible portions of Cucurbita maxima, while Kulczyński et al. (2020) showed that measurable antioxidant characteristics depend on cultivar and extraction conditions. These findings provide scientific context for exploring the vegetable as a sauce base, but they cannot substitute for laboratory analysis of the final recipe. Processing conditions and ingredients can influence the properties of the finished product.

Local and regional product-development literature demonstrates that alternative plant materials can be incorporated into familiar food forms. Biao et al. (2020) investigated a vegetable-derived flour in baked foods; Branco et al. (2017) examined green banana ingredients in pasta; and Butke et al. (2018) considered pumpkin skin flour in pizza. Although those products differ from squash sauce, the common principle is that formulation must be tested as a product in its own right. Dwyer and Drewnowski (2017) situated such work within wider food-and-nutrition-security considerations, in which affordability and access are as relevant as ingredient selection.

Sensory Acceptability and Selection of Formulations

Sensory evaluation provides a structured means of describing reactions to food characteristics such as taste, appearance, aroma, and texture. Consumer evaluations of pasta sauce have illustrated how ingredient changes alter liking and product descriptions (Wallner et al., 2023). Product studies nearer to the Philippine setting have also reported acceptability testing of squash cupcakes (Mercadal et al., 2022) and bamboo shoot cupcakes (Tamayo & Tamayo, 2020). These examples reinforce the importance of sampling actual potential users rather than inferring preference from formulation alone.

In this thesis, sensory judgments were elicited from teachers, students, and entrepreneurs and compared for three formulations. This allowed the researchers to consider whether acceptance was consistent across evaluator groups. The development of a value-added polvoron bar from plant flours, as documented by Ronquillo et al. (2020), provides another example of evaluating local ingredients within a prepared product. Taken together, the literature supports sensory screening as an essential early development stage, while the size and selection of evaluators constrain generalization to wider consumer markets.

Shelf Life, Packaging, and Evidence of Food Safety

Shelf life is a key limitation for moist vegetable-based sauces. Giménez et al. (2022) investigated how storage conditions and packaging influenced a bioactive vegetable sauce, illustrating the importance of monitoring change over time. Research on the foam-mat drying of pasta sauce examined processing strategies relevant to shelf-stable or convenience products (Indrianti et al., 2023). These investigations demonstrate that stability depends on specific processing and storage conditions rather than on consumer acceptance alone.

ISSN: 3116-3475
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of Education, Research, and Innovation Perspectives
Volume 2 Issue 10 (October 2026)

The dissertation used observation of color, odor, and visible mold development over four days at ambient conditions. Such observations can identify evident spoilage but do not establish microbiological safety at any preceding time point. Reports on ready-to-eat products emphasize the importance of preserving quality during processing and distribution (Temgire et al., 2021), while broader discussions of processed-food design stress the need for safe, stable, and affordable options (Drewnowski et al., 2022). Therefore, storage findings must be treated as preliminary physical observations only.

Perceived Economic Value and Local Food-Product Potential

The economic relevance of food processing is not exhausted by whether a food tastes acceptable. Inputs, processing time, packaging, price, distribution, waste, and sale volumes jointly shape commercial feasibility. Food formulation may provide opportunities for agricultural value addition, but perceived affordability must be kept analytically separate from actual unit costs and realized margins. Research on food acceptability similarly identifies multiple consumer-side considerations that shape willingness to choose a product (Maina, 2018).

The source study used an evaluator checklist covering perceived affordability, ingredient availability, household savings, farmer income, production cost, and local-market prospects. These statements are appropriate for an early market-perception appraisal, but not for making numerical claims about return on investment or realized changes in income. The review of processed foods and sustainable diets by Drewnowski et al. (2022), together with the food-system context described by the Food and Agriculture Organization et al. (2020), supports a careful distinction between potential social value and independently demonstrated economic impact.

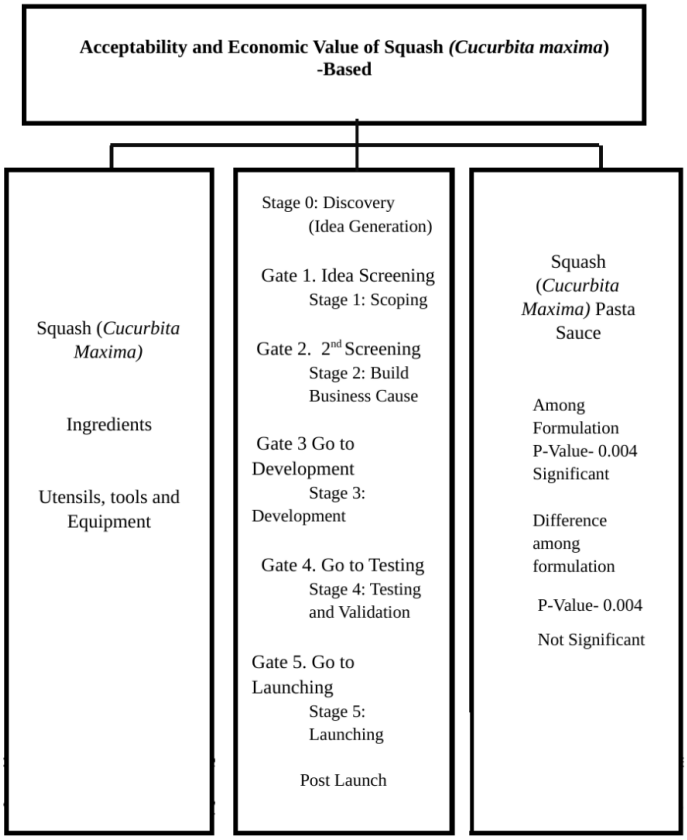


Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework*

ISSN: 3116-3475
International Journal
of Education, Research, and Innovation Perspectives
Volume 2 Issue 10 (October 2026)

METHODS

Research Design

The study used a descriptive approach combined with research and development (R&D) to prepare, assess, and compare three squash-based pasta sauce formulations. Development activities were described through preparatory, formulation, and sensory-evaluation phases within a Stage-Gate model. The quantitative component summarized evaluators' responses using weighted means and reported an analysis of variance with Tukey post-hoc comparisons.

Research Locale

Data collection and product development were situated at Camarines Norte State College–Abaño Campus, Daet, Camarines Norte, during academic year 2025–2026. The setting provided access to potential evaluators familiar with consuming or purchasing prepared foods.

Participants and Sampling Technique

Evaluators were purposively selected from teachers, students, and entrepreneurs. The results table listed 10 respondents per category, for 30 evaluators. Another paragraph in the thesis scope described 10 teachers, 10 students, and five entrepreneurs (25 evaluators); because the two source figures disagree, the sample size should be checked against the original questionnaires before publication. The statistical results below are reproduced as reported, without constructing substitute respondent-level data.

Product Formulations and Research Instrument

Squash purée served as the primary ingredient. The source recipe specified 5, 8, and 10 cups of purée for Formulations 1, 2, and 3, respectively, with oregano increasing to 1 tablespoon in Formulation 3 from 1 teaspoon in each of the other variants. Minced onion and garlic, olive oil, and red wine were listed as constant additions. The evaluation checklist covered color, taste, aroma, texture, appearance, and an additional nutritional-value section; sensory ratings used a five-point acceptance scale. The thesis described expert content validation and a preliminary dry run, but no laboratory nutrient measurements were furnished.

Table 1. *Ingredients listed for the three experimental formulations*

Ingredient	Formulation 1	Formulation 2	Formulation 3
Squash purée	5 cups	8 cups	10 cups
Natural oregano	1 teaspoon	1 teaspoon	1 tablespoon
Minced onion and garlic	½ cup	½ cup	½ cup
Olive oil	1 tablespoon	1 tablespoon	1 tablespoon
Red wine (Merlot Novellino)	3 tablespoons	3 tablespoons	3 tablespoons

Data Gathering Procedure

The preparation process involved gathering and washing ingredients, peeling and cutting the squash, sautéing onion and garlic, cooking the squash with water and seasoning, cooling the mixture, and blending it to a purée consistency. Prepared variants were offered to evaluators, who completed the checklist. For storage observation, the sauce was inspected at 24-hour intervals up to 96 hours under ambient conditions. Responses and observations were then compiled and interpreted according to the thesis procedures.

Data Analysis

Frequency and descriptive distribution were used for the evaluator groups. Weighted means summarized formulation preferences, sensory judgments, and perceived economic value. The thesis reported a one-way ANOVA to compare formulation scores at a .05 significance level, followed by Tukey honest significant difference

ISSN: 3116-3475
International Journal
of Education, Research, and Innovation Perspectives
Volume 2 Issue 10 (October 2026)

comparisons. Because individual ratings and test assumptions were not supplied, the present article does not independently re-estimate inferential statistics.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers described informed consent, voluntary participation, withdrawal rights, anonymity, confidentiality, and respectful communication. The source also disclosed the use of artificial-intelligence tools for writing support rather than for changing respondent data. The dissertation did not report an independently issued ethics-approval number. Claims of food safety were not substantiated by microbial testing, a separate limitation for participant-facing product evaluation and future distribution.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Development and Sensory Preference of Formulations

The Stage-Gate development process provided a sequence for moving from the idea of squash-based sauce to preparation and evaluation. It described discovery, screening, scoping, development, testing, and potential launching, though the latter should be understood as a proposed stage rather than evidence of an actual commercial launch. The test recipe matrix indicates that purée volume and oregano quantity differed among variants, making it inappropriate to attribute preference exclusively to squash concentration.

Table 2 shows the aggregated scores reported in the thesis. Formulation 3 ranked first (4.74), followed by Formulation 2 (4.32) and Formulation 1 (4.29). Teachers and entrepreneurs each rated Formulation 3 at 4.88, while students rated it at 4.46. The pattern supports a preference for the third recipe within these evaluator groups. Sensory evaluations of novel pasta sauces and local squash-based products likewise underscore that the acceptability of new food formulations should be evaluated rather than assumed (Wallner et al., 2023; Mercadal et al., 2022).

Table 2. *Preferred formulation by evaluator group (source weighted means)*

Evaluator group	Formulation 1	Formulation 2	Formulation 3
Students	4.32	4.06	4.46
Teachers	4.32	4.40	4.88
Entrepreneurs	4.22	4.50	4.88
Combined WM	4.29	4.32	4.74
Reported rank	3	2	1

Note. The source labels 4.21–5.00 “Best

Reported Significant Differences and Post-Hoc Comparisons

The source ANOVA identified a statistically significant overall formulation effect, $F(2, 87) = 5.860$, $p = .004$. The reported sums of squares were 3.830 between formulations and 28.43 within formulations, with corresponding degrees of freedom of 2 and 87. This is evidence of a difference among the scores under the analytical model used in the thesis; it does not mean that every pair of formulations differed. The same evaluators appear to have rated more than one formulation, so the suitability of an independent-groups one-way ANOVA should be verified from the original evaluation design.

Table 3. Analysis of variance as reported for formulation ratings

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Between formulations	3.830	2	1.915	5.860	.004
Within formulations	28.43	87	0.327	—	—
Total	32.26	89	—	—	—

ISSN: 3116-3475
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Volume 2 Issue 10 (October 2026)

The Tukey comparisons distinguished Formulation 3 from Formulations 1 and 2 (reported Q values of 4.343 and 4.024 against Q critical = 3.372), whereas the comparison between Formulations 1 and 2 was not significant (Q = 0.319). Thus, the inferential results align with the selection of Formulation 3 as the most favored option in this sample but do not establish superior nutritional quality, food safety, or guaranteed market success.

Table 4. *Tukey comparisons reported in the thesis*

Pair	Mean difference	Q	Q critical	95% CI	Result
F1 vs. F2	0.033	0.319	3.372	−0.3185 to 0.3851	Not significant
F1 vs. F3	0.453	4.343	3.372	0.1015 to 0.8051	Significant
F2 vs. F3	0.420	4.024	3.372	0.0682 to 0.7718	Significant

Sensory Acceptability by Attribute

The dissertation described all three formulations as "Very Highly Acceptable" according to its sensory-rating scale, with Formulation 3 especially favorable on aroma and texture. Its narrative reported ratings of 4.90 for aroma and 4.87 for texture in Formulation 3. However, the detailed sensory-summary paragraph also assigned Formulations 1 and 2 overall means of 4.36 and 4.31 while ranking the first below the second, inconsistent with the separate preference table. Consequently, the ranked formulation results in Table 2 are used here without synthesizing the incompatible summary values into an invented composite.

These findings show that acceptable flavor and physical characteristics can be achieved with squash as the main sauce ingredient for this sample of respondents. They do not demonstrate that the product has a particular nutrient concentration or provides improved health outcomes. Work on value-added plant formulations similarly emphasizes the role of sensory attributes and processing conditions (Branco et al., 2017; Butke et al., 2018; Ronquillo et al., 2020).

Observed Changes During Ambient Storage

The product was monitored at four successive 24-hour intervals. No visible mold or objectionable odor was recorded in the first two days. At 72 hours, early mold formation was observed, and by 96 hours the thesis documented extensive mold growth and an unpleasant smell. The outcome indicates rapid deterioration under the reported ambient conditions. Because no microbial counts, pH tracking, water-activity data, or pathogen tests were presented, the observations cannot establish that the sauce was safe at 24 or 48 hours, nor justify a certified shelf-life duration.

Table 5. *Qualitative shelf-life observations under ambient storage*

Observation interval	Appearance and odor reported	Interpretation
24 hours	Characteristic appearance; no visible mold or objectionable odor	No visible spoilage noted
48 hours	No visible mold or objectionable odor	No visible spoilage noted
72 hours	Initial mold appearance; odor largely unchanged	Visible spoilage had begun
96 hours	Extensive mold development and unpleasant odor	Marked deterioration

The deterioration pattern is an important technical obstacle to broader distribution and storage. Packaging and controlled temperature can materially influence sauce stability, as shown by Giménez et al. (2022), while studies of sauce drying demonstrate other development options requiring separate testing (Indrianti et al., 2023). Before offering an extended storage claim, future formulations should undergo appropriate food-safety, physicochemical, and temperature-specific shelf-life assessment.

ISSN: 3116-3475
International Journal
of Education, Research, and Innovation Perspectives
Volume 2 Issue 10 (October 2026)

Perceived Economic Value

Respondents rated economic-value characteristics favorably, with an overall reported weighted mean of 4.78 ("Very Highly Acceptable"). The highest item concerned the reasonableness of production costs for small-scale businesses (4.87), followed by potential household savings (4.80). However, these are respondent perceptions, not measured expenses, costs per bottle, pricing, profit margin, or changes in farmers' income. Although food product innovation can create potential economic opportunities, feasibility must ultimately be established through accounting and market evidence rather than favorable questionnaire ratings alone (Drewnowski et al., 2022; Maina, 2018).

Table 6. *Perceived economic-value characteristics of squash-based sauce*

Criterion	Students	Teachers	Entrepreneurs	Combined WM
Affordable relative to commercial sauces	4.70	4.90	4.70	4.77
Ingredients low-cost and easy to obtain	4.40	5.00	4.80	4.73
Potential reduction of household food expenses	4.60	4.80	5.00	4.80
Potential to increase farmer income	4.70	4.90	4.60	4.73
Reasonable production cost for small enterprises	4.60	5.00	5.00	4.87
Potential local-market sale	4.50	4.90	4.90	4.77
Overall reported mean	4.58	4.92	4.83	4.78

The findings indicate product interest in the local evaluation setting and offer a practical basis for further prototyping. The strongest contribution of the study is early-stage product screening: a clearly preferred variant, a need for rapid-spoilage mitigation, and perceived affordability. These outcomes remain relevant to local food-product education and innovation even when distinguished from full market validation and food-safety certification.

CONCLUSION

The development and evaluation of squash (Cucurbita maxima)-based sauce showed favorable acceptability across the tested variants, with Formulation 3 consistently preferred by the teachers, students, and entrepreneurs whose evaluations were tabulated. The dissertation reported a significant overall formulation difference and Tukey comparisons that distinguished Formulation 3 from Formulations 1 and 2. The sauce also received favorable perceived economic-value ratings, particularly regarding production-cost reasonableness and household affordability. In contrast, observation of visible mold by the third day and marked deterioration on the fourth day highlighted the need for preservation work. These findings establish preliminary acceptability and perceived value in a local sample, not laboratory-confirmed nutritional superiority, microbial safety, or business profitability. The study contributes a documented formulation and initial evaluation basis for future controlled product refinement.

ISSN: 3116-3475
International Journal
of Education, Research, and Innovation Perspectives
Volume 2 Issue 10 (October 2026)

Recommendation

Food-product developers and Home Economics practitioners may use Formulation 3 as the starting point for controlled recipe replication and further sensory evaluation. Ingredient ratios, batch yields, processing temperatures, serving size, packaging, and preparation steps should be standardized before expanding testing. Researchers should review the original questionnaires to reconcile the reported 25-versus-30 evaluator discrepancy, the incompatible overall sensory means, and the suitability of the ANOVA model where participants assessed multiple products.

Before providing public storage, instructions or pursuing distribution, food technologists should conduct microbiological safety tests and validated shelf-life studies under specified refrigeration and ambient conditions. Additional studies should quantify nutrient composition, sodium content, actual production costs, unit pricing, profit margins, and consumer purchase intention. School and local-enterprise stakeholders may consider supervised small-scale pilot development only after these checks establish an acceptable safety and economic basis.

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