



Sham Hanifa, My Kitchen, The Cottage Restaurant, Buffalo Boy and Chef Sham Sauces

WHERE- Leitrim, Ireland

FIND OUT MORE - www.shamhanifa.ie

Business in Numbers

Year established: 2009

Number of businesses: 4

Employees: 30+

Energy as a % of costs across the businesses:
6-10%

Local Sourcing Ratio across the businesses:
35% - 55%

Sham's Story

Shamzuri (Sham) Hanifa is a Malaysian-born chef and food entrepreneur based in Leitrim, Ireland for over 25 years. He is the owner & creative force behind multi award winning The Cottage Restaurant in Jamestown, My Kitchen Café and Cookery School and Buffalo Boy Steakhouse in Co. Leitrim, celebrated for blending Irish ingredients with Asian culinary influences.

Sham is also the creator of Chef Sham Sauces, an author (Agak Agak), and a dynamic culinary educator through cookery classes & demonstrations that champion seasonal, locally sourced produce. His work reflects his multicultural heritage, sustainable food values & commitment to evolving Ireland's food culture.

How is sustainability visible in daily operations?

Sustainability is built into how we run the businesses day to day, from procurement through to service. It shows up in menu planning that follows seasonality, buying patterns that prioritise local producers, and kitchen systems designed to reduce waste and protect margins.

- **Waste prevention before waste management:** focus is on buying right, prep right, store right, and cook right so waste is prevented rather than dealt with at the end.
- **Tight production planning across multiple outlets:** planning is coordinated across the restaurants, café, and product range so volumes match demand and surplus is avoided.
- **Portion and prep discipline:** clear portioning, batch sizes, and daily prep targets reduce over production while keeping service quality high.
- **Food education as part of impact:** through our cookery classes, demos, and content, sustainability is reinforced by teaching people how to cook well, waste less, and value ingredients.

My Malaysian heritage shapes a "respect for the ingredient" approach, using spice, fermentation, marinades, stocks, and nose to tail style thinking to make full use of raw materials and reduce waste.

What is the role of local sourcing?

Local sourcing means buying from neighbours with real food integrity, keeping relationships strong, and keeping value circulating locally. It shortens our supply chain and makes the operation more efficient. Ultra low food miles translate into better food, ingredients arrive fresher, hold their quality longer, and taste better, so the standard on the plate improves and waste drops too.

It reduces transport, lowers the risk of spoilage, and keeps logistics costs more manageable. We have actually worked with many of the same local suppliers since 2009, which helps us plan better, respond quickly to seasonality and availability, and keep quality steady across the restaurants, café, and product range.

How does community involvement support sustainability?

Community matters greatly to us. It is the reason the business has stayed strong and growing and it is what makes sustainability workable, not theoretical. Our local customers understand and seek out seasonal foods, and they support a menu that changes, sells out, and stays tight, which helps us keep waste low and standards high. Our relationships with suppliers are tight, we can pick up the phone, solve problems fast, and adapt when weather or availability shifts.

Staff are at the centre of it too. A good team carries the culture every day, how we prep, how we portion, how we use ingredients properly, and how we keep quality consistent across service. We also stay involved with local classes, demos, and community links because better food skills lead to less waste, and because it keeps the next generation connected to real cooking.

Local agencies and supports have played a role as well, helping us sharpen planning, packaging, and growth decisions so the business can keep improving while staying true to the values behind it. By providing local employment & attracting diners to rural Ireland, the business supports the local economy & tourism.

What tools support energy and waste tracking?

For us, the most useful tools are the ones that fit a busy kitchen and actually change behaviour.

For **energy**, we start with the basics: utility bills and meter reads to spot trends month to month, then we pay attention to the big hitters, refrigeration, cooking equipment, extraction, hot water. A simple maintenance and checks list matters here, fridge and freezer temperatures, door seals, cleaning condensers, switching off kit properly, and catching faults early. Smart meter data is helpful because it shows peaks and baseload, so you can see what is running when it should not be.

For **waste**, we keep it practical. We track how often bins are lifted and what that costs, and we separate waste streams so we can see what is avoidable. In the kitchen, the most useful tool is a simple waste log with a few reasons, prep waste, spoilage, over production, and plate waste, so we can tighten ordering, portioning, and prep. Our POS and stock routines also support this, because knowing what sells and when helps us plan production and reduce surplus.

How is food waste monitored/ reduced?

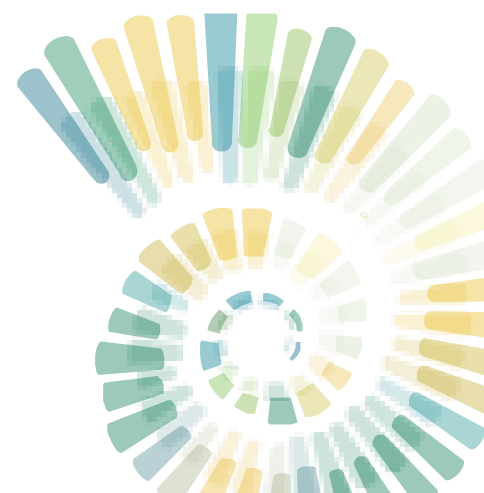
Food waste is a key focus for us, and we treat it as a kitchen performance issue, not a bin issue. It starts with forecast led prep: we set prep levels from bookings, recent covers, and POS patterns, and we cook in smaller batches so we can top up during service instead of over producing at the start. We also keep par levels for high-risk items and review them weekly.

Menu engineering is the next. We design dishes that share ingredients across sections, so products move steadily and fewer items sit unused. We build in flex points too, daily specials that let us use what is freshest and what needs to move, without it feeling like leftovers. My Malaysian heritage supports this, because techniques like stocks, broths, marinades, pickles, sambals, curries, and braises are built for full use of ingredients and turning trimmings into value.

Unavoidable organic waste is composted and used in our kitchen garden.



I use my TV appearances as a chance to bring sustainability values to a national level, showing practical nose to tail cooking and how to get full value from ingredients. It is another way to share the mindset behind what we do, respect the ingredient, waste less, and cook with purpose.



What data is informing key decisions?

Key decisions are informed by a combination of digital data & direct customer interaction. Sales figures, online orders, reservations & CRM insights help track demand, manage stock & plan menus. Equally important are customer conversations, feedback & repeat behaviours, alongside the clear trend of sustainability increasingly influencing consumer choices, ensuring decisions are both data-informed & future-focused.

AI is becoming part of that picture. We are currently upskilling, with strong support through Local Enterprise Office training and business supports. In practice, we are using AI in focused ways that save time and improve consistency, drafting and refining content, summarising customer feedback themes, generating first drafts for menus and event copy, and helping with translation and tone for different audiences. We keep control of accuracy and brand voice by checking all outputs carefully. It is a learning process.

How is digital used to grow and promote the business?

We are increasingly using digital tools to grow & promote the business as we also build confidence in adopting new technologies. Our dedicated website supports e-commerce, enabling direct product sales, while Facebook & Instagram are used to share menus, events & brand stories. A reservation system, mailing list & CRM support customer engagement, repeat visits & improved stock control through better demand forecasting.

What are the challenges of going digital in a rural setting?

Connectivity has improved greatly in Leitrim. This is vital as rural hospitality also has a visibility challenge. You rely heavily on being easy to find in search and maps, and on keeping opening hours, menus, and booking information accurate across channels.

Time and skills are also real constraints. In a small team, training and consistent digital upkeep must fit around service, and systems must be simple enough to run without a dedicated marketing person

How is social media shaping customer relationships? Use of AI?

Each business has its own social media channels, and we create content in house. That means the posts stay close to real service, real food, and real people, and customers get updates that match what is happening on the ground, menus, events, specials, classes, and product launches.

Because content is made inside the team, social also works as a direct relationship channel. We can reply quickly to questions, keep regulars in the loop, and build trust through behind the scenes detail and consistency. We share community connections as a key part of our social media approach. The example below shows a cookery demo with a local GAA group. It is a simple way to give something back, build real relationships, and share practical food ideas that fit active lifestyles. Posts like this also reinforce what we stand for: good food, skills, and community.

To be honest, we are not using AI for social media at the moment. Content is created in house, by the teams in each business, so it stays close to real service, real food, and what is happening day to day. But we do know, we need to embrace it in the future!

How is sustainability communicated to customers?

Sustainability is communicated through the food itself and the choices we make visible around it.

- On the menu and in venue, we highlight what is in season and where key ingredients are coming from, so customers see the link between local produce and what is on the plate.
- We explain our “use it all” cooking style in a practical way, stocks, broths, sauces, specials, so customers understand that flavour and waste reduction go together.
- Through cookery demos, classes, and TV appearances, we share simple techniques people can use at home, how to stretch ingredients, cook nose to tail, and waste less, without losing quality.

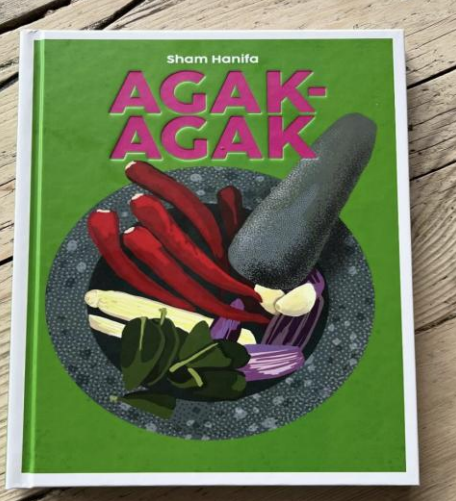


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mykitchenbyshamhanifa Thank you to the St Mary's ladies gaa for coming in this evening for a demo with Chef Sham @sham_hanifa Sham created some recipes for pre match & post match meals. All healthy, high protein and nutritious 🍌 Hope ye enjoyed the demo and got lots of ideas to create when training or playing. @st.maryskiltoghertgaa

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Describe your leadership style? What principles guide your daily decisions?

My leadership style is hands on. I lead from the front, stay close to the kitchen, the team, and the customers, and I am happiest when I am working alongside people, not managing from a distance. I grew up cooking from childhood, and as a migrant entrepreneur I have built this step by step into four businesses, so I know the value of hard work, consistency, and standards you can stand over.

The principles behind my daily decisions are simple. Respect the ingredient, respect the people, and respect the culture behind the food. I focus on creating a sustainable dining experience where Malaysian and Irish cuisines meet in a way that feels honest and high quality. I keep asking two questions every day: what can we improve this week, and how do we keep building something that lasts for the future.

An example of how you have led through adversity

I've learned to lead through adversity by staying flexible and not relying on just one income stream. Diversifying into sauces and operating more than one restaurant helped build resilience during economic downturns. During COVID-19, we quickly adapted by developing takeaway options and outdoor seating to cope with lockdowns. The key lesson was to stay open to change, act quickly and see challenges as opportunities to evolve for the future. We were hit by severe Shannon flooding in Jamestown forcing a temporary closure and renovations at The Cottage. We focused on what we could control: careful planning and supporting the team through a difficult period. Looking back, adversity increased our innovation. It made us faster to adapt, more confident in testing new channels, and more resilient as a group of businesses.

What's next for your brand or sustainability goals?

What is next is about tightening the system and raising the standard, across four businesses, without losing what makes us unique. Awards have helped build trust, yet they also raise expectations, so we want every sustainability message to be backed by real operational practice. The focus now is to deepen what we already do well: stronger resource tracking, lower waste kitchens, smarter energy choices, and clearer proof points across menus, products, and digital channels. We also want to invest in resilience, after flooding and power disruption, so the business can keep operating through shocks.

How will you connect with the next generation of customers

Connecting with the next generation is already part of our day to day, because our customer profile is young and we have many young staff across the businesses. They keep us tuned in to what people care about now, value, quality, transparency, and experiences that feel real.

We will also keep the connection live through hands on experiences, demos, classes and collaborations with local groups and schools, so younger customers feel they are part of it.



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