

Exporting sesame oil to Europe

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Sesame oil is gaining in popularity, as there is a growing interest in ethnic cuisines, gourmet products and healthier oils. Sesame oil can be sold in bottles to consumers but there is also a growing market for food applications, such as the use of sesame oil in hummus and salad dressings. Most European consumers of sesame oil live in the United Kingdom and Germany.

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1. Product description

Sesame oil is an edible oil obtained from sesame seeds (*Sesamum indicum*) through cold-pressing and filtering. Sesame oil can be produced from black (hulled) or white (de-hulled) sesame seeds. See [our studies on sesame seeds](#) for more information about the market for sesame seeds in various European countries.

The oil contains mostly unsaturated fats, and a small amount of saturated fats, it contains glycerides of oleic acid (36–54%) and linoleic acid (38–49%); and other components such as the saturated fatty acids palmitic acid (8–12%), stearic acid (3.5–7%) and some other fatty acids.

Myanmar, China, India and Japan are [the main producers of sesame oil worldwide](#). Sesame oil is produced using cold-press methods or normal oil-refining methods. Cold-pressed sesame oil is mostly available in health shops in Europe and North America. Cold-pressed sesame oil is pale yellow. This differs from the golden colour of the Indian sesame oil or the dark brown oil from East Asia (derived from roasted or toasted sesame seeds). Conventional refined sesame oil is clear, light yellow, and odourless.

Sesame oil is commonly used for cooking in Southeast Asian cuisines and it is also used as a gourmet oil in salad dressings, for example. In addition, it is also used in cosmetics and in other health and wellness products. Its popularity is growing in Europe, where it is marketed as a high-quality oil. The focus of this factsheet is on its use as a high-quality oil for cooking and for other food applications.

Edible sesame oil is traded under two codes within the Harmonised System (HS):

HS code	Description
1515 5019	Crude sesame oil for human consumption

2. What does the European market for sesame oil look like?

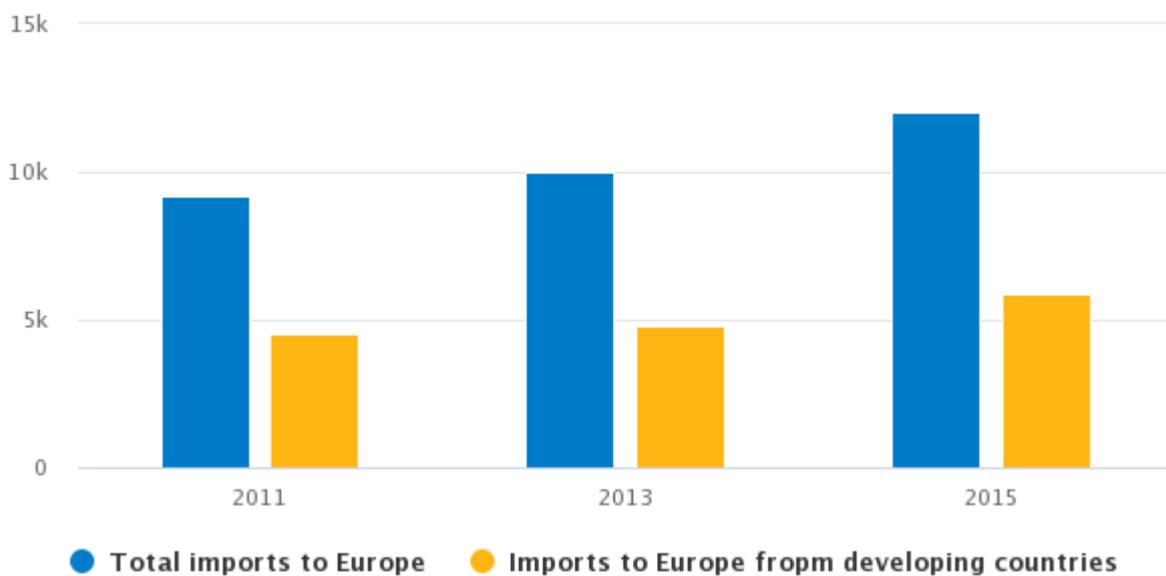
The United Kingdom and Germany are the main consumers[H3]

In 2014, [European consumption of sesame oil was 5,000 tonnes](#). The United Kingdom is the most important market for sesame oil in Europe, with a consumption of 2,000 tonnes in 2014 (around 40% of the market).

Germany accounted for around 20% of the European market in 2014, with a consumption of 1,000 tonnes. Based on the import figures for sesame oil into Europe, an increase in consumption can be expected for 2015.

Imports are growing

Figure 1. Total imports of sesame oil to Europe, 2011–2015, in tonnes.



Source: Eurostat, 2016

Source: Eurostat, 2016

In 2015, European imports of sesame oil reached 12,000 tonnes (€51 million). Since 2011, imports increased at an annual rate of 7.1% in volume, mainly due to the expanding use of sesame oil in Europe, both in Asian cuisines as well as in gourmet and health products.

The main importers of sesame oil in Europe are:

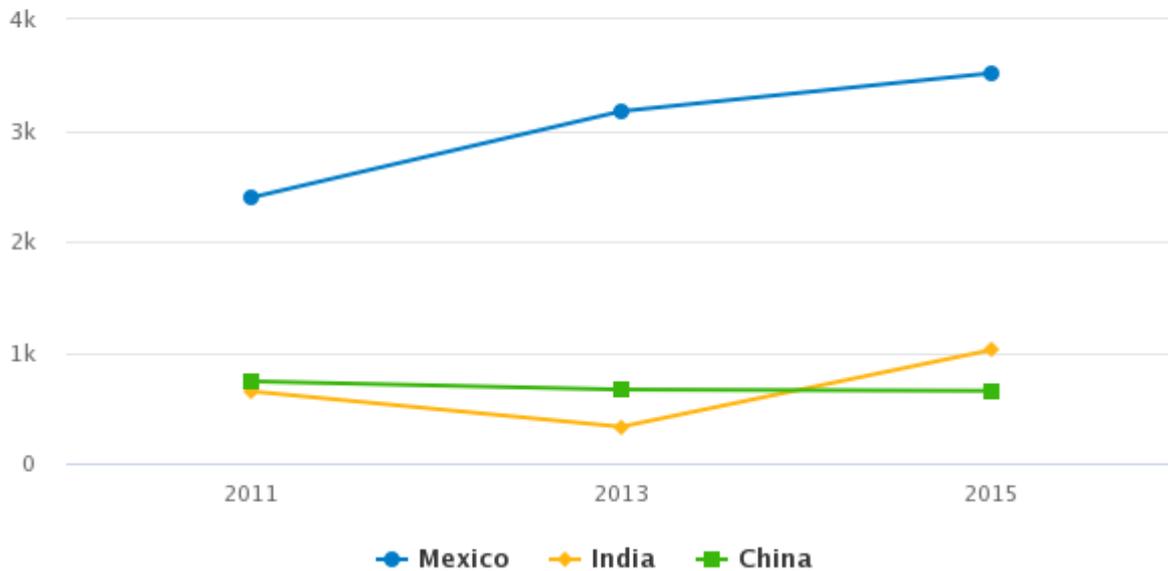
- The United Kingdom (27% of total imports)
- The Netherlands (19%)
- Germany (17%)
- France (10%)

Half of all imports come directly from developing countries

In 2015, 50% of the imported sesame oil originated directly from developing countries. The main developing-country suppliers of sesame oil to Europe were Mexico (29% of total European imports), India (8.5%) and China (5.4%). China experienced a slight decline between 2011 and 2015, while both Mexico and India saw their

exports to Europe increase in this period.

Figure 2. Main developing country suppliers of sesame oil to Europe, 2011–2015, in tonnes.



Source: Eurostat, 2016

Other important suppliers outside Europe are Singapore and Taiwan, accounting for respective shares of 7.1% and 2.2% in 2015. Singaporean supplies remained stable, while Taiwanese supplies saw a sharp increase (25% annually) between 2011 and 2015.

The Netherlands and Germany are the most important trade hubs

Within Europe, the Netherlands (12% of total European imports in 2015) and Germany (8.6%) are the main suppliers, mainly serving as trading hubs for sesame oil re-exports.

In 2015, Europe exported 6,000 tonnes (€33 million) of sesame oil. The Netherlands was the largest European exporter of sesame oil (1,600 tonnes). The Netherlands and Germany serve as important re-exporters to other European countries.

Tips

Check the website of FoodDrinkEurope as an [interesting source to help understand consumption patterns of food products](#), including sesame oil, across different European countries.

Collect your own market statistics to support your export marketing strategy. Find out more about [production and consumption of sesame seeds and oil](#) through the statistics provided by FAOSTAT and Fediol (Federation of the European Vegetable Oil and Protein meal Industry). The website of Eurostat will also help you explore [the trade statistics for sesame oil](#).

Consider the large trade hubs such as the Netherlands and Germany as possible entry points to reach surrounding European markets.

3. What trends offer opportunities on the European market for sesame oil?

Sesame oil takes on the speciality market

Sesame oil is increasingly used as a gourmet product in home and out-of-home consumption in Europe. The speciality oil segment is focused on high quality, sold at a higher price. Cold-pressed and high-quality toasted (one of the most-sold speciality oils in the United Kingdom) sesame oils are becoming especially popular.

Cold-pressed sesame oil has a special appeal as a healthy oil. It is low in saturated fats and has other beneficial ingredients, such as vitamins and minerals; consumers see it as a healthy alternative in comparison to other cooking oils.

Tips

Invest in the quality of your product, paying special attention to: High raw material quality and freshness; appropriate stability; clarity; long shelf life and protection from residues.

Promote the health properties of your product, but only claim health benefits which are backed up by scientific evidence. Access the European Union's Register database for all [nutrition and health claims allowed in Europe](#). You can also read more about this issue in [our study covering buyer requirements for vegetable oils](#).

Demand for authenticity is growing

Authenticity of specialty oils is an increasingly important issue in Europe, revolving around two main themes: product composition and origin. These issues reflect the [food frauds revolving around olive oil](#).

As sesame oil is a relatively expensive oil, it is subject to fraud in product composition: [mixing sesame oil labelled as pure with other cheaper oils](#) (examples: sunflower and corn oils). European authorities, buyers and consumers have very low tolerance for food frauds, and suppliers committing them see their reputations severely affected.

Origin is also a point of attention for sesame oil. The indication of origin is a factor affecting demand and prices for sesame oil, [as sesame oil with a specific origin is especially popular on the market](#). This also affects the traceability of the product, which is an important requirement on the European market.

Tips

Do not adulterate pure sesame oil by mixing it with cheaper oils. The samples you provide to your buyer should correspond to the delivered product! It is also important to provide accurate [accompanying documentation \(example\)](#) on product composition, analytical and sensorial properties, microbiological criteria and other factors demanded by your buyer.

Develop an Identity Preservation (IP) system for your products (for example by maintaining their segregation and documenting their identity), which focuses on their origin and on transparency along the chain.

4. What requirements should sesame oil comply with to be allowed on the European market?

Buyers in the European Union have strict requirements for sesame oil. You will only be able to successfully market your product in Europe when you comply with these requirements. See our study on [buyer requirements for vegetable oils](#) for a detailed analysis of these requirements. They deal with the following topics:

Legal requirements

You must follow these legal requirements applicable to food ingredients and vegetable oils specifically:

- Food safety: Traceability, hygiene and control
- Contamination of food: Contamination with Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon, especially benzo(a)pyrene, is common for sesame oil which can occur during drying and roasting of the sesame seeds. The maximum limit of benzo(a)pyrene allowed is 2.0 µg/kg. Other contamination sources can be salmonella and aflatoxins, which deserve special attention for oils which are not refined.
- Erucic acid content in oils and fats: Not very relevant for sesame oil.
- Extraction solvents
- Product composition
- Labelling, including nutrition and allergens: Sesame seeds [must be listed as an allergen in the list of ingredients](#) if the sesame oil is sold under a less common name like gingelly oil.
- Food contact materials
- General requirements on packaging and liability

Tips

Check the website of the [Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed \(RASFF\)](#) which lists reported border rejections and alerts for sesame oil under the product category 'fats and oils'.

Read more about PAHs in vegetable oils in the European Union paper [Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons - Occurrence in foods, dietary exposure and health effects](#).

Refer to Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 for more information about [the specific requirements for allergens and labelling](#).

Additional requirements

You are advised to follow these additional requirements applicable to food ingredients and vegetable oils specifically:

- Food Safety Certification: In addition to HACCP as a legal requirement, certificates such as IFS or BRC might be required by some buyers.
- Corporate responsibility and sustainable sourcing certification: Sesame oil is not criticised in Europe as much as commodity oils such as palm and soy. However, you can still implement sustainability policies to stand out from your competitors. You could, for example, focus on good environmental practices in the production of your sesame seeds and oil and/or try to create a positive social impact on sesame-producing communities.

Quality requirements

Sesame oil is produced in different qualities, varying according to the extraction method. Manually-intensive methods include hot water flotation, bridge presses, ram presses, and small-scale expeller. Mechanical extraction methods are also possible, with the use of an expeller press, larger-scale oil extraction machines or pressing followed by chemical solvent extraction.

Sesame oil can also be extracted in low-temperature conditions, using an expeller press, in a process called cold pressing. This process avoids exposure to chemical solvents or high temperatures, thus preserving the original properties of the oil.

The main quality problems associated with sesame oil are oxidation (rancidity) and contamination:

- While sesame oil has a relatively high oxidative stability, it is important that you store your sesame oil at low temperatures (lower than 300C) to avoid oxidation.
- Some of the main contamination sources for sesame oil are [salmonella](#) and [aflatoxins](#) (contamination from sesame seeds) and [benzo\(a\)pyrene](#) (mostly occurring during the drying and roasting of sesame seeds).

As sesame oil is a relatively expensive vegetable oil, producers often mix it with cheaper vegetable oils. To prevent adulteration, buyers will ask you to provide the right documentation and to provide samples that correspond to the delivered batches.

Labelling requirements

Ensure traceability of individual batches and use the English language for labelling unless your buyer has indicated otherwise. The labels should include:

- Product name
- Manufacturers lot or batch code
- If the product is destined for use in food products
- Declaration of allergenic substances
- Name and address of exporter
- Products country of origin
- Shelf life: Best before date / use by date
- Net weight/volume in metric units
- Recommended storage conditions
- For organic (if relevant): Name/code of the inspection body and certification number

Packaging requirements

Sesame oil is transported in different types of bulk packaging, depending on the volumes transported. Larger volumes are mainly transported in intermediate bulk containers (IBCs) or flex tanks. Smaller volumes are transported in metal tins or high-density polyethylene drums.

Figure 3a. An example of bulk packaging: Intermediate bulk container (1,040 litres)



Source: *Capacify - Logistics*

Figure 3b. An example of bulk packaging: Metal tin (9 litres)



Source: *Tinbox Dadi*

Sesame oil for direct retail sales is mainly packaged in glass bottles, usually ranging between 250 and 500 ml.

Figure 4. An example of consumer packaging for sesame oil: Glass bottle (250 ml)



Source: Meridan Foods

Tips

Ensure preservation of quality by: thoroughly cleaning the barrels or tanks before loading the oil; filling up the tanks as much as possible to prevent rancidity due to oxygen exposure; protecting the cargo from moisture and humidity to avoid rancidity; preventing rust particles and other contamination from entering by properly sealing the packaging.

Be familiar with [FEDIOL's Hygiene Guides](#), including set procedures dealing with salmonella and other sources of contamination.

Read more about PAHs in vegetable oils in the European Union paper [Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons - Occurrence in foods, dietary exposure and health effects](#).

Requirements for niche markets

Organic certification is expected to be an important competitive advantage for producers and/or exporters targeting the health and speciality segments in Europe. The standards for organic certification should follow those described in our study on [buyer requirements for vegetable oils](#).

Fair trade certification is not expected to grow significantly for sesame oil in the near future. There are some specific ethical companies which comply with fair trade principles, like Bio Planete and Arc en Sels (France, [certified by Ecocert Fair Trade](#)), Earth Oil (United Kingdom, [certified by Fair for Life](#)) and Etico (United Kingdom, [certified by FLOCERT](#)). This segment remains very small.

Tips

Search for a certifier whose standards are recognised by the European Union to make sure your organic certification is recognised. The European Commission's [Agriculture and Rural Development](#) website provides a thorough explanation of import regulations and other related issues.

Before engaging in a fair trade-certification programme, make sure to check (in consultation with your potential buyer) if this label has sufficient demand in your target market and whether it will be cost effective for your product. The markets in the United Kingdom and France could be especially interesting for fair trade-certified sesame oil.

5. Through what channels can you get sesame oil onto the European market?

Market segments

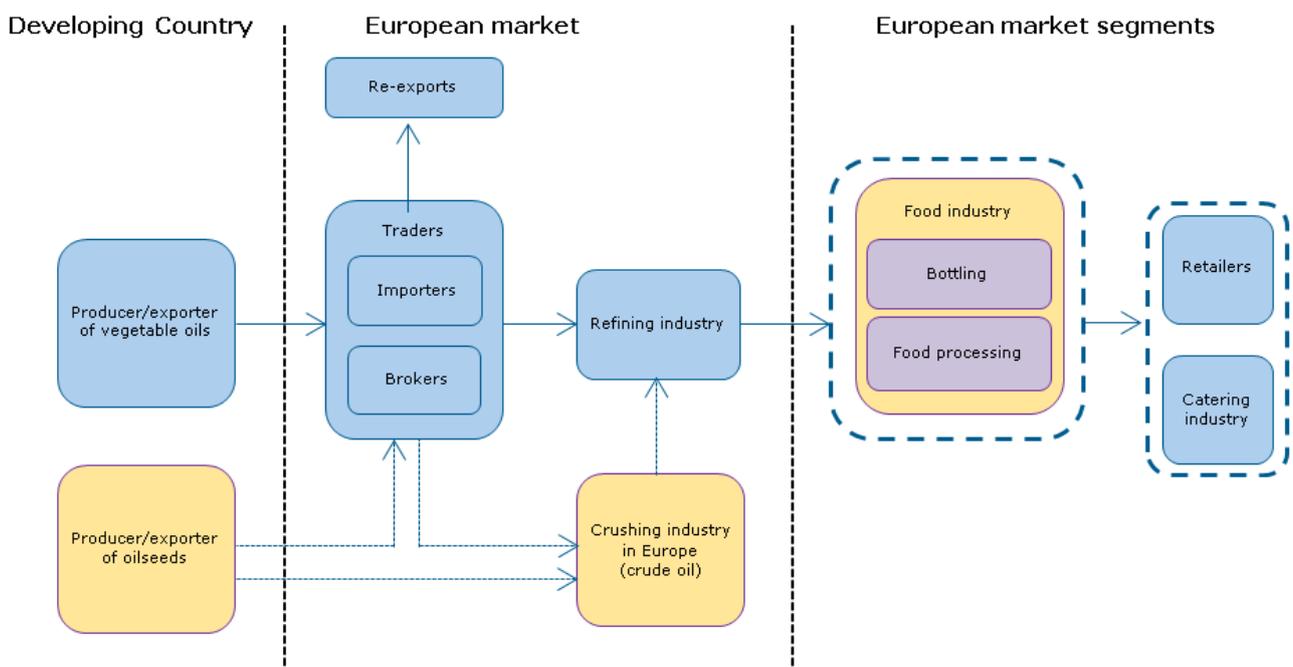
The use of sesame oil for food can be segmented into:

- The bottling industry: the oil is bottled as a final product and used by consumers and restaurants for cooking and frying, mainly in ethnic and gourmet cuisines. Cold-pressed sesame oil is also used as a health product. Refined sesame oil can be used in high-heat applications like frying.
- The food processing industry: in its refined form, sesame oil is used as an ingredient in food products such as baked goods and margarine. It can also be used in crude form in salad dressings and spreads like hummus.

Sesame oil is considered to be a speciality oil in Europe and it is not traded as a commodity.

Market channels

Figure 5. Trade channels for sesame oil in Europe



The trade channels for sesame oil do not deviate from the general structure for vegetable oils as described in our study on [channels and segments for vegetable oils](#) and is illustrated in Figure 5.

In general, if you are dealing with smaller volumes or specialised sesame oil, traders are the most suitable entry point to sell your sesame oil.

If you are a starting exporter, brokers can be your entry point into Europe as they are trusted by the European edible oil sector, which can make up for the lack of reputation of a starting developing-country exporter.

Tips

Link up with sector associations and be part of cooperatives if you cannot reach the required volumes by yourself.

Provide appropriate and complete documentation for your product. The information required by different buyers might differ, but usually includes a certificate of analysis / technical data sheet which contains accurate product composition and a flow chart of the production.

6. What are the end-market prices for sesame oil in Europe?

Examples of retail prices for sesame oil are specified in the table below. The prices vary according to type of retail outlet, origin and value additions such as organic certification.

Table 1. Examples of end-market prices for sesame oil

Brand and details	Retail outlet	Price and packaging size	Price per litre
Lee Kum Kee Pure Sesame Oil	Sainsbury's, the United Kingdom	€3.28 / 207 ml	€10.58
Pearls of Samarkand Sesame Oil (organic and fair trade)	123 Healthshop , the United Kingdom	€10.56 / 250 ml	€42.24
Albert Heijn Sesam Olie	Albert Heijn, the Netherlands	€2.49 / 250 ml	€9.96
Your Organic Nature: Biologische Sesamolie (organic)	Ekoplaza, the Netherlands	€5.69 / 500 ml	€11.38
Rinatura Bio Sesamöl (organic)	Rewe, Germany	€6.99 / 500 ml	€13.80
Auchan Mmm! Huile de Sésame	Auchan, France	€3.97 / 250 ml	€15.88

A L'Ólivier Huile Vierge de Sesame (organic)	Monoprix, France	€5.04 / 250 ml	€20.16
Emile Noel Huile de Sesame (organic and fair trade)	BIO-planet, Belgium	€11.35 / 1000 ml	€11.35
Sabi Roasted Sesame Seed Oil	COOP, Switzerland	€5.49 / 250 ml	€21.96
TIGER KHAN Aceite de sesamo	Hipercor, Spain	€4.95 / 300 ml	€16.50

Tip

Keep an eye on crop levels in various supplier countries of sesame worldwide in order to anticipate price and other international market developments. The website of FAOSTAT is a useful statistical source for such information.

Please review our [market information disclaimer](#).