



[Exporting fresh exotic tropical fruit to Europe](#)

Fresh exotic tropical fruits are mostly grown in developing countries. Although still considered niche products in Europe, the interest in new flavours and special varieties is increasing. Communicating the health benefits of tropical fruit can help increase the demand. Lychees are one of the main imported exotic fruits, but fresh passion fruit and pitahaya are also becoming more popular.

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1 . Product description

This product fact sheet covers a number of exotic tropical fruits, mainly fresh passion fruit, lychees, cashew apples, carambola and pitahaya.

Product definition

- Passion fruit (*Passiflora edulis*) is the fruit of passion flowers. There are several different species that differ in shape and colour. Passion fruit is also known as purple granadilla in South Africa. South America is home to the yellow variety maracuyá.
- Lychee (*Litchi chinensis*) is an evergreen tree which can grow up to 28 metres high. The fruit is up to 5 cm long and 4 cm wide. The white flesh is edible; the pink-red skin is inedible.
- Pitahaya (*Hylocereus*) is a cactus fruit. Three varieties are grown commercially: *Hylocereus undatus* (white flesh with pink-red skin), *Hylocereus polyrhizus* (red flesh with pink-red skin), and *Selenicereus megalanthus* (white flesh with yellow skin). It is also known as pitaya, dragon fruit or cactus fruit.
- Carambola (*Averrhoa carambola*) is also known as starfruit, named after the star-shape form of its cross-section. The fruit is green to dark yellow and can be up to 15 cm long.
- The cashew apple (*Anacardium occidentale*) is a tree which can reach heights of 15 metres. The fruit is an accessory fruit or false fruit. The apple is pear-shaped and yellow and red when ripe. The fruit is perishable and has a fragile skin which makes transport difficult. It is a very small product on the European market.
- Fresh tamarinds, jackfruit and sapodilla plums are only found in Europe in very small quantities in specialised or ethnic retail.

All fruits described above can be grown in tropical or subtropical climates. They are considered exotic to European countries in the sense that they are not produced in Europe and consumption volumes are limited, making them niche products.

The range of products in this product category is not limited to the ones listed above; other exotic tropical and subtropical fruit includes mangosteen, kaki fruit, cherimoya, durian, physalis, longan, and many others. These other fruits are not included in the trade statistics of this product fact sheet, but most other information applies to these fruits as well.

Table 1: Combined Nomenclature (CN) commodity code for trade statistics of fresh tropical fruit

Number	Product
8109020	Fresh tamarinds, cashew apples, lychees, jackfruit, sapodilla plums, passion fruit, carambola and pitahaya

Source: Eurostat Comext

Product specification

Quality

All exotic tropical fruits in this fact sheet are classified in three classes: Extra Class, Class I and Class II. The [Codex Alimentarius](#), the 'food code' of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), provides several specific marketing standards for exotic varieties:

- [Standard for Pitahaya](#)
- [Standard for Passion Fruit](#)
- [Standard for Carambola](#)
- [Standard for Lychee](#)
- [Standard for Mangosteen](#)
- [Standard for Rambutan](#)
- [Standard for Longan](#)
- [Standard for Durian](#)

For other products, you can refer to the:

- [UNECE standards](#)
- [General Marketing Standards of Regulation \(EU\) 543/2011](#).

All products should, at the very least, be:

- intact;
- clean and sound;
- (practically) free from pests;
- free from damage and bruising;
- fresh in appearance;
- free from external moisture, foreign smell and taste;
- in a condition able to withstand transport and handling.

Checks on conformity are randomly carried out when goods enter the European Community customs territory. In certain third countries that provide satisfactory guarantees of conformity, pre-export checks may be carried out by the inspection bodies of these third countries.

Size and packaging

- Size classes are different for the various tropical fruits. Some of the sizes are described in the marketing standards above.
- Packaging requirements differ between customers and market segments. Fruits must at least be

packed in a manner that protects the produce properly, in new, clean and quality packaging that prevents damage to the product. Discuss your customers' packaging requirements with your buyer. In general, wholesale packaging comprises cardboard boxes or crates that can vary in size.

- See also the [Recommended International Code of Practice for Packaging and Transport of Tropical Fresh Fruits and Vegetables \(CAC/RCP 44-1995\)](#).

Labelling

Consumer package labelling must be in accordance with the rules and regulations applicable in the European market. Labels cannot contain any toxic ink or glue. See also the:

- [Codex General Standard for the Labelling of Pre-Packaged Foods](#);
- [Regulation \(EU\) No 1169/2011](#) on the provision of food information to consumers.

The following items should be on the label of fresh fruits:

- The name of the product if the contents are not visible from the outside
- Information about the producer/packer/dispatcher
- Country of origin of the product
- Commercial specifications: class, size or size code, net weight and optionally the number of units
- Traceability code (and if certified GLOBALG.A.P., add GG number)
- Official control mark (optional)

In addition, any certification logo or retailer logo should be on the label in the case of private label products. Listing ingredients is not mandatory for fresh fruit, unless a container is filled with several different products, in which case a list of ingredients and quantities of each product must be on the label.

For more information on labelling, packaging and quality, see also:

- the [Codex Alimentarius](#);
- [Food labelling at the EU Trade Helpdesk](#).

Which European markets offer opportunities for exporters of exotic tropical fruit? [H2]

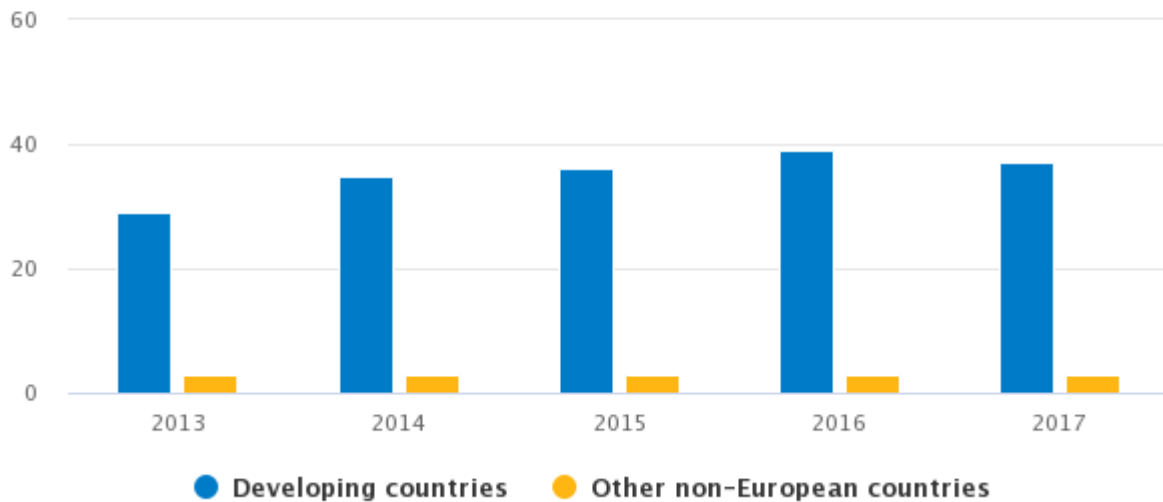
General information and figures about production and trade developments in the European market for fresh fruit and vegetables are provided on the [CBI market intelligence platform](#). This section provides you with more detailed statistics about the trade and consumption of fresh tropical exotic fruit in Europe.

Import of exotics gradually increasing

In 2017, European buyers imported 40 thousand tons of exotic tropical fruit from outside Europe, almost exclusively from developing countries (see Figure 1). Israel is the only developed non-European country with significant exports to Europe (329 tonnes in 2017). Since 2012, the import of fresh exotic fruit has shown an upward trend. The total import value reached €122 million in 2017, over €8 million more than in 2016.

Figure 1: European import of fresh tamarinds, cashew apples, lychees, jackfruit, sapodillo plums, passion fruit, carambola and pitahaya

in 1.000 tonnes



Source: Market Access Database

Tips:

- Find specialised European importers at trade fairs such as [Fruit Logistica](#) in Berlin or [Fruit Attraction](#) in Madrid.
- [FreshPlaza](#) is a good starting point if you are looking for current relevant information regarding the market for fresh exotic fruits.

The Netherlands, France and Belgium combined are responsible for 86% of European imports

The main importing markets of exotic fruit from non-European countries are France, Belgium and the Netherlands. The latter two countries have positioned themselves as trade hubs of imported exotics. The direct export to the United Kingdom, Germany and other markets is much lower (see Figure 2). A large quantity of Dutch and especially Belgian exotic imports comprises [lychees](#) from Madagascar. France absorbs the largest volume of these lychees and this also shows in the shifted lychee trade from Belgium to France in 2017.



Tips:

- Find an importer in the Netherlands or Belgium. These countries are the main entry points into the European market and can open up a much larger market.
- Keep track of trade developments and statistics on the [Trade Map](#) website of the International Trade Centre (ITC).

Belgium and Spain are the main exotic fruit exporters

While the Netherlands is a stable and important re-exporter of exotic fruit, with Germany and France as the principle destinations, Belgium has gained an important position as a trade hub for Madagascan lychees (see Figure 3). The high volume of imports of the Netherlands and Belgium can be mainly attributed to their popular logistical routes.

The Netherlands trades a variety of exotic tropical products that are sourced throughout the year in, for example, Colombia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Thailand, Vietnam and Malaysia. Belgium has significantly increased its re-export of lychees from Madagascar due to logistical choices. It is its principle exotic import, especially during December and January.

Spain exports mostly locally produced exotic fruit varieties such as kaki fruit, pomegranates, and cherimoya, which are likely to be included in the same trade statistics and explain their strong export growth.



High consumption of exotic fruit in Germany and France

According to trade data estimates, Germany and France remain the principle final destination markets for exotic fruit such as lychees, passion fruit, pitahaya and carambola. The United Kingdom follows as third largest final destination market. Most exotic fruit can be best introduced in northern European countries. However, in other countries the consumption is also believed to be expanding. In southern Europe, for example in Spain, specialised shops and street markets have assortments of some of the most exotic fruit varieties.



Photo: [ICI Business](#)

[La Boqueria fruit market](#) in Barcelona, Spain.

2 . Which trends offer opportunities in the European market for fresh exotic tropical fruit?

The [CBI trends](#) study describes general trends in the European market for fresh fruits and vegetables. This section provides more details about specific trends in the market for fresh exotic

tropical fruit.

Growing interest in sustainable fruit

The consumption of fresh fruit in Europe is developing towards a more sustainable approach to production and processing. Environmental and social issues are becoming more and more important. Social and environmental certification schemes include actions to strongly reduce and register the use of pesticides, improve employee safety and/or even include price guarantees for producers.

Certification schemes that are in line with the [Global Social Compliance Programme \(GSCP\)](#) have a greater chance of being accepted by European supermarkets. There is a clear demand for organic and fair-trade tropical fruit, particularly in the United Kingdom and Germany.

Tip:

- Check the [Global Social Compliance Programme \(GSCP\)](#) website for more information about social and environmental conduct.

Attention to health food

Consumers in Europe are becoming more aware of health issues and pay more attention to their diet. Several exotic fruit types are well known for being healthy. Since European consumers have embraced healthy and tasty fruit, health benefits have become one of the main drivers for market success. Examples of exotic fruit with health benefits:

- Carambola is rich in antioxidants and vitamin C and low in sugar, sodium and acid. It has the potential to grow in the European market if proven health benefits are communicated more effectively.
- The high levels of vitamin A and C make passion fruit a healthy fruit, leading to growing demand in Europe.
- Lychees contain strong antioxidants and vitamin C, which is a good selling point besides the unique taste of the fruit.

Tip:

- Communicate the health benefits of the fruit to help expand the European market. Take note of [European Legislation on food health claims](#).

Organic niche

Thanks to the increased attention to health and the environment, there is also a growing interest in organically produced fruit and vegetables. Organic exotic fruit is a niche within a niche, but the combination can be very profitable. There are specialised importers of exotic fruit and organic produce.

Tips:

- If your climate and soil are suitable for organic cultivation, verify with your buyer the possibilities for supplying organic exotic fruit.

- Read more about the principles of organic agriculture on the [website of IFOAM Organics International](#).

Taste is important

European consumers want tropical exotic fruit to be ripe when bought, so that the fruit can be eaten immediately after purchase. Exotic fruit is generally expensive, therefore taste and how the consumer experiences your product are very important. You must make sure your product arrives in perfect condition and that it targets the right markets.

Tips:

- Make sure that logistics and the post-harvest process do not affect product taste or quality in any way.
- Try to work with specialised importers of exotics. They are familiar with different taste preferences and know which varieties fit your destination market.

Most exotics are shipped by air

The choice of air or sea freight depends on the market and the shelf life of the product. Transport by ship will be much cheaper, but time to market will increase. Most exotic tropical fruit is shipped in small volumes by air, while larger commodities or less perishable produce are shipped by sea when possible. Purple passion fruit are now mainly shipped by sea because of new packaging technics.

3 . What requirements must fresh exotic fruit comply with to be allowed on the European market?

Buyer requirements can be divided into (1) must-haves (requirements you must meet in order to enter the market), such as legal requirements; (2) common requirements (those which most of your competitors have already implemented) – the ones you need to comply with in order to keep up with the market; and (3) niche market requirements, for specific segments.

The food safety requirements for fresh exotic fruit are the same as for other fresh fruit and vegetables. You can find a complete overview from the following resources:

- General [buyer requirements for fresh fruit and vegetables](#)
- [Trade Helpdesk](#), which provides an overview of export requirements for different exotic fruit varieties (code 08109020) per country

With which legal and non-legal requirements must your product comply?

Minimise pesticide residues

Pesticide residues constitute a crucial issue for suppliers of fruits and vegetables. In order to avoid health and environmental damage, the European Union has set maximum residue levels (MRLs) for pesticides in and on food products. Products containing more pesticides than allowed will be withdrawn from the European market.

Note that buyers in several countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands and Austria set MRLs that are stricter than those specified in European legislation.

Tips:

- Find out which MRLs are relevant to exotic fruits by consulting the European [MRL database](#) in which all harmonised MRLs can be found. You can search on your product or pesticide used. The database shows the list of the MRLs associated to your product or pesticide.
- Reduce the amount of pesticides by applying [integrated pest management](#) (IPM) in production. IPM is an agricultural pest control strategy that includes growing practices and chemical management.
- Read more about the [European legislation on MRLs](#) on the website of the European Commission. Check with your buyers if they have additional requirements regarding MRLs and pesticide use.

Comply with phytosanitary requirements

Fruit and vegetables exported to the European Union must comply with the European legislation on plant health. The European Commission has laid down [phytosanitary requirements](#) to prevent the introduction and spread of organisms harmful to plants and plant products in Europe. These requirements are managed by the competent food safety authorities in the importing and exporting countries.

Tip:

- Verify with the [national plant protection organisation](#) or food safety authority in your country if and under which conditions you can export fresh exotic fruit to Europe. These authorities normally work with international standards, but always check with your buyer as well.

Which additional requirements do buyers often have?

GLOBALG.A.P. and other certification as guarantee

Since food safety is a top priority in all European food sectors, you can expect most buyers to request extra guarantees from you in the form of certification.

The most commonly requested certification for fresh fruit is [GLOBALG.A.P.](#), a pre-farm-gate standard that covers the whole agricultural production process, from before the plant is in the ground to the non-processed product (processing is not covered). Whether GLOBALG.A.P. is required also depends on the destination country, market conditions and market channel.

For very exotic varieties, GLOBALG.A.P. is a great advantage, but not always a strict requirement. For more common varieties, it has become almost a standard requirement, especially in northern Europe, where large retailers look for reliable suppliers that are certified and controlled.

Examples of other food safety management systems that may be required are:

- [BRC](#) (British Retail Consortium)
- [IFS](#) (International Food Standard)
- [FSSC22000](#) (Food Safety System Certification)
- [SQF](#) (Safe Quality Food Programme)

These management systems are supplementary to GLOBALG.A.P. and are recognised by the [Global Food Safety Initiative \(GFSI\)](#).

Tips:

- Identify the food safety management systems that are usually requested in your target market. Expect GLOBALG.A.P. to be one of them.
- Read more on the various food safety management systems on the [Standards Map](#) website.
- Always remember that food safety is a major issue. Work proactively with buyers to improve food safety, be transparent in your food safety management and remain up to date with regard to buyer requirements and regulations.

Social and environmental compliance

There is growing attention in Europe for the social and environmental conditions in producing areas. Most European buyers have a social code of conduct which they expect suppliers to adhere to. For fresh exotic fruit social and environmental compliance is important and for supplying to most large retailers, it is a must.

Important ways to prove yourself as a responsible supplier of melons are through:

- [GRASP](#), a social add-on of GLOBALG.A.P. and an accessible certification that is gaining importance in Europe.
- [SMETA](#), which stands for the Sedex Members Ethical Trade Audit. SMETA was developed by the non-profit member organisation of Sedex with the objective to facilitate the exchange of information on social compliance.

You increase your chances by implementing standards that are recognised by the [Sustainability Initiative Fruit and Vegetables](#) (SIFAV), which consists of an initiative from traders and retailers to become 100% sustainable in sourcing fresh produce from Latin America, Africa and Asia by 2020.

Fair-trade labels such as [Fair for Life](#) or [Fair Trade](#) are part of a niche within the exotic trade, but obtaining one of these certifications can also be an additional way for smaller producers to stand out.

Tips:

- Examine your company's current social performance, for example by completing a self-assessment on the [amfori/BSCI website](#).
- For a complete overview of buyer initiatives with regard to social compliance, see the [buyer requirements for fresh fruit and vegetables](#) on the CBI marketing intelligence platform.

What are the requirements for niche markets?

Growing demand for organic fruits

An increasing number of European consumers prefer food products that are produced and processed using natural methods. The market for organic exotic fruit is relatively small, but with interesting prospects and a limited supply. In order to market organic products in the European

Union, you must use organic production methods according to [European legislation](#). Furthermore, you have to use these production methods for at least two years before you can market your fresh exotic fruit as organic.

In addition, you (or your European importer) must apply for an import authorisation from organic control bodies. After being audited by an accredited certifier, you may put the [EU organic logo](#) on your products, as well as the logo of the standard holder.

Tips:

- Assess the market potential before making any investments. Implementing organic production and becoming certified can be expensive.
- Use a specialised importer for the export of organic exotic fruit to the European market, who understands the market and has access to niche markets with their particular requirements. Use, for example, the [Organic-Bio](#) database.

4 . What competition will you be facing on the European exotic tropical fruit market?

For general information about market competition for fresh fruit and vegetables, you can have a look at the [market competition information](#) available on the CBI market intelligence platform. The platform also provides [tips for doing business with European buyers](#).

This section provides information about market competition in the European market for fresh tropical and exotic fruit.

Company competition

The worldwide production of tropical fruits is increasing and rivalry is usually strong. Temporary shortfalls in supply (for example due to harvest problems) have a huge impact on prices. For some of the more exotic varieties, such as yellow pitahaya or maracuyá, the market in Europe is very small and competition is not a major obstacle. Niche or new varieties of fruit require sufficient promotion and superior quality.

Lychees: European markets receive lychees from Madagascar, China, Israel, Mauritius, Mexico, Thailand and South Africa, as well as from Brazil. Lychee imports are concentrated in December. Although Madagascar is the main supplier of lychees to the European market, the production volume is largest in China and India. Vietnam, Thailand and Mexico also have significant lychee production. See also the [CBI product fact sheets for fresh lychees](#).

Rambutan: Closely related to the lychee family are rambutans, which are mainly imported from Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia. A few Latin American countries, such as Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico, also produce and supply rambutan. See also the [CBI product fact sheets for fresh rambutan](#).

Passion fruit: Brazil is the largest producer of passion fruit (including the yellow variety), but is a minor exporter because of its large domestic market. Various other countries produce passion fruit, such as Kenya, South Africa, Israel and Vietnam (purple variety), as well as Colombia, Ecuador and Peru (both purple and yellow varieties). Most passion fruit enters Europe as concentrates or juice for the food industry. However, the fresh market is growing as well, with imports from Vietnam, Kenya, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Colombia and Israel.

While African suppliers export fresh passion fruit to Europe, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru export a larger volume of processed passion fruit (pulp or concentrated juice). See also the [CBI market](#)

[intelligence for processed fruit and vegetables](#). Yellow passion fruit (maracuyá) is less common as fresh fruit in Europe, but small quantities are imported from Colombia and Ecuador.

Carambola: Mainly produced in Southeast Asia, with India as the largest producer, carambola (also called star fruit) are among the lesser known fruit species in Europe. Production in Latin America is much lower, but increasing in, for example, Peru. Malaysia is one of the main suppliers of carambola to Europe.

Pitahaya: The cultivation of pitahaya, also referred to as dragon fruit, consists of different varieties: red peel/red flesh, red peel/white flesh and yellow peel/white flesh. The red varieties are most common and cultivated throughout Asia (Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia), Israel and South and Central America. The less known yellow variety is produced in Colombia and Ecuador.

The main supplier of red pitahaya to the European market is Vietnam, but during the season it changes to Israel and South America. Israel supplies the southern part of Europe by sea at a lower cost price than Vietnam, which supplies by air. Colombia and Ecuador supply small quantities of the yellow variety of pitahaya.

Cashew apple: Cashew apples, unlike the cashew nut, are not very common as an export product to Europe. With around 1.8 million tonnes, Brazil is the largest producer (and consumer) of cashew apples ('caju'), followed by Madagascar and Mali with each 70 to 75 thousand tonnes.

Other fruits: Thailand is Europe's main supplier of the niche fruits sapodilla plums and jackfruit. Tamarinds are more often processed before exporting and used in food preparation.

Tips:

- Fill the gaps when there is a shortfall from traditional suppliers. Populations in Asian countries are increasing. Over time, more Asian produce will be needed for domestic and regional markets. Filling the gap for traditional Asian suppliers to the European market has great potential.
- Find more information about the worldwide production of fresh tropical and exotic fruit at [FAOSTAT](#) to increase your knowledge about potential competitors and to identify opportunities.

Market entry

Certification and meeting both legal and non-legal requirements form a major hurdle for producers and exporters wishing to enter the market. The majority of fresh tropical fruit in the north-western European market is sold through large supermarket chains, whereas specialist shops and markets dominate the southern European market. The buying power of large supermarkets is very strong and their requirements are strict.

For tropical and exotic fruits, MRLs, quality during harvest and shipping and corporate social responsibility (CSR) are becoming increasingly important, as are supply chain transparency and information sharing. Long-term partnerships are sought by European buyers to ensure product supply and quality. Product innovation and added value such as ready-to-eat contribute to a successful market entry.

Tips:

- Try not to compete on price alone, but to also establish a credible track record, providing transparent information on your company and product quality.

- Build partnerships with experienced buyers and ripening facilities and strive for excellent product quality and handling. Being part of a stable partnership and a trustworthy supplier can help you to establish and maintain your position in the market.
- Use storytelling (for example, show the product's origin and producer), novel packaging and premium quality as methods for distinguishing your product.

Product competition

In the last decade, the diversity of fruit and vegetables supplied to the European market has increased. Exotic tropical fruits compete with other fruits, but can also complement them. They are distinguished by a higher price, a more exclusive image and perceived health benefits.

5 . Which trade channels can you use to put fresh exotic tropical fruit on the European market?

For more general information about market channels and segments, have a look at the [market channels and segments](#) available on the CBI market intelligence platform. This section provides information about the various marketing channels through which fresh exotic tropical fruit is marketed in Europe.

Market channels for exotics differ throughout Europe

In Europe, there are differences in the composition of market channels. Northern countries like Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Belgium have a very dominant retail channel that is supplied by specialist importers. France and Spain go one step further with large hypermarkets, alongside smaller specialist shops and traditional wholesale markets such as [Rungis](#) and [Mercabarna](#). Countries in the Alpine region, such as Switzerland and Austria, are more favourably disposed towards small local shops.

Exotic is a specialisation

Specialised retailers, ethnic shops and street markets provide a better perspective for low-volume suppliers of exotic or organic fruit than large supermarkets. Although most exotic tropical fruits are sold via the retail channel, the food service industry (e.g. restaurants) is also an important market segment. In the development of these segments, importers specialising in exotics play a significant role.

Tips:

- Find a European importer at trade fairs such as [Fruit Logistica](#). All of the different channels are accessed by building a strong relationship with a European partner.
- Choose an importer based on the size of your company or your strategy. Determine whether branding provides added value for your product.
- If you choose the organic production method, find companies that are specialists in organic products. Check, for example, the online database [Organic-Bio](#) or visit the [Biofach](#) trade fair in Germany.

6 . What are end-market prices for fresh exotic tropical fruit?

Prices for products vary greatly. Generally, fruit with high wholesale prices is sold in smaller quantities and in smaller boxes. Shipping is often air freight, which drives up the price per unit. An indication of consumer prices in Europe:

- Pitahaya: €3-6 euros apiece
- Passion fruit: €0.60-0.70 apiece
- Lychees: €11-13 per kg
- Carambola: €1.50-2.50 apiece
- Fresh jackfruit, cashew apples and tamarinds are not very common in the European market. Some exclusive varieties are only available on special order. Due to their limited presence on the market, there is no reliable data on indicative consumer prices.

Tips:

- For consumer prices, check the online shops or ranges of supermarket chains such as [Tesco](#), [Albert Heijn](#) and [Carrefour](#).
- Prices fluctuate during the year. Find information about current fresh fruit prices at the [French wholesale market Rungis on the France Agrimer website](#).

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