



[Exporting chia seeds to Europe](#)

Chia seeds are becoming increasingly popular in Europe due to their nutritional and health properties (omega-3 and fibre), and have a strong presence in new product launches and innovation. However, it is a niche product when compared to linseeds or sunflower seeds, for example. The seeds are mainly used in bakery products, seed mixes or packed as a single product. Chia is relatively new on European market, so there is interesting potential in drinks, snacks and other food products. Keep an eye on the recent revisions on the Novel Food regulation, which facilitates access to the European market.

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1 . Product description

Chia (*Salvia hispanica*) is a plant native to Southern Mexico and Guatemala. Its seeds are speckled brown / white and have a faint nutty aroma and a crunchy texture. Chia seeds do not grow in Europe. They are primarily produced in Latin America and Australia. There is emerging production in some African countries as well.

Chia seeds are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, protein, fibre, vitamins and minerals. They can be used as:

- an additive in food
- a nutritional supplement
- a base for beverages

It is difficult to obtain accurate market statistics on chia seeds. There is no specific Harmonised System (HS) or other code applicable to chia seeds. For the main producers of chia the product group 'other oilseed' (HS 12079996) is relatively reliable. This is because these suppliers are not known to produce other oilseeds within this statistical group.

2 . What makes Europe an interesting market for exporters of chia seeds?

Europe imported around 18,697 tonnes (€41.7 million) of chia seeds in 2017. This marks an average annual increase of 53% (in volume) since 2013, when imports amounted to 3,436 tonnes (€12.8 million).

Germany is the largest importer of chia seeds in Europe, with a share of 36% in 2017. Germany is followed by the Netherlands (22%), Spain (13%) and the United Kingdom (7%).

The main European importers of chia seeds do not only serve their domestic markets but often act as trade hubs, re-exporting the product to other European countries. The import figures therefore differ from the actual consumption of chia seeds in various European countries.

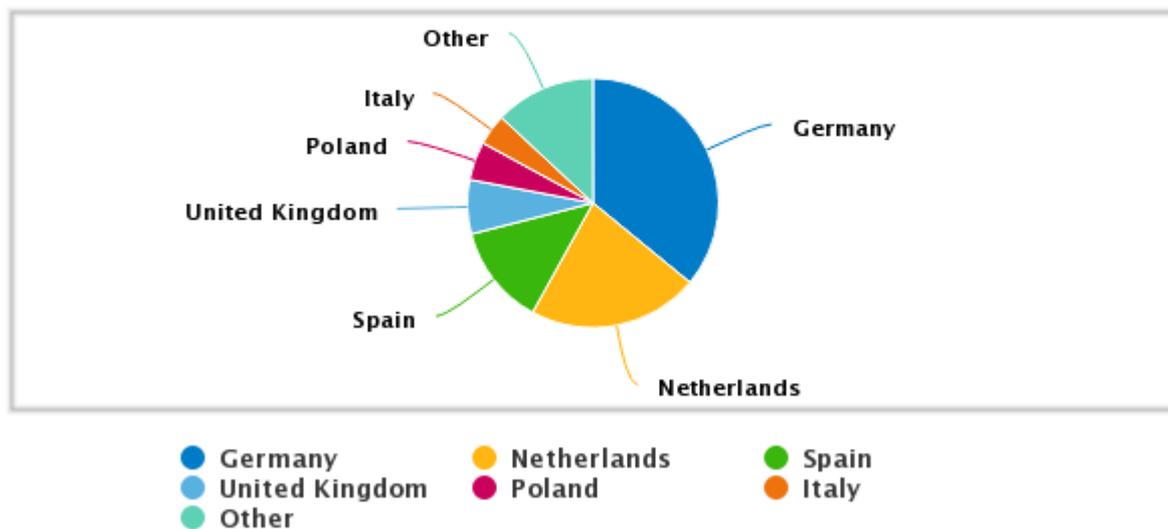
At the moment, chia seeds are most popular in countries like Germany, Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Scandinavia. These are the most promising markets to target.

For example, a market such as Denmark with 300-400 tonnes of Chia seed imports annually is currently more important for chia exporters than the enormous French food market.

European Union Novel Food regulation restricts the use of chia seeds in industrial applications. If legislation changes, it would mean a significant market expansion for chia seeds. Refer to the sections dealing with market requirements and market segments for more details.

Figure 1. Main European importers of oilseeds from selected supplying markets 2018

in volume



Source: Eurostat, 2016

Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, Argentina and Mexico are the main suppliers of chia seeds to Europe. Australia, Nicaragua and Ecuador also supply chia seeds to Europe, but in smaller volumes. More information on supplying countries can be found on the competition section of this market study.

Tip:

- Compile your own trade statistics to support your export strategy. There is no specific HS code for chia seeds. However, the 12079996 code can be used in trade statistics portals if you are from one of the main producing countries. The [European Trade Helpdesk](#) allows you to find statistics for specific European Union countries and [ITC Trade Map](#) (requires

registration) can help you trace the export destinations from the producing country.

3 . What trends offer opportunities on the European chia market?

Healthy properties of chia seeds at the centre of attention

The growing demand for chia seeds in Europe follows consumer interest in healthy diets. The most significant health claim which drives the market for chia is its high omega-3 fatty acid content.

In the European Union [Health and Nutrition Claims database](#), omega 3 fatty Alpha-linolenic acid (ALA) is in the list of authorised claims for 'contributing to the maintenance of normal blood cholesterol levels'.

[Consumer awareness of Omega-3 in the European Union is estimated at around 90%](#), but consumption is much lower and expected to grow. [The global market for omega-3 ingredients is expected to reach USD 7.49 billion in 2021, from a current value of around USD 3.70 billion.](#) Europe currently accounts for more than 60% of the world's consumption.

Of course, chia seed is only a small component in this trend and competes with several other ingredients. Also keep in mind that a [maximum daily consumption of 15 grams of chia](#) is recommended by the European Commission.

Chia seeds also present an interesting nutritional profile combining protein, vitamins, minerals and protein. Protein from vegetable origin is another big trend in health markets.

Tips:

- Promote the various applications and nutritional properties of chia seeds. However, avoid health or nutritional claims which are not substantiated by scientific evidence. Check the [European Register of nutrition and health claims](#) to find out what health and nutrition claims are permitted and under what conditions you can use them.
- Provide your buyer with accurate product specifications and composition, following good examples on the market.
- Stay informed on supplement and nutrition trends on the European market by visiting the [Nutra Ingredients](#) website.

Potential in “free from” markets

Chia seeds are interesting to the European market as part of the 'free from' category of products. These are food products that do not contain any allergens or other ingredients that many consumers avoid (such as gluten, dairy, sugar or eggs).

As a source of protein, fibre, rich in numerous vitamins and minerals, chia seeds are naturally gluten-free. This makes them especially popular in vegan and vegetarian diets.

In Europe, vegetarian and vegan consumers represent a very small, but growing, population. Germany has the most vegetarians in Europe. [Almost 10% of the German population](#) are estimated to be vegetarian. Other large vegetarian markets are Italy and Switzerland. Vegans account for less than 1% of the total population in most European countries.

The gluten-free aspect of chia seeds also creates a strong interest among consumers suffering from

gluten-intolerance (celiac disease) or those who simply avoid gluten intake (lifestyle choice). [The occurrence of celiac disease in Europe ranges between 0.5% and 1.0% of the total population](#), with the highest incidence in Ireland, Italy and Sweden.

Global sales of gluten-free foods in 2018 is estimated at US\$ 4.48 billion (approx. € 3.94 billion) and is expected to reach US\$ 6.47 billion (approx. € 5.69 billion) by 2023 according to [MarketsandMarkets](#)[™]. The market for gluten-free, low-FODMAP diets for irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) treatment is expected to continue to grow at a sharp rate in the next years.

This expected increase indicates growth opportunities for ingredients such as chia seeds, but also for several other ingredients which compete directly with chia. Examples within oilseeds include hemp seed and linseed.

Tips:

- Check the websites of European trade shows and exhibitions to follow the 'free-from' discussions. Several trade shows and exhibitions have specific areas dedicated to 'free from' products (for example, gluten-free and allergy-free). Some of these trade fairs are [Food Ingredients Europe](#), [Health Ingredients Europe](#), [SIAL](#), [Anuga](#), [BioFach](#), [Food Matters Live](#), [Vitafoods](#) and [Free From Expo](#).
- Also use the websites of European trade shows and exhibitions to find potential buyers (search for exhibitor lists).

Chia seeds as a marketing tool in the European food industry

Several product innovations containing chia seeds have been launched in Europe following the Novel Food authorisation in 2009. Most of these products use chia seeds as a marketing tool (due to its nutritional profile), often in small quantities.

Some examples:

- Danish bakery brand [Easyfood](#) introduced a protein bar with chia seeds.
- In 2015, [Irish bakery brand BFree](#) launched quinoa and chia seed wraps in Tesco stores in Ireland.
- Marks & Spencer in the United Kingdom has just launched a range of [products containing chia seeds](#) - including bread and pitta.
- [Lifefood](#) has launched a chocolate bar containing 10% chia seeds in several countries in Europe.
- [Mr. Kitchen \(Netherlands\)](#) developed a jam with chia seeds, without added sugar.

Bakeries have also started to include chia seeds in breads, for example:

- The Swiss bakery [Bäckerei Hug](#).
- [Primrose's Kitchen](#), a British company, which has launched an [organic Raw Almond and Chia Butter](#) spread as an alternative to peanut butter.
- In the United Kingdom, [Nourish Kefir](#) started to blend kefir with chia seeds.

Tips:

- Keep an eye on legislative developments and industrial applications for chia seeds.
- Look into supplying directly to industrial end-users if you can meet their quality and volume requirements. The [Novel Food notifications list](#) provides an overview of European companies which are authorised to market the product. They are your potential buyers as well.

4 . What requirements must chia seeds comply with to be allowed on the European market?

European buyers have strict requirements for chia seeds. You can only export your product to Europe if you comply with these requirements.

In our study on [buyer requirements for oilseeds](#) you can find a detailed analysis of these requirements. In this chapter you can find more information about requirements specifically for chia seeds.

Legal requirements

Chia seeds must comply with general food safety requirements, including traceability, hygiene and control. These requirements are described fully in our study on [buyer requirements for oilseeds](#).

Suppliers of chia seeds should pay special attention to aflatoxins and [Salmonella](#) as well as pesticide residues. European buyers report that problems are especially common among large-scale producers. Agrochemical contamination in organic-certified chia seeds has become a real problem in the sector, for example. Pesticide residues also represent a problem in conventional chia seeds.

Novel Food

Chia seeds were banned for food use in the European Union until 2009. In 2009 the product was recognised and approved as a novel ingredient which can be sold and consumed within Europe.

At this moment the use of chia seeds is approved in:

- Baked products (not more than 10%)
- Breakfast cereals (not more than 10%)
- Fruit, nut and seed mixes (not more than 10%)
- Pre-packaged chia seeds (not more than 15 g per day)

With the [revision of the Novel Food legislation](#), the [notification procedure](#) to place chia seeds on the European Union's market will not be necessary anymore. The new rules will come into effect as of January 2018. However, the Novel Food Regulation will still apply in its general framework, and still limit the use of chia seeds to the approved applications as described above.

Tips:

- Learn about the [legislation for chia seeds](#) and the Novel Food restrictions that have remained applicable to this product in terms of use and maximum quantities. They are still applicable despite the revision of the Novel Food legislation.
- For more information on Novel Food legislation, visit the [European Commission](#) website designed especially for that subject.
- Identify and address the possible sources of contamination for your chia seeds. For example, clarify whether pesticide contamination is resulting from chia cultivation itself or from cross-contamination from nearby intensive soy production (or other crops).
- Research your target markets. Learn about existing legal provisions. See our study on [buyer requirements for oilseeds](#) for more information.

Additional requirements

Demand for certification of quality and food safety management systems is likely to increase due to requirements of supermarkets selling chia seeds. These might be required by some buyers:

- [HACCP](#) (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points)
- [IFS](#) (International Featured Standard: Food)
- [BRC](#) (British Retail Consortium)

As the European chia market develops further, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) will also become increasingly important. Cooperating in sustainability projects dealing with chia-producing communities as well as with ecological aspects can be an important way to differentiate yourself from other suppliers. CSR has played an important part in the [CBI chia project in Bolivia](#).

Tip:

- Read our study on [buyer requirements for oilseeds](#) for more information about quality and food safety management schemes. Use this document to get further insight into sustainability and corporate responsibility as well.

Quality requirements

For European importers the most important [quality parameters for chia seeds](#) are:

- Moisture content (8% or lower)
- Uniformity of seeds
- Purity and quantity of damaged / mouldy seeds (a purity level of at least 99.6% is expected on the European market)

Other quality aspects of chia seeds are described under the section dealing with buyer requirements.

Tips:

- Avoid long delays between harvesting and transportation of chia seeds. Ensure appropriate storage conditions by protecting the seeds from moisture and ensuring the right temperature, humidity / moisture and ventilation conditions during transportation.
- Include the quality parameters of your chia seeds in your offer: moisture content, uniformity and purity level (in %).
- Accurate and representative sampling is also very important for European buyers. It is crucial that the samples correspond to the offered lot. AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds provides some [guidelines for accurate sampling](#).

Labelling requirements

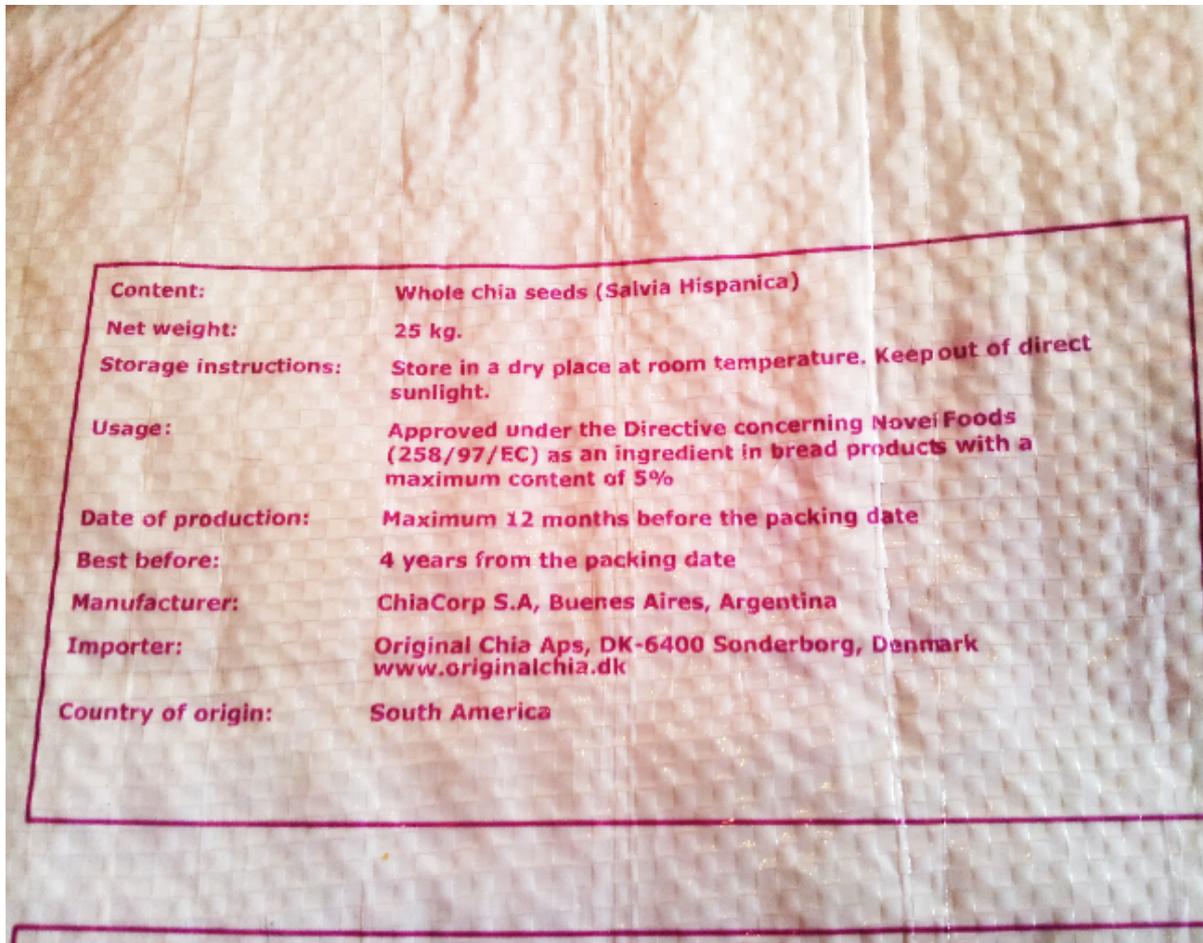
When you export chia seeds to Europe, bulk package must be labelled. The label should include:

- Product name: Chia seeds (*Salvia hispanica*)
- Manufacturer's lot or batch code
- Whether or not the product is destined for use in food products
- Name and address of exporter

- Product's country of origin
- Shelf life: Best-before date / use-by date
- Net weight / volume in metric units
- Recommended storage conditions
- Organic (only for certified seeds): Name / code of the certifying body and certification number.

The label must be in English, unless specified otherwise by your buyer.

An example of a label:



Source: Original Chia

Consumer package labelling should inform the consumer that the daily intake of chia seeds should not exceed 15 grams. This is described in the [European Union's chia seed specific legislation](#).

Packaging requirements

Chia seeds are usually transported to Europe in 20 or 25 kg polypropylene (PP) bags. Buyers may have specific requirements regarding packaging materials and sizes. Consult them for further information.

When chia seeds reach Europe, they are re-packed in quantities ranging from 100 grams to 1 kg (for consumers), or up to 25 kg (for food ingredients buyers).

Requirements for niche markets

Organic certification is an interesting opportunity for chia seeds if the absence of chemicals (especially pesticides) can be ensured throughout the supply chain. The presence of pesticide residues in organic products is not tolerated. Currently, the market for chia seeds is 60% conventional and 40% organic, with increasing demand for organic. Supply of organic-certified seeds is often not sufficient to meet market demand.

Fair trade certification is currently not relevant for chia seeds. However, fair trade principles such

as the payment of a minimum price to producers could be interesting in the framework of corporate responsibility.

Tips:

- Learn more about niche requirements in our study on [buyer requirements for oilseeds](#). Find out if your potential buyer demands organic certification.
- Perform cost calculations to decide if organic certification will provide you with a beneficial margin. Also considering conversion, production and certification costs. Try to include organic in your offer as it is in high demand and supply is often not sufficient.

5 . What competition do I face on the European chia seed market?

The production of chia seeds increased significantly in recent years.

While there are no official data, it is generally assumed that the global market for chia seeds amounts to around 40 to 60 thousand tonnes. Climate change and annual variations in rainfall cause large differences in production output in some important producing countries like Bolivia. However, new producing countries have emerged and there are now more growers cultivating chia to compensate for these fluctuations.

The chia market has been generally affected by the 'boom and bust cycle'. Very high prices in 2013 led to record plantings in 2014 and beyond. In turn, this led to a large amount of unsold chia. Those stocks are still affecting today's market, safeguarding a supply-demand balance and price stability. However, long-term price developments are almost impossible to forecast.

In 2017, the main suppliers of chia seeds to Europe were:

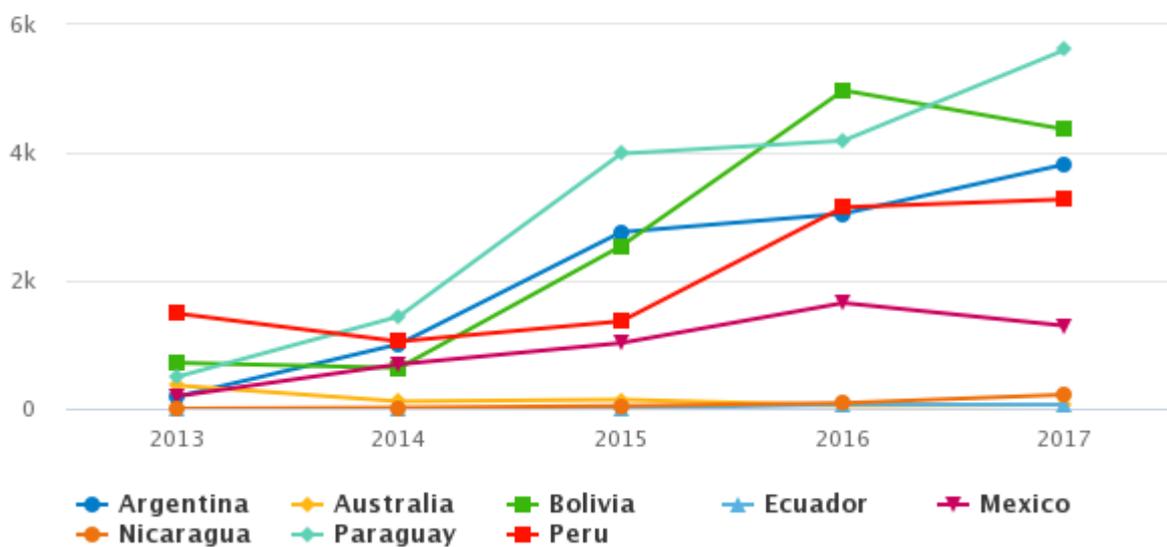
- Paraguay (30% of the market in 2017)
- Bolivia (23%)
- Argentina (20%)
- Peru (17%)
- Mexico (7%)

Smaller suppliers were:

- Nicaragua (1%)
- Australia and Ecuador (less than 1% of the market)

Figure 2. European imports of chia seeds and other oilseeds from selected suppliers 2017

in tonnes



Source: Eurostat, 2018

In the future, new producing countries can be expected to take part in exports to Europe. This can potentially fuel competition, creating the need for suppliers to invest further in quality, sustainability and marketing. There have been initial trials in, for example:

- Uganda
- Kenya
- Tanzania
- Ethiopia

There are huge differences in quality and prices among producers. Buyers report that large-scale producers in certain areas in particular can have serious quality issues. This has led to a situation where buyers now request chia seeds from specific origins.

Besides quality, buyers select suppliers based on good reputation in customer services. This includes prompt response to e-mails and general communication on the status of production and other market changes.

Chia seed production is very small compared to other oilseeds. Global [linseed production](#), for example, amounted to nearly 3 million tonnes in 2016. It is important to remember that chia seed is a niche product within the large oilseed sector.

Besides linseed and other oilseeds like hemp, chia seeds face competition from several other ingredients. Health markets in Europe are constantly subject to trending products associated with health and nutrition claims. The Global Food Forums website, for example, presented the [food trends for 2017](#) and highlighted ingredients like algae and moringa.

Tips:

- Build partnerships with buyers and strive for product quality, handling and customer services. Low quality can affect your reputation as a company and even the reputation of your country as a chia supplier. However, it is also important to offer attractive prices to buyers.
- Establish a credible track record. Include transparent information on your company and product quality. Being part of a stable partnership and being a trustworthy supplier can

help you to establish and maintain your position on the market.

- Use storytelling as a way to set yourself and your product apart as a supplier of chia. Use social media and a professional website. Use photos and videos of the producing communities (upon authorisation) and surrounding nature. But do not make unfounded claims.

6 . Through which channels can you get chia seeds on the European market?

What market segments are the most interesting?

In Europe, chia seeds are mostly used in the food market. This market can be segmented into:

- Direct consumption. This accounts for the bulk of the European market (around 80-95%, according to our industry sources). The regular chia seeds (varying shades of black, brown, white and grey) account for the largest share of the market. White chia attains a small share of 1-2%. Black chia seeds (from Nicaragua) are rare and do not account for a significant share.
- Food manufacturing industry. Here chia seeds are mainly used for bakery products, breakfast cereals and nut and seed mixes. Industrial uses account for around 5%-20% of the European market for chia seeds, according to industry sources.
- Crushing industry. The current use of chia seeds for crushing is described in [our study for chia oil](#). The oil has potential applications in the vegetable oil industry as a food supplement, as single gourmet oil, as an ingredient in other edible oils and in cosmetic products.

The European Union Novel Food Regulation restricts the use of chia seeds in industrial applications. If legislation changes, it would mean a significant market expansion for chia seeds.

Our industry sources estimate that the market could grow up to tenfold within the next five years after legislative changes take place. For example, chia seeds could be used as a replacement for flaxseed in some applications (example: eggs enriched with Omega 3).

Chia meal (a by-product of chia seed crushing) has high potential in the bakery (as flour) and animal feed industries. The product could have similar applications as Psyllium powder (examples: in fibre foods and breakfast cereals, as a binder and stabiliser and as a thickener).

However, the marketing of chia meal is currently not allowed on the European market due to Novel Food restrictions.

7 . Through which channels can you get chia seeds on the market?

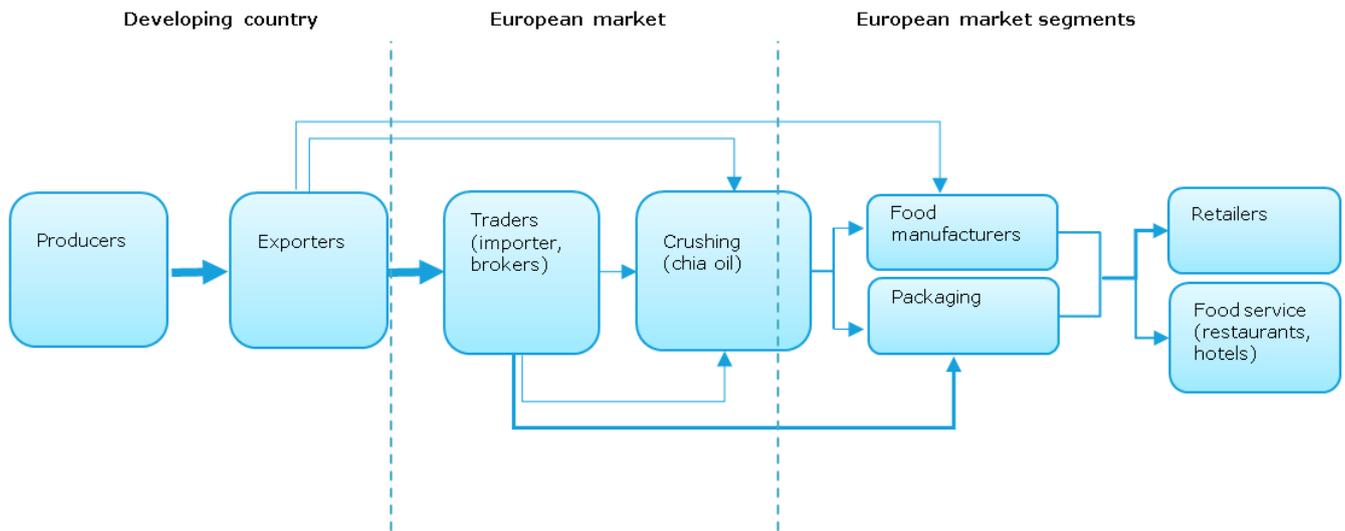
As of January 2018, the Regulation (EU) 2015/2283 on novel foods is applicable. Under the old regulation only authorised European companies could import chia seeds into the European Union market. According to the new rules, chia seeds can now be marketed freely by any trader, provided that they meet the requirements on appropriate use and labelling.

At the moment, both retailers and food manufacturers buy chia seeds from importers. This is because chia seeds represent a small-volume business. Traders are in a good position to manage the supply chain and risks for this product on behalf of their final customers.

Chia seeds can be crushed into chia seed oil which, in Europe, is sold mostly by niche retailers. You can find more information in our study on the [European market for chia seed oil](#).

The figure below highlights the main trade channels for chia seeds into Europe.

Figure 3: Trade channels for chia seeds into Europe



Tips:

- When approaching a buyer, make sure to provide them with the appropriate product documentation ([composition, properties, certification, microbiological criteria and other relevant information](#)).
- Be realistic about the volumes you can deliver. Make sure you can meet quality requirements in Europe. Using industries demand the highest level of technical information. But aspects like quality, purity, pesticides and microbiological criteria are the same for retail or industry. Other key quality factors include uniformity in colour and shape (whole seeds) and a high purity level.

8 . What are the end market prices?

The end market prices per kg for chia differ widely, according to package size, certification and retail channel. Chia seeds are mainly sold as conventional or organic-certified products.

You can find examples of retail prices for chia seeds in the table below.

Brand and details	Retail outlet	Price and packaging size	Price per kg
Albert Heijn Chiazaad	Albert Heijn, The Netherlands	€2.49/175 grams	€14.23
Mattisson Absolute Chia Seeds	www.vitaminstore.nl , The Netherlands	€11.95/1 kg	€11.95
Just Chia Zaad	Holland & Barrett, The Netherlands	€13.99/500 grams	€27.98
Sevenhills Raw Chia Seeds (organic)	www.amazon.co.uk , United Kingdom	€8.99/1 kg	€8.99

Alnatura Chia Samen (organic)	Migros, Switzerland	€4.59/500 grams	€9.18
Celnat Graines de Chia (organic)	BienManger.com, France	€5.90/400 grams	€14.75
Markal Graines de Chia (organic)	Naturalia, France	€5.35/500 grams	€10.70
NATURACEREAL Chia Samen	www.vitafy.de , Germany	€10.29/1 kg	€10.29
enerBio Bio Chia Samen	Rossmann, Germany	€2.79/300 grams	€9.30
Vital Bio Chia-Samen (organic)	Spar, Austria	€2.45/250 grams	€9.80
Chia Original Chiafrø	Matas, Denmark	€6.29/500 grams	€12.58

Tip:

- Keep in mind that retail prices do not directly reflect importer prices. Use the above-given prices to calculate how much value is added throughout the chain. This can help you in arriving at a better pricing strategy and proposition with your buyer.

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