



## [10 tips for finding buyers in the natural ingredients for health products sector](#)

The European health products market offers plenty of opportunities to natural ingredients suppliers from developing countries. There is growing demand for natural healthcare products, and in turn, increased demand for medicinal and aromatic plants and extracts. How can you find European buyers? Here are some tips to help.

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## 1 . Start by doing thorough market research

If you want to find buyers, your first step is to do thorough market research. You'll need to:

- Find out in which European countries demand for your ingredient is highest. Also look at growth in demand in these countries.
- Look for market segments that use your products. Ask yourself what your ingredients can be used for. Natural ingredients for health products have numerous fields of application. Can they be used in energy products for example? Or for food supplements? Digestive health products? Find out which types of products are getting more popular. If growth rates for these market segments are high, then there is likely to be a stronger demand for raw materials used in these market segments.

### Tips:

- See our studies on important market segments: [digestive health](#), [energy](#), [immune system](#), [joint health](#), [stress and anxiety](#), [vascular system](#), [anti-obesity](#), [cognition](#), and [aromatherapy](#).

- For product-specific information, see our studies on [promising export products](#), including [frankincense](#), [aloe](#), [Curcuma longa](#), [capsicum](#), [Moringa oleifera](#) and [mulberries](#).
- See also our study about [market channels and segments in the natural ingredients for health products sector](#).
- Use [ITC Trade Map](#) for statistical data. Search for product groups that are used in health products, such as vegetable extracts, or medicinal and aromatic plants.
- Review [news about the market for medicinal plants](#) on ITC Market Insider.

## 2 . Make sure you know about buyer requirements

If you cannot meet buyer requirements, European buyers will not buy your products. Make sure you know what the buyer requirements are before you contact European buyers. These are the laws and regulations that products and processes need to comply with throughout Europe.

To ensure your products and processes meet these European standards, many European buyers will ask for an audit of your factory. During the audit your potential as a new supplier will be assessed.

European buyers may also send a variety of questionnaires for you to fill in. You must take this seriously. Your willingness to comply with these demands will make or break your chances of a successful business relationship. First impressions count.

### Tips:

- See our study on [buyer requirements for natural ingredients for health products](#) for an overview of requirements you will need to comply with to export to Europe.
- Visit the European Commission's website on health and food safety for [more information on legislation](#).
- See the next tip for websites of European sector associations. These provide information about legal requirements in the health and food (supplements) sectors.

## 3 . Review the websites of European sector associations

You can find buyers on the member lists of sector associations. Many European buyers join such associations. Identify potential customers and get in contact with them.

Sector associations play an important role in European Union regulations and legislation. They are actively involved in research programmes and corporate social responsibility programmes (CSR). They may also provide country-specific and sector-specific information which is vital to your market research.

One important sector association is the [European Federation of Associations of Health Product Manufacturers](#) (EHPM). This association represents specialist health product manufacturers in Europe, as well as national associations. EHPM also works on developing an appropriate regulatory framework for its members' products throughout Europe.

Another example is the [European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations](#)

(EFPIA). The EFPIA represents 1,900 companies in the European pharmaceutical industry. On its website, you can find members, companies and 33 national associations, such as:

- [Les Entreprises du Médicament](#) (LEEM) in France
- [scienceINDUSTRIES](#) in Switzerland
- [Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry](#) (ABPI) in the United Kingdom.

Here are links to the lists of members for the following sector associations:

- [European Federation of Associations of Health Product Manufacturers](#) (EHPM)
- [Health Food Manufacturers Association](#) (HFMA)
- [European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations](#) (EFPIA)
- [Association of Research-Based Pharmaceutical Companies](#) (VFA)
- [Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry](#) (ABPI)
- [scienceIndustries](#)
- [Food Supplements Europe](#)

### Tips:

- Use the membership lists of national and European sector associations to find importers and manufacturers of health products.
- See the websites of sector associations for information on legal requirements in the health and food (supplements) sectors.
- Check the websites of sector associations to find matchmaking programmes. For example, the German Federal Association of Industrial and Commercial Companies for Pharmaceuticals, Health Food, Dietary Supplements and Cosmetics (BDHI), offers a [matchmaking programme](#) (information in German). You can also consult the [matchmaking platform](#) on the website of analyze & realize GmbH.

## 4 . Join trade development associations and export support programmes

Contacts at trade development associations are useful contacts to have. Think about joining:

- [Centre for the Promotion of Import from developing countries](#) (CBI)
- [Swiss Import Promotion Programme](#) (SIPPO)
- [German Import Promotion Desk](#) (IPD)

These organisations offer help and advice on topics such as buyer requirements, quality issues, legislative frameworks, certification and organise export support programmes.

A trade development association in your country can also help you find new business contacts and contacts with institutions that promote trade within Europe. They also organise export support programmes. These are good places to meet other exporters and expand your network.

Examples of organisations with successful export support programmes include:

- [ProColombia](#) (Colombia)
- [PromPeru](#) (Peru)
- [Vietrade](#) (Vietnam)
- [Trade Development Authority of Pakistan - TDAP](#) (Pakistan)
- [Directorate General for National Export Development - DGNED](#) (Indonesia)
- [Department of Trade and Industries](#) (South Africa)
- [Agricultural Export Council](#) (Egypt)

## Tips:

- Check the websites of trade development associations for market studies on the European market. You can also ask them for such information.
- Check the websites of associations for information on regional legislation (ASEAN, Andean Pact), good practices and international standards, or contact them for further info.
- Visit events organised by trade development associations and meet with other exporters. Learn from their experience. Discuss and share experiences on trading channels, legislative requirements, buyer requirements and logistics.

## 5 . Visit trade fairs

Trade fairs are one of the most important places to meet buyers. They are ideal places to look for new business partners and to gather information about new trends and product developments.

You can use trade fairs as a platform to present your products to a wide audience. This could be a national or international one. There are also niche events for more specialised industries/sectors.

Choose whether you want to exhibit at a trade fair or attend as a visitor. If you decide to exhibit, make sure you do the following first: calculate the costs; set objectives; develop a stand concept; invite visitors.

Presenting your company and products in a professional manner at the trade fair also gives your business more credibility. Buyers will expect:

- a professional attitude and professional appearance (also in terms of clothing)
- good time management (for example, always be on time for appointments)
- good background knowledge about good practices and standard operating procedures, as well as standards for your processes and products.

The leading trade fairs in Europe for natural ingredients for health products are:

- [BioFach](#) (for organic products)
- [Vitafoods](#)
- [Health Ingredients Europe](#).

Look online for additional trade fairs, for example using websites such as [Expo Database](#) or [Exhibit In Europe](#)

## Tips:

- Select the right trade fair for your products. Answer questions such as: What type of products will you be bringing? In which market segment are they used? Are your products organic certified? Does the trade fair focus on innovation? Will you find many new/innovative products there? Is the trade fair open for brands from outside of Europe, or is it focused on European companies?
- After a trade fair, make sure you do the follow up work and monitor your success. Contact the people you have met based on business cards and your notes taken during the trade fair discussion. Send them the information you promised them. Keep up those good first and second impressions.
- Take a look at the online exhibitor catalogues of trade fairs to find potential buyers for your products. Determine which companies are active in your market segments and target

countries. These catalogues usually contain links to the exhibitors' company profiles, contact details and the products they produce or are looking for. See for example the [Health Ingredients Europe 2018 exhibitor list](#) and the [BioFach 2018 list of exhibitors and products](#).

## 6 . Advertise

Advertising can be an effective way of helping buyers find you. Examples of interesting journals to advertise in are:

- [ACTIF's](#) (a magazine on functional, health and food ingredients market)
- [SOFW Journal](#)
- [Nutraceuticals Now](#)
- [Nutraceuticals World](#)
- [Nutraceuticals Business Review](#)
- [Wellness foods & supplements](#)
- [NutraIngredients](#).

Business-to-Business (B2B) online trading platforms are good places to advertise posts about your company and/or your products, for example:

- [Alibaba](#)
- [TradeB2B](#)
- [Global Sources](#)

Also look at websites that offer a directory of food ingredient suppliers, such as [ingridnet.com](#). This website offers online advertising opportunities.

### Tips:

- In your advertisements, include ingredient-specific information.
- Advertise on a mix of different platforms, both online and offline.
- Base your advertisements on the European Advertising Standards Alliance (EASA) [Best Practice Recommendation on Online Behavioural Advertising](#).

## 7 . Make sure you can be found online

It is difficult for European buyers to find suppliers and products in developing countries. You can use the internet to bridge this gap.

The best way to provide information about your company and your product(s) is on your own website. This needs to contain:

- Basic information about your products, your facilities and your company, also including correct contact details.
- Any relevant documentation, such as product specifications, Safety Data Sheets and certificates.
- Pictures or images that show who you are as a company, what products you sell and where you source your raw materials from.
- Information on what you do in terms of sustainability and corporate sustainable responsibility (CSR).

Put some time into Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) as well. This is a strategy that can make it easier for search engines to find you. In that way it will also become easier for potential buyers to find you. All you might have to do for a big effect is change some minor things on your website.

### Tips:

- See these [steps to a Google-friendly site](#).
- See the [European Commission website](#) for information about optimising your website for search listings.
- Have a look at websites of other suppliers. What can you learn from them?
- Also look at the websites of European buyers. What kind of information do they include? What do they do regarding sustainability? What do they share about their suppliers?

## 8 . Use online social networks

Most European buyers use online social networks to communicate with potential suppliers. In turn, they expect suppliers to be active online and communicate at a professional level.

This means that you need clear, accessible and up-to-date information about your company and products on online networking platforms like [LinkedIn](#), [Xing](#), [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#). Of these, LinkedIn and Xing are especially important for Business-to-Business contacts. Social media are becoming almost as important as face-to-face networking at conferences and trade fairs.

Many associations and magazines also offer online networking platforms. Such platforms give you the opportunity to promote your product developments and trends. One example is the [ENA - European Nutraceutical Association](#). On this website you can announce or discuss industry news. The website also offers a good way of communicating with customers, partners and/or suppliers. Moreover, you can post announcements on job vacancies or tender for projects.

### Tips:

- Use social media to spread information about your own activities and your products.
- Use social media and B2B platforms to keep yourself up-to-date on what your potential buyers are doing.
- Use social media for finding out what your business partners and competitors are up to. This could lead to potential buyers.
- Use social media for networking and keeping in contact with your existing buyers.

## 9 . Get certified

More and more European buyers request their suppliers to apply for specific certification. With these standards, buyers have access to documentation about the entire production process. They also use it as a guarantee of the origins of the raw materials, which reduces risks.

Certifications and labels also help buyers to communicate to their consumers. They use these to show consumers how they assure sustainability, quality and corporate social responsibility (CSR),

which is important to consumers.

Although obtaining a certification may be a significant investment, it can also add value to your products. Moreover, it can increase your chances of attracting buyers by improving your business operations and your reputation as a reliable supplier of natural ingredients.

Important verification schemes and certification standards are:

- [Organic \(European Union\)](#)
- [ISO 22000](#)
- [Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points \(HACCP\)](#)
- [United Nations Global Compact](#)
- [Union of Ethical BioTrade](#)
- [Fairtrade International](#)
- [FairWild Foundation](#)

You need to go through a certification process before you are allowed to use these labels. Experts will audit your company. You may need to improve your processes according to their instructions.

### Tips:

- Discuss with (potential) buyers whether they would be interested in certified natural ingredients and for which standards.
- For a [full overview of certification schemes in the sector](#), consult the ITC Standards Map database.
- Check the Standards Map videos on YouTube to see how Standards Map can help you to determine [which initiatives may be useful for your company](#).
- Get certified by implementing Good Practices and standards.
- Once you have obtained certification, ask the organisations behind the certification standard to add your company profile to their websites. This may help potential buyers to find you. See, for example, this [list of companies participating in FairWild certification](#) on the FairWild website.
- Publicise your certification. Put labels on your products. Update the home page of your website. Publish press releases and/or make announcements during trade fairs and in national programmes.
- Prepare well for company audits. You can find the requirements for certification standards online. Make sure you can comply with these requirements and have the necessary proof available when the auditor visits.
- Stay in contact with the auditors and communicate new offers/products regularly.
- Join relevant associations/foundations related to your new certification. Subscribe to newsletters to stay informed about the latest developments and go to member associate meetings.
- Use auditor visits as a source of information.
- *See our study on [buyer requirements for natural ingredients for health products](#) for more information on specific standards, such as organic and FairWild certification.*

## 10 . Understand your buyers

Before you contact European buyers, make sure that you are prepared. You need to get know your buyers. They will expect more from you than just meeting standardised legal requirements. You need to find out what their expectations are and how you can meet them.

The business culture of your (potential) buyers may also be different to your own. Cultural backgrounds play an important part in business transactions, and these aspects vary throughout Europe.

In the natural ingredients for health products sector, there is a clear distinction between traditional buyers and modern ones. Modern buyers have separated purchasing from quality control. They have purchasing departments and quality control managers who will both be involved in the negotiations. They will ask a lot of questions and expect audits and certifications.

There are many new trends in supply chain management and in purchasing. One example is risk management. Buyers (especially in the pharmaceutical industry) want their suppliers to also be responsible for risk management. Buyers expect you to know what risk management is. They expect you to have a system in place to monitor and cope with risks. For more information, see the [ISO website](#).

### Tips:

- See [our 10 tips for doing business with European buyers](#) of natural ingredients for health products.
- See our study on [buyer requirements for natural ingredients for health products](#) for more information on buyer requirements and expectations.
- See our study on [trends for natural ingredients for health products](#) for more information on developments in the sector.
- See an [overview of differences in business culture in Europe](#) on Passport to Trade 2.0. This website provides short video introductions to each countries' cultural peculiarities.
- Talk to European buyers. They are your most direct and most important source of information. Meet them face to face at trade fairs, or make appointments for a meeting at or after the fair.
- Attend meetings or workshops organised by trade associations to find out what is going on in the sector. Have a look at the respective associations' websites to find dates, times and locations for such events.

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