



[Exporting fresh plums to Europe](#)

The opportunities for exporters of plums to Europe are mainly counter-seasonal. The winter months in Europe are the best period to export, because Southern and Eastern European countries produce lots of plums in the European summer. The European import value from developing countries increased annually until 2013, but slowed down in 2014 due to the Russian embargo. The import recovered quickly thereafter. Plums, together with cherries, are among the most common imported stone fruit.

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1 . Product description

Plums belong to stone fruit, also known as drupes, which refer to a fleshy fruit with a hard inner layer, or stone, that surrounds the seed. Plum species that are significant for commercial trade include the hexaploid European plum (*Prunus domestica*) and the diploid Japanese plum (*Prunus salicina*). The European plum is preferred for processing and drying because of its high content of solids. Varieties of the Japanese species contain more juice and are fit for fresh consumption.

Within these species there are many varieties and hybrids varying from red, purple to yellow and green skin or flesh, many of which you can find for sale in Europe, for example:

Selection of plum varieties			
			
Damson	Victoria	Mirabelles	Greengages
purple or black skin, green flesh, clingstone, astringent	yellow flesh with a red or mottled skin	dark yellow, predominantly grown in northeast France	firm, green flesh and skin even when ripe
Red Beauty	Santa Rosa	Golden Japan	Reina Claudia
early variety, reddish-purple and juicy yellow flesh, mild sweet flavor, slightly tart skin	large red fruit, gold flesh, sweet, clingstone	early variety, sweet, medium sized, golden yellow and pale yellow flesh, clingstone.	French variety, sweet, with green-yellow skin and flesh

Sources: [Wikipedia](#), [Frutas-hortalizas.com](#)

Combined Nomenclature (CN) commodity code for fresh plums	
08094005	Fresh plums

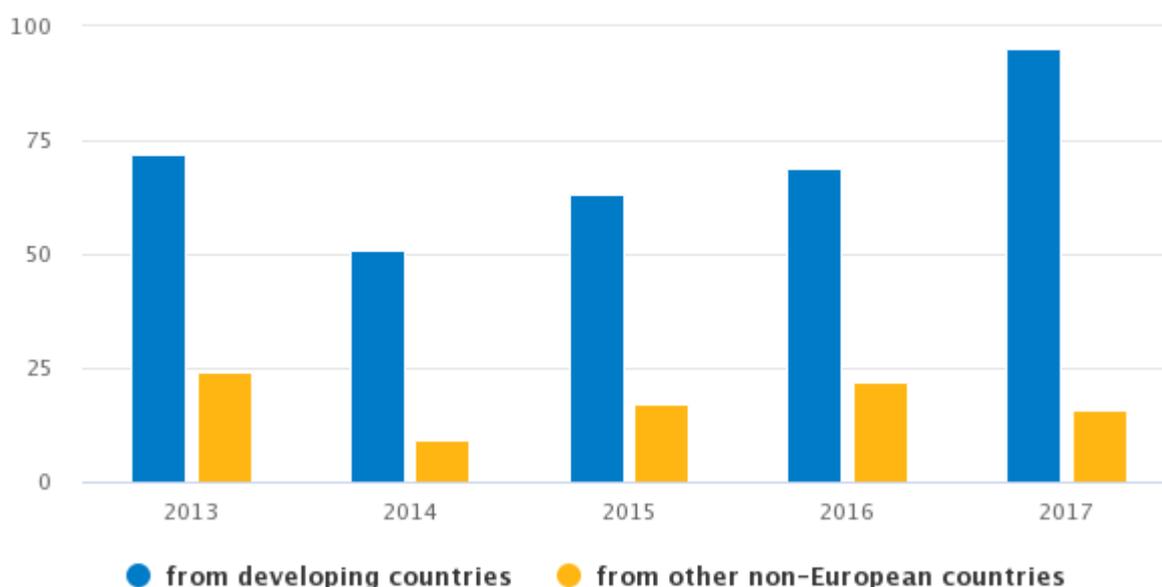
Source: Eurostat Comext

2 . Which European markets offer opportunities for plum exporters?

Total demand for imported plums surpasses 100 thousand tonnes

In 2014 the European import of fresh plums experienced a dip partly due to the Russian embargo. But in the following years the European import recovered and passed 100 thousand tonnes for the first time. From the 111 thousand tonnes, 95 thousand were imported from developing countries, mainly from South Africa, Moldova and Chile.

Figure 1: European import of plums 2013–2017
in 1,000 tonnes



Source: Market Access Database

Tip:

- Maintain focus on the quality instead of quantity when exporting to a growing market. In the end, wholesalers and retailers demand good quality produce and trustworthy suppliers.

Germany, the UK and the Netherlands offer best opportunities for imported plums

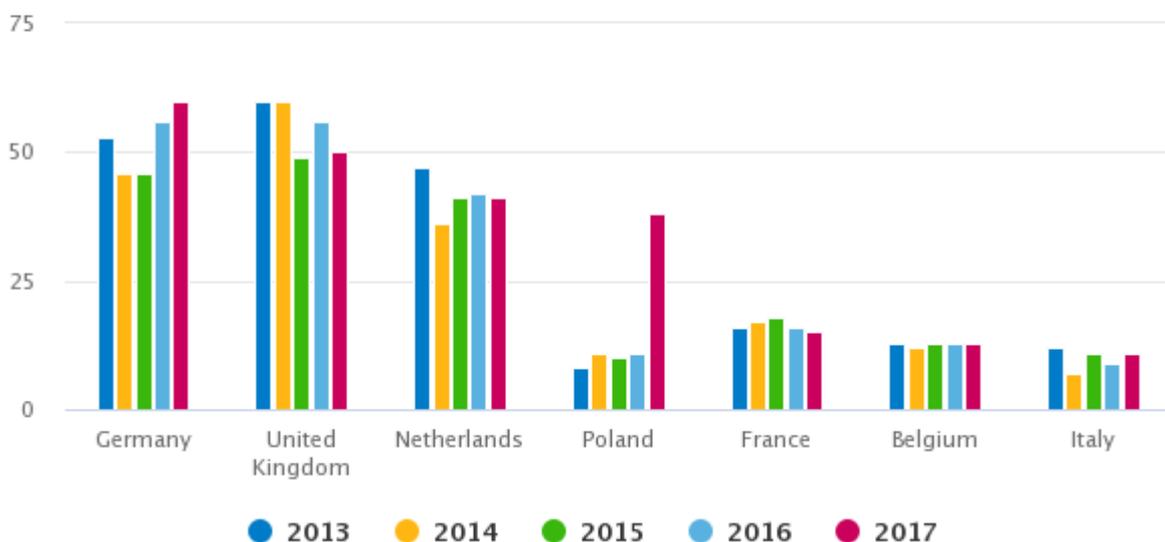
Germany and the United Kingdom are relevant consumers of imported plums. Some of these plums are imported from outside Europe, such as South Africa. Nevertheless, most non-European plums arrive in Europe through the Netherlands before being re-exported. As an exporter these are the main countries to take into account.

Southern and Eastern Europe are also large consumption areas, but they are mainly supplied by their local producers. When exporting to France, Spain or Italy, your best moment is in the off-season (December-May).

Polish imports showed a steep import growth, importing large amounts of plums from Moldova just like Romania, but these numbers are probably still subject to corrections. [Moldova](#) profited from wider tax-free quotas for plums.

Figure 2: Main European importers of fresh plums 2013–2017

in 1,000 tonnes



Source: ITC Trademap

Tips:

- Stay up to date with the seasonal supply and production volumes. Check the news and [market overviews](#) on platforms such as Freshplaza regularly.
- Check the [CBI Market Intelligence Platform](#) for the market developments of other fresh fruits.

- Discuss with your buyer what the best timing and potential demand for your product is.

3 . What trends offer opportunities on the European market for fresh stone fruit?

Opportunities in hybrids and new varieties

Taste and consumer experience have become important in the purchase of fresh plums. Plums need to be at their optimal ripeness when bought and consumers have a preference for sweet varieties.

This has paved the road for new varieties that excel in sweetness, appearance or bite. Hybrids such as the [Pluot](#) (75% plum - 25% apricot) find their way into mainstream channels and growers in producing countries such as [France](#) and [Chile](#) experiment with new varieties. Selecting the right varieties is an important part of positioning your company in the European market.

Tips:

- Make sure that supply chain logistics and transport processes do not affect product taste in any significant way.
- Find the right varieties that are most favoured in your destination market. Check wholesale markets and retail shops to see which varieties are sold in which countries.

Attention for local seasons limit imports to off-season

Several European countries are producers of stone fruits, including plums. There is an increased attention to the specific seasons of fruit, which is often promoted by retailers and gives extra value to locally produced fruit. This is seen for example with [British Plums](#) in Tesco and with the use of the [national flag by French retailers](#) to indicate the local origin of the plums.

While consumer awareness of local seasons increases, the opportunities for developing countries are often limited to the off season and supplementing the European production.

Tips:

- In order to complement or compete with the European production, maintain high quality standards and supply a superior product. Uniformity in size and quality is important.
- Check out other [trends in the fresh fruit and vegetables](#) on the CBI Market Information platform.

4 . What requirements should fresh plums comply with to be allowed on the European market?

Buyer requirements can be divided into:

(1) musts (requirements you must meet in order to enter the market), such as legal requirements,

(2) common requirements (which are those 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 plums are the same as for other fresh fruit and vegetables. You can find a complete overview in and at the:

- CBI [buyer requirements for fresh fruit and vegetables](#)
- [Trade Helpdesk](#) that provides an overview of export requirements for fresh plums (code 08094005) 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. With the aim of avoiding 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 are 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. Imported plums are known to score [high in the detection of pesticides](#) therefore you can expect your buyer to check your product thoroughly.

Tips:

- Find which MRLs are relevant for fresh plums by consulting the European [MRL database](#) in which all harmonised MRLs can be found. You can search for your product or the pesticide used. The database has a list of the MRLs associated with 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 [MRLs on the European Commission website on Food Safety](#). Check with your buyers if they have any additional requirements regarding MRLs and pesticide use.

Comply with phytosanitary requirements

Fruit and vegetables exported to the European Union must comply with European legislation on plant health. The European Commission has laid down [phytosanitary requirements](#) to prevent 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 plums to Europe. These authorities normally work with international standards, but always check with your buyer as well.

Quality

Import of fresh fruits and vegetables from third countries to the EU must conform to general standards. These standards can be found in the [General Marketing Standards of Regulation \(EU\) No. 543/2011](#). Annex 1 of this regulation summarizes the minimum requirements that products should be:

- intact, clean and sound;
- (practically) free from pests, damage, abnormal external moisture, internal browning;
- in a condition to withstand transport and handling.

For fresh plums there is also a specific marketing standard available from the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE):

- [UNECE STANDARD FFV-29 concerning the marketing and commercial quality control of PLUMS, 2017](#)

Plums can be divided into three classes: “Extra” Class, Class I and Class II.

Europe demands minimum Class I, which means that your plums may only show slight defects if these do not affect the general appearance, quality or presentation of the produce. The quality tolerances are 5% for “Extra” Class and 10% for Class I.

Size

For plums the marketing standard states the following minimum sizes:

	Classes "Extra" and I	Class II
Large-fruited varieties	35 mm	30 mm
Other varieties	28 mm	25 mm
Mirabelles and Damsons	20 mm	17 mm

Source: [UNECE Standard for plums](#)

Remember that uniformity in size is important, especially for “Extra” Class.

Packaging

Packaging requirements differ between customers and market segments. They must at least be packed in new, clean and quality packaging to prevent damage and protect the product properly. Discuss packaging requirements with your buyers. Some general packaging characteristics are:

- Wholesale packaging: Cardboard boxes, different sizes. Plums are mostly sold in 3-5 kg boxes.
- Retail packaging: In European retail plums can be sold out of the box or in punnets of often 0.5 kg.

Labelling

Consumer package labelling must be in accordance with the rules and regulations applicable in the European market. Labels may not 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 labelling and information to consumers.

Labels or marking for fresh fruit and pre-packed fresh fruit should provide the following information:

- packer and/or dispatcher/shipper
- name and physical address (street/city/region/postal code/country) or a code mark officially

recognised by the national authority

- product name 'Plums' if the contents are not visible from the outside and name of the variety
- country of origin and, optionally, district/region/place
- commercial specifications, i.e. class, size (code), number of units and net weight
- official control mark (optional).

In addition, the label should include any certification logo (if applicable) and/or retailer logo (in the case of private-label products).

For more information on labelling, packaging and quality, see also the marketing standards above or read about [food labelling in the EU Trade Helpdesk](#).

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 such as certifications.

The most commonly requested certification 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 example, it has become nearly impossible to supply northern Europe without GLOBALG.A.P., since it is a standard requirement for most supermarkets.

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

- British Retail Consortium ([BRC](#))
- International Food Standard ([IFS](#))
- Food Safety System Certification ([FSS22000](#))
- Safe Quality Food Programme ([SQF](#)).

These management systems are supplemental 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 at the [Standards Map](#).
- Always remember that food safety is a major issue. Work proactively with buyers to improve food safety, be transparent and remain up to date with regard to buyer requirements and regulations.

The production must be sustainable and socially responsible

There is growing attention for the social and/or environmental conditions in the producing areas. Most European buyers have a code of conduct which they will expect you to adhere to. For fresh plums social compliance is important and a must for most large retailers in northern Europe. Eastern Europe can be less demanding but is expected to follow the rest of Europe.

Implementing [GRASP](#), a label for social practices, provides you with a good basic social certification. GRASP is part of GLOBALG.A.P. and gaining in importance.

Another good option is implementing standards recognised by the [Sustainability Initiative Fruit and](#)

[Vegetables](#) (SIFAV). This comprises an initiative from traders and retailers to become 100% sustainable in sourcing from Latin America, Africa and Asia by 2020.

A few specialised buyers provide extra opportunities for socially certified products. They use certification schemes such as [Fair for Life](#) or [Fairtrade](#). In general Fair Trade certification is losing importance in Europe due to its complexity and costs.

Tips:

- For a complete overview of buyer initiatives for social compliance, see the [buyer requirements for fresh fruit and vegetables](#) on the CBI marketing intelligence platform.
- Examine your company's current performance, for example by completing a self-assessment of the Business Social Compliance Initiative on the [amfori/BSCI website](#).
- Consult the [Standards Map database](#) for additional information and to learn about differences between fair-trade labels.

What do niche markets require?

Organic is the requirement in niche markets

An increasing number of European consumers prefer food products that are produced and processed using natural methods. The market for organic plums is much smaller than the conventional market, but the demand is growing and supply is limited. 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 plums 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, for example:

- [Soil Association](#) (especially relevant in the United Kingdom)
- [Naturland](#) (Germany)
- [Bio Suisse](#) (Switzerland).

Some of these standards differ slightly, but they all comply with the European legislation on organic production and labelling.

Tips:

- Implementing organic production and becoming certified can be expensive, so assess the market potential before making any investments.
- For the export of organic plums into the European market, use a specialised importer, who understands the market and has good access to clients that purchase organic fruit. Use, for example, the [Organic-Bio](#) database.

5 . What competition will you be facing in the European plum

market?

European production determines the trade dynamics

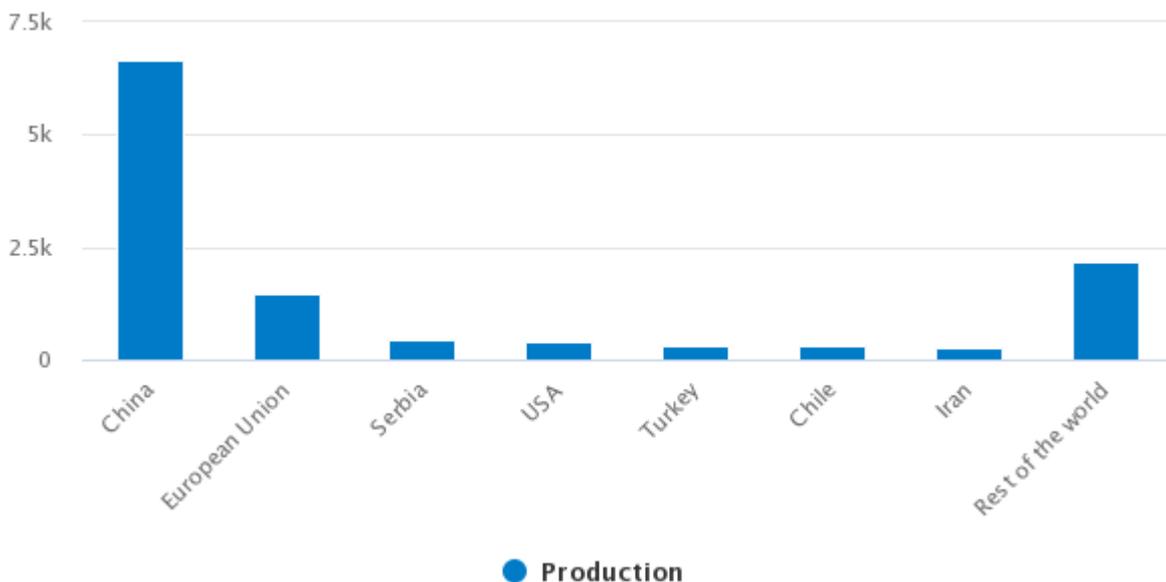
Europe is, after China, the biggest producing region. Europe's main plum producer is Romania with 513 thousand tonnes in 2016, followed by Spain, Italy and France with volumes of just over 200 thousand tonnes. The season for plums runs from June up to November.

In summer time, the European production makes trade from other countries difficult. The supply of local growers is favoured because of less transportation which results in a more sustainable and fresher supply of plums is possible.

However, plums are fragile and changing weather conditions can influence the European production. For example, recently in the spring of 2018 several companies announced a delayed and lower supply of plums due to hail and adverse weather conditions. Therefore you must be alert on the fluctuations in order to benefit from sudden demand.

Figure 3: Worldwide production of plums and sloes 2016

in 1,000 tonnes



Source: FAOSTAT

Tip:

- Make sure you stay informed about the production and climate conditions in Europe and use them to your benefit. Also keep up to date with import requirements and maintain good contact with important buyers in order to jump in when European production is low.

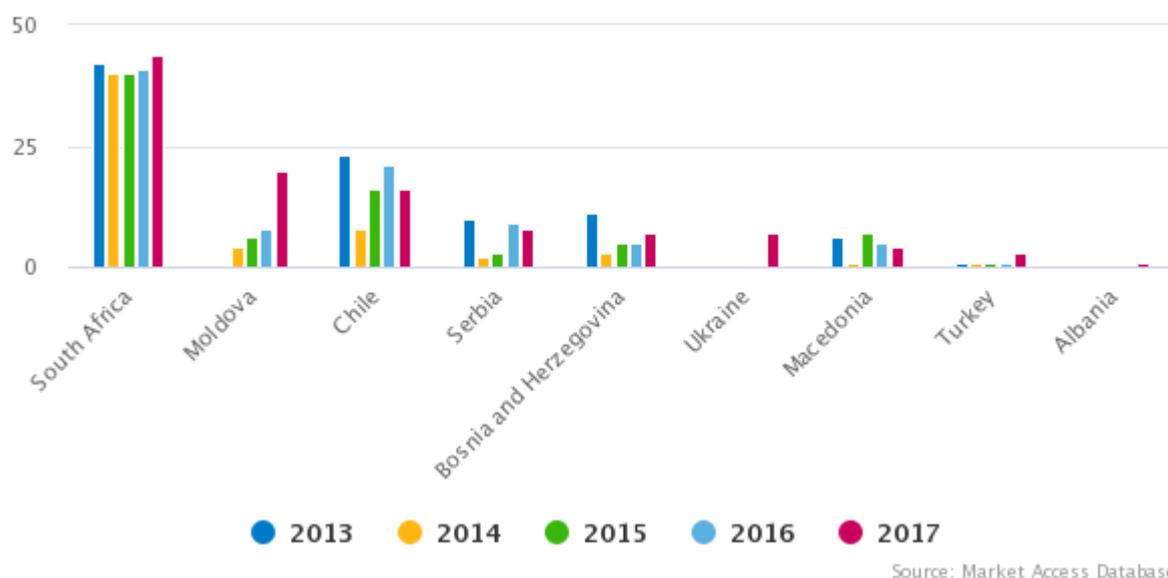
South Africa and Chile are large non-European suppliers

South Africa and Chile are relevant suppliers to the European market. South Africa 'only' produced a little over 80 thousand tonnes, much less than the 295 thousand tonnes in Chile. Still, South Africa is Europe's main supplier with a stable 40 thousand tonnes annually. South Africa and Chile are counter seasonal suppliers. The South African supply ends in May/June when the European season starts.

The supply from other countries fluctuates drastically. When you are relatively close to Europe such as in Moldova, Serbia or Albania you can meet the extra demand during shortages or during the start or the end of the season.

Figure 4: Main suppliers of fresh plums to Europe 2013–2017

in 1,000 tonnes



Tips:

- Look for opportunities in the European off-season or in supplying new varieties. Specialists in novelties can have a stronger position for negotiation than suppliers of regular stone fruit.
- Do not compete on price alone, but build partnerships with buyers and strive for excellent product quality and handling.

Size matters in supplying Europe

Certification and meeting both legal and non-legal requirements form a major hurdle for producers and exporters wishing to enter the European market. Suppliers of fresh fruit and vegetables to European retailers are not in a position to argue about the rules of the game.

In general, European producers have an advantage over suppliers from developing countries. And when plums are sourced from non-European countries importers usually select a medium or large supplier that can offer a reliable supply and is well organised.

Tips:

- Establish a credible track record including 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.
- Only become part of a retail programme if you are able to offer larger volumes and adhere

to the high requirements. Relationships with experienced service providers that supply large retailers are highly recommended.

- Make sure you are well prepared for the European market and read the [CBI tips for doing business with European buyers](#).

Plums vs other stone fruit

Fresh plums can be easily substituted by other popular stone fruits such as peaches, nectarines or various hybrids, but also by mangoes for example. Besides the season, price and retail promotions also play an important role in the purchase of the consumer.

In terms of European import plums are the most important stone fruit, followed by cherries. Peaches and nectarines are well represented in local production.

Tip:

- Look on the CBI Market Intelligence platform for more information about [competition in the European market for fresh fruit and vegetables](#).

6 . Which trade channels can you use to put fresh plums on the European market?

Supermarket versus specialist retailers

Most plums are sold in retail settings, with lower sales through food service channels. It is important to distinguish between the supermarket channel and the specialist retail channel, which includes physical shops and street markets. Supermarkets are dominant in north-western Europe, while specialised retail is more important in southern Europe.

Tip:

- Have a look at the [Market Channels and Segments](#) available at the CBI market intelligence platform.

Counter seasonal importers are concentrated in the Netherlands

Fresh plums from counter seasonal suppliers are for a large part imported through the Netherlands, from where they get distributed to other European destinations. It is an efficient trade route and you will find several importers in the Netherlands that can provide you with a European network of buyers.

However, your location is also important in the determination of your market entry strategy. Suppliers from Central Asia and in former Yugoslavia often find their best opportunities directly in relevant consumer markets in Eastern and Central Europe such as Romania or Poland.

Tip:

- Find a European importer by presenting yourself at trade fairs such as [Fruit Logistica](#). All of the different channels start with a strong relationship with a European partner.
- Read also the CBI tips on how to [find buyers on the European fresh fruit and vegetable market](#).

7 . What are end market prices for fresh stone fruits?

Consumer prices for plums depend on the availability, quality, type of shipment, origin and type of retail outlet. Transport costs may vary depending on the type of shipment (air or sea) and inland transportation.

Temporary shortfalls in supply (e.g. through harvest problems) have a huge impact on prices. During higher seasonal supply, retailers often put their stone fruit on offer with 20-50% discounts.

The table below provides information about the indicative consumer prices of plums (without discounts). Be aware that these figures are just indications.

Supermarket prices in the Netherlands, the UK and Spain	
Plums	€2.50 - €7.50 p/kg based on data in 2014 - 2018 (June - August) +20/25% for organic
	Pluot plums (ripe to eat, red flesh) www.ah.nl , the Netherlands 4 pieces €2,99 Origen: Spain
	Pluot plums www.ah.nl , the Netherlands 500g €2,99



Duchy Organic plums
www.waitrose.com, UK
400g
GBP 2,00
Origen: Argentina, Italy, South-Africa, Spain



Tesco Supersweet plums
www.tesco.com, UK
325g
GBP 2,50
Origen: various



Tesco British plum punnet
www.tesco.com, UK
400g
GBP 1,50
Origen: United Kingdom



Tesco Yellow plums
www.tesco.com, UK
300g
GBP 1,00
Origen: Italy, Portugal, South Africa, Spain



Purple plums
www.hipercor.es, Spain
approx. 800g
€2,68
Origen: Spain



Yellow plums
www.hipercor.es, Spain
approx. 800g
€1,75
Origen: Spain

Tips:

- Find information about consumer prices on the online shops or assortments of supermarket chains such as [Tesco](#), [Albert Heijn](#) or [Carrefour](#). Be aware that much of the retail trade is planned in supply programmes and pricing is not linked to trading prices.
- Find wholesale and trade prices by consulting your contacts in Europe (build a network!) or look on websites such as [France Agrimer](#).

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