

# Exporting cutting boards to Europe

Cutting boards are available in all shapes and sizes, and are made of different raw materials. Wooden cutting boards offer opportunities for sleek design, showing the natural structure of wood, and demonstrating sustainable production. In all cutting boards, design is moving beyond simple, functional boards towards a sense of added functionality.

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## 1. Product description

Cutting boards are categorised under kitchenware or serveware. They are used for cutting various food products, ranging from vegetables to meat, bread and cheese.

Cutting boards are usually made of wood, plastics, rubber or glass, depending on the specific food product they are used for. For example, the porousness of wood makes wooden boards more difficult to clean. Therefore boards used to cut raw meat are usually made of plastic or glass. Wooden cutting boards are more often used for cutting and serving bread or cheese.

Most synthetic cutting boards are machine-made and mass-produced in China or Europe. These producers are generally too difficult to compete with, in terms of price and volume. Wooden cutting boards offer the best opportunities. Therefore this study focuses on wooden cutting boards. It uses the following code to indicate trade:

Table 1: Product codes

Harmonised System (HS)	Prodcom	Description
4419 00	16 29 12 00	Tableware and kitchenware, of wood

### Quality

#### Functionality

Functionality is a basic quality requirement for cutting boards. The boards should not damage the knives used, which can occur if they are too hard. Food safety is a major issue, especially for wooden boards. Your boards must be safe when they into contact with food. Generally, a vegetable oil is applied to ensure this. Sometimes, a wood species' natural antiseptic qualities are highlighted (like oak). Additionally, some boards have running grooves that funnel off crumbs and juices.

### Size

The dimensions of cutting boards vary depending on their use, but are usually rectangular and measure around 40 cm in length and 30 cm in width. Anything much larger than that becomes a real statement piece in the kitchen, anything smaller is usually used as a serving board.

## Material

The choice of wood in cutting boards is almost endless, from European or American native species to exotics, in hardwoods and softwoods. The choice is determined by durability (hardwood deteriorates less quickly) and look (olive wood has an expressive grain). Features can be added, such as grips or loops to hang the items, which can be in leather, metal or other materials.

## Design

Consumers often buy a wooden cutting board to have a real chunk of nature in their kitchen. The main design value of the cutting board is therefore expressed by the grain and colour of the natural wood. Increasingly, style features are added in the form of fancy (non-rectangular) shapes, variations in the thickness of the board (a thick board is more butch, a thin one more elegant), and accessories such as grips or loops.

## Durability

Cutting food on wooden cutting boards can leave marks on the surface of the board. Therefore, the boards need to be durable enough to withstand scratches.

Retailers greatly appreciate it when you provide detailed specifications for your cutting boards, including the type of wood, exact size, a logical description and whether the product is dishwasher safe. Generally, however, wooden cutting boards should be hand-washed and dried with a damp cloth to avoid cracks, mould, etc. and to prevent fast deterioration.

## Labelling

- Information on the outer packaging of wooden cutting boards should correspond to the packing list sent to the importer.
- External packaging labels for wooden cutting boards should include the producer, consignee, material, quantity, size, volume, country of origin and caution signs. They should also show the number of pieces, bale/box identification, total number of bales or boxes and net and gross weight.
- EAN or barcodes on the product label are common in Europe.
- Your buyer will specify what information they need on the product labels or on the item itself, such as logos or “made in...” information. This is part of the order specifications.
- Use the English language for labelling, unless your buyer indicates otherwise.

## Packaging

### Importer specification

You should pack wooden cutting boards according to the importer’s instructions. They have their own specific requirements for the use of packaging materials, filling boxes, palletisation and stowing containers. Always ask for the importer’s order specifications. These are part of the purchase order.

## Damage prevention

Properly packaging wooden cutting boards minimises the risk of damage by shocks. How an item is packaged for export depends on how easily it can be damaged. Packaging should ensure the items inside a cardboard box cannot damage each other. It should also prevent damage to the boxes when they are stacked inside the container. Packaging therefore usually consists of outer and inner cardboard boxes filled with protective materials like bubble wrap or paper.

## Dimensions and weight

Packaging must be of easy-to-handle dimensions and weight. Standards are often related to labour regulations at the point of destination, specified by the buyer. Boxes are usually palletised for air or sea transport. You have to maximise pallet space.

## **Cost reduction**

Cutting boards are usually flat surfaces, which facilitates effective packing and as such reduces costs. If grips or loops are added, keep them in the horizontal plane to maximise the space in your cartons and container. While packing has to provide maximum protection, you must also avoid using excess materials or shipping “air”. Waste removal is a cost to buyers.

## **Material**

Importers are increasingly banning wooden crating and packaging due to their unsustainability and high material and disposal costs. Economical and sustainable packaging materials are more popular. Using biodegradable packing materials can be a market opportunity. For some buyers, it can even be a demand.

## **Mould prevention**

Wooden cutting boards can mould or crack, so you need to properly dry the wood after production. Condensation inside the container during transport can cause mould, due to humid air becoming colder at night and warmer during the day. You need proper air ventilation inside the container to prevent this. Before shipment, you must inspect containers for air holes. You can also place products to reduce humidity amongst the cargo. Make sure to follow the importer’s instructions.

## **Consumer packaging**

At retail level, cutting boards are usually supplied without any packaging. This allows consumers to try the item out and feel the material.

## **2. Which European markets offer opportunities for exporters of wooden cutting boards?**

European imports of wooden tableware and kitchenware are steadily increasing, with the majority sourced from developing countries. Germany and the United Kingdom are Europe’s main importers of wooden tableware and kitchenware, with strong imports from developing country suppliers. The Netherlands is also an interesting target market.

Note that since no specific trade data are available for cutting boards, these statistics cover wooden tableware and kitchenware.

### **Where is consumer demand?**

- European demand for wooden tableware and kitchenware increased in this period. With an average annual growth rate of 10% it reached €323 million in 2016.
- Demand is highest in Italy at €81 million. France and the United Kingdom follow with €48 million each.

### **What is the role of European production in supplying European demand?**

- Europe’s demand for wooden tableware and kitchenware is higher than its production. This drives the need for imports, making Europe an interesting market.
- European production of wooden tableware and kitchenware also increased between 2012 and 2016. With an average annual growth rate of 15%, it reached €144 million in 2016.
- Italy is responsible for 50% of European tableware and kitchenware production, followed by Poland and Romania with 15% and 9.4% respectively.

### **Which countries are most interesting in terms of imports from developing countries?**

- European imports of wooden tableware and kitchenware increased from €264 million in 2012 to €398 million

in 2016. This resulted in an average annual growth rate of 11%.

- In the coming years, European imports are expected to keep growing moderately.
- Developing countries are Europe's main source of wooden tableware and kitchenware. They supply 59% of European imports, amounting to €235 million. This share is predicted to remain fairly stable in the coming years.
- In reality, much of the imports of wooden tableware and kitchenware from western European countries are re-exported products manufactured in developing countries.
- Germany is Europe's leading importer of wooden tableware and kitchenware by far, at €88 million in 2016. The United Kingdom follows at €60 million.
- Germany and the United Kingdom also lead in imports from developing countries. They source 67% (Germany) and 79% (the United Kingdom) of their wooden tableware and kitchenware from developing country suppliers. The Netherlands also has a particularly strong market for developing country imports, accounting for 74%.
- The strong performance of developing country suppliers in Germany and the United Kingdom is further evidenced by their increase between 2012 and 2016, by €21 million and €14 million respectively. In the Netherlands these imports also increased, by €7.1 million.
- China dominates European wooden tableware and kitchenware imports, with 47% in 2016. Other leading developing country suppliers are Vietnam (3.1%), Thailand (2.9%), India (1.9%) and Tunisia (1.4%).

### **Tips:**

Study your options in Germany, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Their strong imports from developing countries make them especially interesting markets.

Compare your products and company to the strong competition from China, as well as Vietnam, Thailand, India and Tunisia. You can use [ITC Trademap](#) to find exporters per country. You can compare on market segment, price, quality and target countries.

## **What role does export play in supplying European demand?**

- European exports of wooden tableware and kitchenware consist mainly of trade within Europe.
- Germany (€54 million) is Europe's leading tableware and kitchenware exporter, followed by the Netherlands (€22 million) and Poland (€21 million).

## **What effect does real private consumption expenditure have on European demand?**

- Private consumption expenditure is an important indicator for the European home decoration market. The sector is closely linked to economic conditions. When money is tight, consumers postpone buying non-essential items until they have enough disposable income.
- Between 2017 and 2019, European private consumption expenditure is expected to increase. This means that consumption of decorative products is likely to rise. Especially in emerging markets, consumers will have more money available to spend on decorating the home. Consumers in mature markets already spend a fair amount of money on decoration, so growth in their consumption will be moderate.

## **3. What trends offer opportunities on the European market for wooden cutting boards?**

### **Increased interest in cooking skills**

Kitchenware is generally trendy and consumers are not holding back in spending on cookware and dinnerware. In mature markets, "experience" has become more important to consumers than luxury in itself. Home cooks

enjoy learning how to cook and gain respect by showing off their skills.

Cooking has also become a social event with friends and family in western and northern European markets. Amateur cooks playing “master chef” at home prefer tools that are more expressive, and expensive, than everyday cookware. This includes wooden cutting boards.

### Tip:

Follow trends in the food market. How people cook and dine provides welcome clues for kitchenware and serveware. Major food trade fairs such as [Anuga](#) and [Biofach](#) usually communicate such food trends.

## Cutting boards are diversifying

Cutting boards have developed into a cross-category item. Previously, they were “anonymous” kitchen tools for cutting food products, while now they are increasingly being used as serving boards and even for display on the table. As cutting boards have an increased visible function, their visual appeal (look) has become more important and adds character. As a result, cutting boards have become a popular gift item.

### Tips:

Look for new design ideas to improve the visual appeal of your cutting boards, such as the introduction of a new, unknown wood type with specific natural properties (such as grain and/or colour) and the creation of new shapes.

Combine design with innovations that create additional functionality, to provide consumers with clever solutions. For example, boards that help cutting meat or cheese in difficult shapes or that can store cutting tools.

Add fun elements to your design, such as cutting boards shaped like fish, trees, hearts, houses or even musical instruments. Such “playful” boards are gift-related or impulse purchases. They are primarily decorative, although they must function properly.

Determine your options for diversifying your cutting boards even further. Find other uses or shapes for basic wooden cutting boards. Current examples are wooden placemats, plates and trivets (tripods), cutting boards focused on specific types of food and cutting boards for outdoor use. Although these have slightly different properties, they essentially have the same design. Study the market for the desired properties (mainly shape, thickness and durability).

## The joy of natural materials

European consumers increasingly prefer natural materials, both in tableware and in kitchenware. As such, high-quality wood and organic shapes are becoming more important in cutting board design. The combination of these two aspects gives consumers a true piece of nature on the table.

In line with this, hand-made techniques or finishes add extra value. This makes wood a popular material for cutting boards, ranging from functional and inexpensive types in low-end segments, to exclusive and expressive wood types (like olivewood) in high-end segments. Examples of craftsmanship in wooden cutting boards are lamination (of different wood types) and veneering.

### **Tips:**

Communicate the type of wood you are using, its origin and properties, to provide your reseller with additional selling points.

Experiment with wood techniques and the combination of materials to distinguish yourself from the competition.

## **Interest in sustainability is increasing**

Sustainability is a continuing trend on the European home decoration market, including in kitchen and tableware. Green values give the consumer status and may give you a competitive advantage. Wooden cutting boards fit in well with this trend. Manufacturers can improve sustainability through the purchase and use of raw materials, production, distribution, use in the market and waste disposal. Examples include the use of environmentally friendly wood or fair-trade cutting boards.

### **Tips:**

Clearly communicate the added value of your “green” alternatives to the importer, to ensure that the message comes across at retail level.

For more information, see our special study on [sustainability](#).

For more information, see our study about [trends for Home Decoration & Home Textiles](#).

## **4. With which requirements must wooden cutting boards comply to be allowed on the European market?**

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

#### **General product safety**

The European Union’s [General Product Safety Directive](#) applies to all consumer products, including wooden cutting boards. It states that all products marketed in Europe must be safe to use.

### **Tips:**

Read more about the [General Product Safety Directive](#).

Use your common sense to ensure normal use of your product does not cause any danger.

The [RAPEX database](#) lists products that the European Union has rejected at the border or withdrawn from the market. Check the database for similar products for an idea of what issues may arise.

## Packaging legislation

Europe has specific [packaging and packaging waste legislation](#). It for instance restricts the use of certain heavy metals. Europe also has [requirements for wood packaging materials](#) (WPM) used for transport, such as packing cases, boxes, crates, drums, (box) pallets and dunnage.

### Tip:

Read more in the [overview of EU rules on wood packaging material](#).

## Restricted chemicals: REACH

The [REACH](#) regulation lists restricted chemicals in products that are marketed in Europe. For example, REACH restricts the use of arsenic and creosotes as wood preservatives.

### Tip:

The European Chemical Agency provides useful information and tips on REACH. See for instance [REACH Annex XVII](#) for a list of all restricted chemicals. Also check out the [Information on REACH for companies established outside Europe](#) and the [Questions & Answers on REACH](#).

## Food contact materials

The [Food Contact Materials](#) regulation states that home decoration products like kitchenware and tableware should not negatively affect consumer health or food quality. It also contains rules on labelling food contact materials.

### Tips:

Read more on the [legislation for Food Contact Materials](#).

Also see the [European Food Safety Authority](#) (EFSA) for more information on [Food Contact Materials](#).

## Wildlife Trade Regulations and the Timber Regulation

The [Wildlife Trade Regulations](#) restricts the international trade in specimens of wild animals, plants and derived wildlife products. This is the European Union's strict implementation of the [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species](#) (CITES). According to the [Timber Regulation](#), you must prove any timber used was harvested legally. Products with a [FLEGT](#) or [CITES](#) licence comply with the Timber Regulation.

### Tips:

For more information, see the [Reference Guide to the Wildlife Trade Regulations](#) and the [Frequently Asked Questions about the Timber Regulation](#).

For more information on CITES permits, you can contact your [National CITES Management Authority](#).

For more information about [FLEGT licensing](#), see the [FLEGT licence information point](#).

## What additional requirements do buyers often have?

### Sustainability

Social and environmental sustainability make your products stand out on the European market. Consider sustainable raw materials and production processes. European buyers increasingly demand the following certification schemes.

- [Business Social Compliance Initiative \(BSCI\)](#): European retailers developed this initiative to improve social conditions in sourcing countries. They expect their suppliers to comply with the BSCI Code of Conduct. To prove compliance, the importer can request an audit of your production process. Once a company has been audited, it is included in a database for all BSCI participants.
- [Ethical Trading Initiative \(ETI\)](#): This initiative is an alliance of companies, trade unions and voluntary organisations. It aims to improve the working lives of people across the globe who make or grow consumer goods.

You can use standards such as [ISO 14001](#) and [SA 8000](#) to read up on sustainable options. However, only niche market buyers demand compliance with such standards.

### Tips:

Optimise your sustainability performance. Reading up on the issues included in the initiatives will give you an idea of what to focus on.

Buyers appreciate a good story. If you can show that you value your company's environmental and/or social performance, this may be a competitive advantage. Consider a self-assessment like the [BSCI Self-Assessment for Producers](#), or a code of conduct such as the [BSCI Code of Conduct](#) or the [ETI base code](#).

For more information, see our special study on [Sustainability in the Home Sector](#).

## What are the requirements for niche markets?

### Fair trade

The concept of fair trade supports fair pricing and improved social conditions for producers and their communities. Especially when the production of your cutting boards is labour-intensive, fair-trade certification can give you a competitive advantage.

Common fair-trade certifications are from:

- [World Fair Trade Organisation \(WFTO\)](#)
- [Fairtrade International](#)
- [Fair For Life](#).



### **Tips:**

Ask buyers what they are looking for. Especially in the fair-trade sector, you can use the story behind your product for marketing purposes.

Check the [ITC Standards map database](#) for more information on voluntary standards and their requirements, including fair production.

## **FSC certification**

[FSC](#) (Forest Stewardship Council) certification is the most common label for sustainable wooden products, including wooden cutting boards. The FSC label guarantees that a product's source material comes from responsibly managed forests. These products are especially popular in western European markets.

### **Tip:**

For more information, see the [three steps towards FSC certification](#).

For more information, see our study about [buyer requirements for Home Decoration & Home Textiles](#).

## **5. What competition do you face on the European wooden cutting boards market?**

The competition for wooden cutting boards does not differ significantly from the sector in general. Refer to our [10 tips for doing business with European buyers](#).

## **6. Which channels can you use to put wooden cutting boards on the European market?**

The market channels and segments for wooden cutting boards do not differ significantly from the sector in general.

### **Market channels**

In the European market, wooden cutting boards are widely distributed. They are sold both offline and online through the big supermarkets, garden centres and Do-It-Yourself outlets, as well as kitchenware and general home decor retailers.

### **E-commerce**

E-commerce in home decoration is increasing and can help you reach a broader range of customers. Retailers often combine online and offline channels. Consumers research and purchase products online, shopping around and comparing prices on home decoration items. Small (gift) items like cutting boards are especially suitable for this. To supply e-commerce retailers you must be able to work with individual packing and labelling, as well as limited minimum orders.

## Tips:

See our special study about [E-commerce in Home Decoration & Home Textiles](#) for more information.  
Target online business-to-consumer retailers if you can meet the additional requirements.

## Trade fairs

The following trade fairs are useful sources for finding trading partners in Europe.

- [Ambiente](#), Frankfurt, February
- [Maison et Objet](#), Paris, January (main event) and September
- [Tendence](#), Frankfurt, August

## Market segments

In the low segment, functional boards without a brand are common. The middle segment is the largest segment, which includes private brands. Mid-market wooden cutting boards are more durable and more decorative than those in the low-end segment. Fancy shapes and colouration add an element of trend, here. In the high segment, cutting boards are more exclusive. They have more special, sometimes rare woods; are more solid and chunky; and may be branded.

The lower ends of market require high volumes and low margins and are dominated by China. Therefore, the middle and premium segments generally offer you the best opportunity to connect to trading partners in a more structural way.

## 7. What are the end-market prices for wooden cutting boards?

Table 2 gives an overview of the prices of wooden cutting boards in the low, middle and high market segments.

Table 2: Indicative consumer prices of cutting boards

	Low-end	Middle-end	High-end
Wooden cutting boards	Up to €15	€15–80	€80 and over

Consumer prices depend on the value perception by the consumer in a particular segment. This is influenced by your marketing mix: product benefits, promotion (brand or not, communication of product benefits), points of sale (reseller positioning), and a matching price.

Shipping, import and handling add 25% to the price of your wooden cutting boards. Wholesalers account for a further 100% markup. Finally, retailers may add another 100–150% to the price.


## Tips:

The value perception of your product in the chosen segment determines its price. The quality and price of your wooden cutting boards must match what is expected in your chosen target segment. To determine your price, study consumer prices in your target segment and adjust your cost accordingly.


Understand your segment. Offer a correct marketing mix to meet consumer expectations and adapt your business model to your position in the market.

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