

# Exporting chilli peppers to Europe

European consumers are becoming more familiar with ethnic cuisines, which will contribute to the consumption of chilli peppers. The European market for fresh chilli peppers is still a specialised market, which is supplied primarily by producers in southern Europe, Turkey and northern Africa. Because of the strong regional competition, you will find most opportunities in specific varieties.

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## 1. Product description

The chilli pepper is the fruit of plants of the genus *Capsicum*. Red chillies contain large amounts of vitamin C and small amounts of carotene (provitamin A). Considerably lower amounts of both substances are contained in yellow and, especially, green chillies (which are essentially unripe fruit). Peppers are also a good source of most B vitamins, particularly vitamin B6. They are very high in potassium, magnesium and iron.

The five domesticated species of chilli peppers are as follows.

- *Capsicum annum*: (varieties including wax, cayenne, jalapeño and chiltepin)
- *Capsicum baccatum*: (South American aji peppers)
- *Capsicum chinense*: (Naga, habanero, Datil and Scotch bonnet)
- *Capsicum frutescens*: (Malagueta, tabasco and Thai peppers, piri piri, and Malawian Kambuzi)
- *Capsicum pubescens*: (South American rocoto peppers)

Table 1: CN commodity code for fresh chilli peppers

Number	Product
07096099	Fresh or chilled fruits of the genus <i>Capsicum</i> or pimenta (excl. for industrial manufacture of capsaicin or capsicum oleoresin dyes, for industrial manufacture of essential oils or resinoids, and sweet peppers)

Source: Eurostat Comext

## 2. Which European markets offer opportunities for exporters of chilli peppers?

### Rising import from developing countries

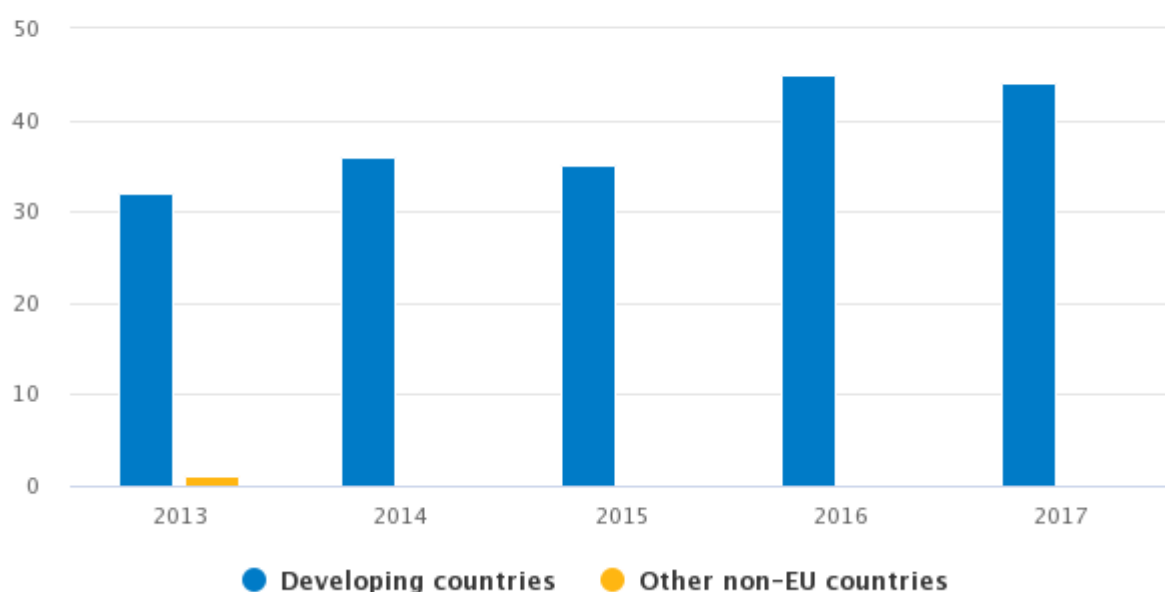
The European import of fresh chilli peppers from developing countries has increased from an average of 30-40 thousand tonnes in 2013-2015 to 40-45 thousand tonnes in 2016 and 2017 (see Figure 1). Morocco and Turkey are mostly responsible for this growing supply.

Morocco (20.1 thousand tonnes) and Turkey (11.7 thousand tonnes) were the leading non-European suppliers of chilli peppers in 2017. Other medium-to-large suppliers in 2017 included India, Uganda, Macedonia and Kenya, each supplying between one and two thousand tonnes. Wholesalers in the European market favour larger producers, for reasons of supply certainty.

Imports from outside Europe are either counter-seasonal or special varieties intended for Asian and African consumers. Because the demand for chilli peppers is stable, you can expect the market to respond strongly to changes in supply. Being able to supply the right variety is crucial.

**Figure 1: European import of chilli peppers**

in 1.000 tonnes



Source: Market Access Database

### Tips:

Find a European importer at trade fairs such as [Fruit Logistica](#) in Germany or [Fruit Attraction](#) in Spain.

Ask your buyer about the varieties that offer the best opportunities. Exporting fresh chilli peppers to Europe is possible throughout the year, but it depends upon specific varieties.

## Chilli peppers popular in ethnic markets

France, the United Kingdom and Spain are the leading importing countries of chilli peppers from outside Europe. France is most significant, importing over 12 thousand tonnes from Morocco. The United Kingdom is an important buyer of chilli peppers originating from India, Kenya and Pakistan.

Fresh chilli peppers are often considered ethnic foods. European countries such as France, the United Kingdom and Spain that have historical ties to tropical and subtropical countries, are naturally larger markets. This is due to their larger population of ethnic African, South American and Asian inhabitants.

Central and Eastern European countries such as Romania and Poland also have a growing interest in chilli peppers, even though these are not traditional consuming countries of chilli peppers. Romania mainly imports

chilli peppers from Turkey, while Poland depends on supplies from Spain and the Netherlands.

**Tip:**

Broaden your opportunities by focusing on both fresh and dried chilli peppers. Check the CBI market intelligence platform to find information about [exporting dried chillies to Europe](#).

## **Spain and the Netherlands are the largest European exporters**

The leading exporting countries for chilli peppers in Europe are Spain and the Netherlands. Spain mainly exports its own produce, while the Netherlands also re-exports imported chilli peppers in the winter. The United Kingdom is the largest end market in Europe. You will find export possibilities to several destinations, but it will take good contacts and proper planning to enter all the different markets.

**Tip:**

Consider entering the European market directly where consumption is high, such as the United Kingdom, France or Spain, or use the Netherlands as an entry point to other European markets.

## **3. What are the trends offering opportunities on the European market for chilli peppers?**

### **Growing interest in ethnic cuisine**

The market for fresh chilli peppers can be divided into two consumer segments: ethnic and non-ethnic.

Ethnic consumers are quite accustomed to the product and cooking methods. The growing ethnic population in Europe drives the consumption of chilli peppers.

Although spicy dishes are less common in north-western Europe, many non-ethnic consumers are willing to try 'new' products. European interest in cultural and fusion cuisines offer opportunities for suppliers of different varieties of chilli peppers besides the common red and green peppers, such as the habanero, jalapeño, padron, rawit or bird-eye, Madame Jeanette and, to a lesser extent, also rocoto and ají amarillo.

**Tips:**

Define a strategy with your buyer in order to inform the consumers about using and the possibilities of chilli peppers in their home cooking, for example by offering recipes or preparation tips.

Read more about the changing consumer market in [Cultural Diversity and its impact on Global Consumer Markets](#), a Euromonitor publication.

Read about [which trends offer opportunities on the European fresh fruit and vegetables market](#) in general on the CBI website.

## Growing interest in sustainability

Environmental and social issues are becoming more and more important in the supply of fresh fruit and vegetables. Social and environmental certification schemes include actions aimed at sharply reducing and registering the use of pesticides, taking action to ensure the safety of employees and/or even including price guarantees.

Certification schemes that are in line with the [Global Social Compliance Programme \(GSCP\)](#) will have a higher chance of being accepted by European supermarkets. See the buyer requirements for fair and sustainable fruit production below for more information.

### Tips:

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

Check the available CSR labels and certification in the [Standards Map database](#).

## Greater attention to health food

Consumers in Europe are becoming more aware of health-related issues, and they are paying more attention to their diet. In addition to their function of adding flavour and spice to food, the health benefits of chilli peppers are gaining fame as well.

## The organic channel is becoming larger

The increased attention to health and the environment is also generating increased interest in organically produced fruits and vegetables. Although demand for organic chilli peppers is relatively small, there are specialised channels, and further growth of the organic channel is expected.

### Tips:

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

Consult the website of the [Organic-Bio](#) website to find specialised buyers of organic chilli peppers.

## 4. Which requirements should chilli peppers comply with to be allowed on the European market?

Buyer requirements can be divided into (1) musts (for example, legal requirements), which must be met in order to enter the market; (2) common requirements (which have been implemented by most competitors), with which you should comply in order to stay abreast of the market; and (3) niche market requirements, for specific segments.

The food safety requirements for chilli peppers are the same as for other fresh fruit and vegetables. You can find a complete overview in and at the:

- general [buyer requirements for fresh fruit and vegetables](#)
- [Export Helpdesk](#) that provides an overview of export requirements for chilli peppers (code 07096099) 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 will be withdrawn from the European market.

Note that buyers in several countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands and Austria set MRLs that are stricter than those specified in European legislation. Due to many [problems with exceeding MRLs on chilli peppers](#), European authorities have put extra focus on control

#### Tips:

Find out the MRLs that are relevant for chilli peppers by consulting the European Union [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 at the EU Export Helpdesk](#). Check with your buyers if they have additional requirements on MRLs and pesticide use.

## Quality

Chilli peppers can be divided into three classes according to quality: Extra Class, Class I and Class II. Information on the quality requirements for each class can be found in the:

- [Codex Alimentarius standard for chilli peppers](#) ('food code' of WHO and FAO)
- [UNECE Marketing Standard on Chilli Peppers](#).

The [General Marketing Standards of Regulation \(EC\) No. 543/2011](#) apply. Chilli peppers should be intact, clean and sound, and practically free of pests, damage, abnormal external moisture and internal browning, in addition to being able to withstand transport and handling.

In the Annex to the same [UNECE Marketing Standard on Chilli Peppers](#), categories of 'mild', 'medium', 'hot' and 'extra hot' chilli pepper varieties are distinguished, depending upon the total amount of capsaicinoids per microgram of dry weight.

## Size

The European regulations on size are presented in Part III of the [UNECE Marketing Standard on Chilli Peppers](#). As explained in these regulations, the chilli peppers in a package must be uniform and packages should contain only chilli peppers of the same origin, variety or commercial type, quality and size (if sized).

Nevertheless, a mixture of chilli peppers of distinctly different colours and/or commercial types may be packed together in a sales package, provided they are uniform in quality and of the same origin.

The size of chilli peppers is determined by either length or diameter. The following bullet points apply to all classes:

Sized by length:

- Size Code 1: peppers < 4 cm
- Size Code 2: peppers 4–8 cm
- Size Code 3: peppers 8–12 cm
- Size Code 4: peppers 12–16 cm
- Size Code 5: peppers > 16 cm

Sized by diameter:

- The difference between the diameters of chilli peppers in the same package may not exceed 2 cm.

It is acceptable for about 10% percent of the product to be of the next lower size standard.

## Packaging

- Chilli peppers should be packed in a way that ensures proper protection for the product.
- The visible part of the contents of the package must be representative of the entire contents.
- The materials used inside the package must be clean and of such a quality that it prevents any external or internal damage to the produce. The use of materials (particularly paper or stamps bearing trade specifications) is allowed, provided that the printing or labelling has been done with non-toxic ink or glue.
- Stickers individually affixed to the produce shall be such that, when removed, they leave neither visible traces of glue nor lead to skin defects.
- Packages must be free of all foreign matter.

## Labelling

To protect the right of consumers in the European Union to access useful and appropriate information, [Regulation \(EU\) No. 1169/2011](#) establishes the general principles, requirements and responsibilities governing food information, particularly with regard to food labelling.

Each package must bear the following details, in letters grouped on the same side, legibly and indelibly marked, and visible from the outside:

- information about the packer/dispatcher and or shipper
- nature of the product (including chilli peppers, if this is not visible from the outside)
- country of origin of the product
- class and size of the product
- If certified GlobalGap, use GG number.

Additional information about labelling, packaging and quality is available in the [Codex Alimentarius Standard for Chilli Peppers](#) and the [CBI Market Intelligence Platform for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables](#).

## Comply with phytosanitary requirements

Fruit and vegetables exported to the European Union must comply with the European legislation on plant health. The European Commission has laid down [phytosanitary requirements](#) to prevent 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.

### Tips:

Verify with the [National Plant Protection Organisation](#) or food safety authority in your country if and under which conditions you can export chilli peppers to Europe. These authorities normally work with international standards, but always check with your buyer as well.

Read more about [plant health at 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 in the shape of certification.

The most commonly requested certification for chilli peppers 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, and the rest of Europe follows fast.

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

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

These management systems are 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](#) website.

Always remember that food safety is a major issue. Work proactively with buyers to improve food safety, taking care to be transparent and remain up to date with regard to buyer requirements and regulations.

## Social and environmental compliance

There is growing attention in Europe for the social and environmental conditions in producing areas. Most European buyers have a social code of conduct which they expect suppliers to adhere to. For chilli peppers it is important to adopt social and environmental standards and for supplying to most large retailers, it is a must. The United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Germany are the most demanding, but the rest of Europe is expected to follow these three countries.

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

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

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

Actual fair-trade labels are not common in the chilli pepper trade and have generally lost some attention in the

fresh trade due to their high cost and complexity.

### **Tips:**

Examine your company's current social performance, for example by completing a self-assessment on the [amfori/BSCI website](#).

For a complete overview of buyer initiatives for social compliance, see the [buyer requirements for fresh fruit and vegetables](#) on the CBI marketing intelligence platform.

## **What do niche markets require?**

### **Growing demand for organic chilli peppers**

An increasing number of European consumers prefer food products that are produced and processed using natural methods. The market for organic chilli peppers is relatively small, but demand is growing and there is a limited supply. In order to market organic products in the European Union (EU), 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 chilli peppers as organic.

In addition, you 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, such as the [Soil Association](#) (especially relevant in the United Kingdom), [Naturland](#) (Germany) or [BioSuisse](#) (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.

Consult the [Standards Map database](#) for information about the various organic certifications.

For the export of organic chilli peppers to the European market, use a specialised importer, who understands the market and has access to niche markets with their particular requirements. Use, for example, the [Organic-Bio](#) database to find these specialised importers.

## **5. What competition will you facing on the European market for chilli peppers?**

### **Company competition**

Rivalry is strong, given that imported chilli peppers are often used to fill gaps in supply. Any surplus supply immediately results in falling prices. Strong competition can be expected from Spain, Turkey and Morocco, as well as from greenhouse peppers from the Netherlands. During the winter, there is much less competition from Mediterranean producers.

The western European market is highly competitive, with many suppliers and a few dominant retail organisations. In southern Europe, there are more street markets and specialist shops. For fresh chilli peppers,



the quantities sold per store are usually small. Specialised (ethnic food) importers are more interested in buying smaller quantities and/or lesser known varieties. These special chilli pepper varieties are often sold in channels other than supermarkets, where the buying power is not as high.

### Tip:

Read more about [what competition you face on the European fresh fruit and vegetables market](#) on the CBI market intelligence platform.

## Global production of chillies and peppers is increasing

There are no exact production statistics for chilli peppers. The total annual production of all pepper varieties (Capsicum & Pimenta) is estimated to exceed 34 million tonnes, with an annual increase of around 2%. The production of chilli peppers is much smaller than the production of sweet pepper varieties. For example, according to the [United States Department of Agriculture](#) (USDA), the United States produced 668 thousand tonnes of sweet bell peppers and 192 thousand tonnes of chilli peppers in 2016.

India and China are major producers of chilli peppers. Much of the production in India and China is used to supply their own or nearby Asian markets, as well as for drying or processing purposes. Dried chilli peppers are most common in India. Latin America and the USA also have large a production, with many different varieties of chilli peppers. In Europe, Spain is the largest producer of chilli peppers, mostly the long type 'Spanish pepper'.

### Tips:

Information about varieties and characteristics of chilli peppers on such websites as [TheChileman](#) and [Chilly.in](#). [The Chile Pepper Institute](#) and the [USDA](#) provide information about production in the USA.

Use the advantage of producing outside the European season and/or explore new varieties.

Establish a credible track record of providing transparent information on your company and product quality. Being part of a stable partnership and a trustworthy supplier can help you to establish and maintain your position in the market.

## Market entry

Certification and the need to fulfil both legal and non-legal requirements pose major obstacles to producers and exporters entering the market. As an exporter you depend a lot on the quality control of your buyer.

### Tips:

Read the [Tips for doing business with European buyers](#).

Become part of a long-term retail programme and improve your company's performance by building relationships with experienced buyers.

Do not compete on price alone, but also build partnerships with buyers and strive for excellence in product quality and handling.

## Product competition

Chilli peppers are used for cooking, and the option of replacing chilli peppers with other hot spices is limited. Nevertheless, fresh chilli peppers are easily replaced by easy-to-use chilli powder or ready-made sauces and curry pastes.

### Tip:

Use storytelling (such as highlighting the origin and producer of your products), cooking tips/recipes, novel packaging, health benefits and premium quality as methods for distinguishing your product from the rest of the field.

## 6. Which trade channels can you use to put chilli peppers on the European market?

### Supply from small producers

Chilli peppers are often produced by small farmers. The quality of the produce, its traceability and the adherence to European buyer requirements is more complicated when working with many small-scale producers. This can be an extra challenge for exporters working with multiple farmers. However, for your buyer it is important that you work very closely with the primary producers.<sup>6</sup>

### Tip:

Establish integrated producer cooperatives that provide sufficient assistance to farmers and that monitor both production methods and post-harvest handling and storage in order to maintain the required quality standards.

### Distribution by specialised importers

In the European market, fresh chilli peppers are mainly imported by a relatively small number of importers specialising in tropical and exotic fruits and vegetables. In general, these importers trade in a wide range of fruits and vegetables, supplying outlets that focus on ethnic consumers or stocking the 'exotic shelf' in supermarkets with all sorts of produce.

### Tips:

Find specialised trade partners at trade fairs such as [Fruit Logistica](#) and [Fruit Attraction](#).

Consult the CBI Market Intelligence platform for more information about the [different market channels for fresh fruit and vegetables](#).

## Segments and geographies

The main varieties of chilli peppers can be found in general supermarkets, while the special varieties find their way into the market through specialised ethnic stores, restaurants and street markets. Smaller market segments are supplied by wholesalers.

In Europe, there are regional differences in the composition of market channels. Northern countries (such as Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Belgium) have a very dominant supermarket segment. France and Spain go one step further with large hypermarkets, alongside smaller specialist shops. Countries in the Alpine region (such as Switzerland and Austria) are more favourably disposed towards small local shops.

Tip:

Adapt your strategy according to your product variety and geographical focus. Assess whether your company is ready to supply the large retail chains or better fits the ethnic market channel.

## 7. What are the end-market prices for chilli peppers?


















The figure below provides an indication of the price breakdown. In Europe, consumer prices are generally between €0.20 and €0.80 per pepper (or €10–30 per kilo), but it depends heavily on the specific variety and retail outlet. Locally-produced and common peppers may be sold well below €10 per kilo. The price of a rare variety can cost as much as €75 per kilo, such as the extremely hot Komodo Dragon pepper introduced by Tesco in 2015.

The best prices for consumers are found in southern Europe and in street markets. Temporary shortfalls in supply or demand can have a major impact on prices.

Figure 5: Price breakdown of the supply chain for fresh chilli peppers



Figure 6: Consumer prices examples

					
www.ah.nl Common red chilli pepper / Spanish pepper 0,29 euro / piece Spicy	www.ah.nl Yellow chilli pepper 0,29 euro / piece Light spicy Use for Indian curries	www.ah.nl Madame Jeanette 29,90 euro/kg Very spicy Typical use in Surinam dishes or Asian wok	www.ah.nl Jalapeño green / red 0,29 euro / piece Spicy Used in Mexican dishes	www.ah.nl Adjuma pepper 0,29 euro / piece Very spicy	www.ah.nl Rawitt peppers red & green 1,50 euro / 50g package 30 euros / kg Spicy
					
www.ah.nl Naga Jolokia, Poblano, Habanero, Madame Jeanette, Rawit, Shakira, Jalapeno, Pimiento de Padron, Spanish pepper. 1,50 euro / 75g package	www.carrefour.es Padrón pepper 1,15 euro / 200g package 5,75 euro / kg	www.carrefour.es Padrón pepper 1,85 euro / 200g package 9,25 euro / kg	www.mon-marche.fr Le Piment Antillais (Habanero) 8,37 euro/kg France	www.mon-marche.fr Les Piments Verts (Green peppers) 3,07 euro/kg France	www.mon-marche.fr Les Piments Rouges (Red peppers) 8,40 euro/kg Italy
					
www.tesco.com Bird eye chillies 0,90 GBP / 25g (36 GBP/kg)	www.tesco.com Green chillies 0,60 GBP / 65g (9,24 GBP/kg)	www.tesco.com Finger chillies 0,90 GBP / 80g (11,25 GBP/kg)	www.tesco.com Mixed chillies 0,65 GBP / 65g (10 GBP/kg)	www.tesco.com Komodo Dragon chillies 1 GBP / 15g (66,67 GBP/kg) Extremely hot	

## Tip:

For consumer prices you can check the online shops or ranges of supermarket chains such as [Tesco](#), [Albert Heijn](#) (search for 'peper') and [Carrefour](#) (search for 'piment').

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