

# Exporting chia seed oil to Europe

Europe is a new and promising market for chia oil exporters. Since 2014 chia oil can be marketed in the European Union. Chia oil is valued for its high omega 3 content, giving it great potential in the food and food supplement market. The market is expected to grow in the coming years. However, the growth rate will depend on whether the European Union will change legislation that restricts the use of chia oil. At the moment, the accepted uses are 2g/day in food supplements and a maximum of 10% in vegetable fats and oils.

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## 1. Product description

Chia oil is obtained from ripe seeds of *Salvia hispanica* L. (Fam. Lamiaceae) through cold-pressing and filtering. Chia oil is comprised of two-thirds omega-3 fatty acids and contains mostly polyunsaturated fats. It also contains a small measure of mono-saturated and saturated fats.

Chia seeds are primarily produced in:

- Paraguay
- Bolivia
- Argentina
- Mexico
- Australia

Smaller producers are:

- Nicaragua
- Guatemala
- Ecuador

Chia oil has a mild (nutty) odour and flavour, so it can be added to foods without substantially changing their original sensorial characteristics.

Codes for chia oil:

Chia oil is not specifically classified under a specific Harmonised System (HS) code. It can be classified under 'Other fixed veg oil, refined or not, not chem. modified' (HS code 151590) as a vegetable oil, or under 'Other vegetable saps and extracts' (HS code 130219) as an extract.

Due to data limitations, it is not possible to provide statistical information on chia oil. For this reason, most data used in this document are qualitative.



## Tip:

Read our study on chia seeds [to learn more about the raw material for chia oil](#).

## Product specification

### Quality

Chia oil must be produced according to the [following requirements](#):

- The chia seeds must be 99.9% pure.
- A cold-pressing process must be applied to maintain original chemical properties.
- No solvents can be used.
- Once pressed, the oil must be held in decantation tanks and filtered to remove impurities.

### Labelling

Labels must be in English (unless your buyer has specified otherwise) and include the following:

- Product name
- Batch code
- A statement that the product is destined for use in food products
- Declaration of allergenic substances
- Name and address of exporter
- Best-before date
- Net weight
- Recommended storage conditions
- Organic (if applicable): Name / code of the certifying body and certification number.

## Packaging

### Bulk packaging

**The most common forms of packaging for chia oil in bulk are: stainless steel or high-density polyethylene drums/barrels (examples: 5 litres, 50 litres, 200 litres).**

Figure 1. Examples of bulk packaging for chia oil:

High-density polyethylene barrel (200 litres)	High-density polyethylene drum (5 litres)	Steel drum (200 litres)
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<p>Source: Tecnobotanica</p>	<p>Source: Tecnobotanica</p>	<p>Source: Janusvaten.nl</p>

### Consumer packaging

Chia oil is available as edible oil (mostly in glass bottles, example: 200, 250 and 500 ml) or as a food supplement (in capsules). Darker glass bottles can delay the oxidation of the oil by preventing exposure to light.

Figure 2. Examples of consumer packaging for chia oil:

Glass bottle (250 ml)	Capsules (90-unit packaging)
	
<p>Source: Raw Living</p>	<p>Source: Evergreen</p>

### Tips:

Pay attention to production and harvesting aspects that can influence the quality of the seeds and oil. Read more about chia seeds in [our study covering the European market for this product](#).

Want to produce organic chia oil or target the organic market? Comply with [European organic standards](#). Do not use solvents or other chemical substances during oil extraction. Preferably dedicate the processing plant to the production of organic oils only to avoid contamination from non-organic particles. Otherwise, ensure that the machinery and equipment undergo full cleaning at all times.

Send accurate and representative samples to your (potential) European buyer. It is crucial that samples correspond to the offered lot.

Ensure preservation of quality by cleaning and drying the drums or cans before loading the oil. And also by filling the drums or cans as full as possible to avoid ventilation and light. This will prevent oxidation, thus rancidity.

Ensure appropriate temperature control during loading, travel and general handling. Optimal conditions for chia oil require a temperature inferior to 20°C and humidity control level inferior to 60%.

## 2. Which European markets offer opportunities for exporters of chia oil?

The United States, Australia and Canada are the leading markets for chia oil worldwide. They are the markets where the oil has the longest and most established use.

In Europe, where chia oil has been newly introduced, industrial uses and consumption patterns are [expected to follow those of more developed markets](#). But, at the moment, the market is focused on a few countries and on 2 authorised applications [due to Novel Food restrictions](#).

In the European Union, these [legislative restrictions still limit the wider use](#) of chia oil in the food industry. At the moment, the oil can be used in fats and oils (not more than 10%) and as a food supplement (not more than 2g/day). All companies marketing chia oil in the European Union must mention this to food safety authorities and provide evidence that the product is similar to the oil which is already authorised under Novel Food. Read more about this under the section 'Legal requirements'.

In practice, this has concentrated market entry opportunities around companies in specific countries, as seen under the [Novel Food list of notifications](#). This list is updated constantly. At the moment, importing companies in France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Austria and the Netherlands have a green light to market chia oil in Europe.

### Tips:

Keep your eyes open for up-to-date information on the Novel Food Regulation! Check the Novel Food page under the European Commission website for [legislative developments involving chia oil](#). Make sure to keep up-to-date on the [Novel Food list of notifications](#), which basically represents your list of potential buyers in Europe.

Consider partnering up with a European company to go through the Novel Food procedure and market entry steps. Read about [the case of Andean Grain Products and Bioriginal Europe](#) to get inspired.

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

#### Health and wellness

The approval of chia oil in Europe follows a consumer trend towards healthy diets, health supplements and the search for new ingredients.

The most significant health benefit which drives the market for chia oil is its high omega-3 content. The chia market (seeds, oil and other derivatives) is expected to reach US\$ 1 billion by 2020 ([Food Navigator USA](#), 2013).

According to [Grand View Research](#), the global market for omega-3 ingredients was estimated to be US\$ 1.82 billion in 2014. The market is expected to grow at an annual rate of 13.7% from 2014 to 2020.

In the North American market, chia oil is especially popular in dairy products. In the United States, [omega-3-enriched dairy products are becoming more and more popular](#). The market accounted for 3.8% of all dairy product launches in 2013. This type of use is still limited in Europe due to Novel Food restrictions. But the market is expected to boom once more uses of chia oil are approved within the food industry.

But it is also important to mention that health claims of 'super foods' are increasingly challenged in Europe. The article "[The truth about 'miracle foods' - from chia seeds to coconut](#)" (The Guardian, 2015) provides an insight into this critical perspective.

#### Tips:

Promote the nutritional properties of chia. Make sure to provide your buyer with accurate product specifications and composition. But don't make health or nutritional claims which are not substantiated by scientific evidence! The [European Union Regulation on Health and Nutrition Claims](#) strictly ensures that *any claim made on foods' labelling, presentation or marketing in the European Union is clear, accurate and based on evidence accepted by the whole scientific community*.

Take advantage of the vast amount of information on the growing omega-3 market and promote your product's properties accordingly.

Keep yourself informed on different (global) portals concerning innovative food ingredients. [Food Navigator](#) and, more specifically, [Food Navigator USA](#) can give good indications of where the market for chia oil is heading to. [Food Ingredients First](#) is also an interesting portal to keep up-to-date on the latest developments in the sector. Also stay informed on the news for supplements and nutrition in Europe by visiting the [NutraIngredients](#) website.

Read [our study on chia seeds](#) to learn more about the health properties of the raw material for chia oil. For example, chia seeds are also promoted for their high protein content, while chia oil is mostly consumed because of its high omega-3 content.

### 4. What requirements should chia oil comply with to be allowed on the European market?

Buyers in the European Union have strict requirements for chia oil and other vegetable oils. You will only be able to successfully market your product in Europe when you comply with these requirements. See our study on [buyer requirements for vegetable oils](#) for a detailed analysis of these requirements. It deals with the following topics:

## Novel Food

Novel Food regulation is the baseline regulation for chia oil on the European market as it is part of European Union regulation. It covers foodstuffs that are newly developed by industry. In addition, it also covers natural foodstuffs or ingredients (like chia oil) which were not consumed to a significant degree within the European Union before 15 May 1997.

Through the [simplified 'notification' procedure](#), chia oil entered the European market as a food ingredient for the first time in 2014, following a positive opinion on [Benexia chia oil's](#) application. Accepted uses in Europe are in food supplements (2g/day) and vegetable fats and oils (maximum 10%).

Since Benexia was awarded the novel food approval, other companies have followed to file a dossier for approval to use chia oil in the food market. The accepted uses are the same as mentioned above.

See the [example application of Functional Products Trading \(Chile\)](#) towards the United Kingdom's Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes. A full list of approved applications can be found on the [Novel Food list of notifications](#).

## Other legal requirements

If you do not comply with the regulation on the following issues, you will not be able to export to Europe:

- Traceability, hygiene and control
- Contamination (think about [salmonella contamination](#) from chia seeds and other sources during your production process)
- Erucic acid content (not highly relevant for chia oil)
- Extraction solvents (should not be used for chia oil)
- Product composition
- Labelling, including allergens and nutrition & health claims
- Food contact materials

## Documentation

Make sure to provide your buyer with the right documentation. This is important for all products, but a must for oils which are lesser-known to the European market like chia oil. An example of a Technical Data Sheet for chia oil can be found on the website of [Nutritional Science Research Institute](#). This documentation usually includes:

- Product description and code
- Origin
- Certificate(s) [if applicable]
- Production: ingredients and extraction process
- Sensorial properties: smell, colour, taste, appearance
- Packaging: net content, kind of packaging, size, layers
- Shelf life
- Nutritional values
- Analytical properties
- Microbiological properties
- Allergen list
- Uses / applications
- Production flow chart (depends on the application and requirements of each end-user)

## Additional requirements

Complying with the following standards can be essential in accessing specific market segments and buyers in Europe:

- Food Safety Certification: especially for chia oil, certificates such as [IFS](#) or [BRC](#) might be required by some

buyers.

- Corporate responsibility and sustainable sourcing: these aspects will become increasingly important for chia oil as the European market develops further. Sustainability projects dealing with chia-producing communities and ecological impact are an important way to differentiate yourself from other suppliers. Organic certification is likely to be an extra selling point for you or even a demand from your buyer, and is described below.

## Requirements for niche markets

Given the close relation of chia oil to health food markets, organic certification is an important competitive advantage to producers and/or exporters. Chia oil is often sold as organic on the European market. The rules for organic certification should follow those described in our study on [buyer requirements for vegetable oils](#).

Fair trade certification is not expected to be relevant for chia oil in the near future.

### Tips:

Read our study on [buyer requirements for vegetable oils](#) for more information about for example food safety, documentation and certification.

For more [information on the Novel Food legislation, including the notification procedure](#), you can visit the European Commission website.

Search for a certifier whose standards are recognised by the European Union to make sure your organic certification is recognized. The European Commission's [Agriculture and Rural Development](#) website provides a thorough explanation of import regulations and other related issues.

## 5. Through which channels can you get chia oil on the European market?

### Market segments

According to the Novel Food Regulation, the European Union accepts 2g of chia seed oil per day in food supplements and a maximum 10% of chia seed oil in vegetable fats and oils. This restricts its applications in the food industry.

Chia oil is mainly available and sold in speciality and health shops in Europe. The oil is mostly available in soft-gel capsule form, but also in gummies or liquid forms. It is combined with other oils like cranberry seed oil, fish oil, olive oil or safflower oil.

Its use as an omega-3-enriching ingredient in other vegetable oils is also increasing (example: British company [Real Food Source](#), mixing chia oil with virgin coconut oil). The edible oil industry focuses on oil blends which combine saturated and unsaturated fats, omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids.

Chia oil can be used to supplement products like cooking oils, breads and margarines. Chia oil is added to other cooking oils to increase the amount of omega-3 and antioxidants. In addition, it is also added to reach a better ratio of different saturated and unsaturated fats. But it is [unsuitable for cooking](#) without being mixed with other oils due to its high alpha-Linolenic acid (ALA) content. However, it has potential in salad dressings and dips.

Once the novel food restriction on chia oil is removed, chia oil is expected to reach the mass market. According to [Nutrivita Global](#), chia oil can find application products like:

- Dietary supplements (incl. as an alternative to fish oil capsules)
- Gels
- Food
- Beverages
- Edible oils
- Skin creams and other [cosmetics](#)
- Pet food

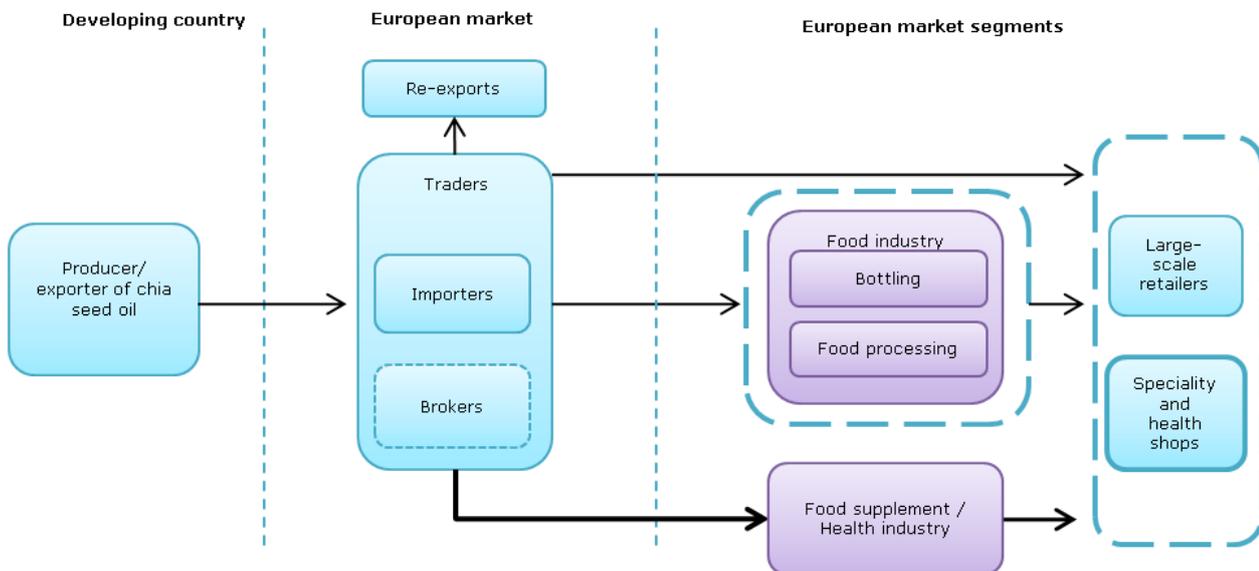
## Market channels

Chia oil is considered a speciality oil. It is traded in much smaller volumes when compared to the large commodity oils such as palm and coconut oils. Even compared to other speciality oils such as sesame oil and virgin coconut oil this oil is traded in small volumes.

Being a new product in the European market, chia oil is not part of the assortment of many importers, but this is changing fast. Most importers dealing with the chia oil are active within the speciality oil segment, having a high focus on quality.

The current list of importing companies in Europe handling chia oil can be found on the [Novel Food list of notifications](#). They are concentrated in France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Austria and the Netherlands.

Figure 3: Trade channels for chia oil in Europe



### Tips:

Link up with the right partners in Europe. Traders are the most suitable entry point for chia oil into the European market. As it is a relatively new product on the European market, there are only a few importers who specialise in chia oil.

Make sure to provide your potential buyer with the appropriate product documentation (composition, properties) and be realistic about the volumes you can deliver. Most (speciality) vegetable oil traders will be familiar with chia oil. However, it is important that they receive as much technical information as possible to assess the quality of your product.

Keep an eye on legislative developments and product applications for chia. A by-product of chia oil,

chia meal / flour, might provide future opportunities within bakery and other industries in Europe.

Read our study on chia seeds [to learn more about the trade channels of chia seeds \(the raw material for chia oil\)](#).

## 6. What are the end market prices for chia oil?

Retail prices for chia oil are specified in the table below. The prices per 100 ml range widely, between € 7 and € 33. Chia oil is often sold as organic, through (online) health and speciality shops.

Table 1. Retail prices for chia oil in various European countries

Brand and details	Retail outlet	Price and packaging size	Price per 100 ml
Chia Seed Oil (organic)	<a href="http://www.rawliving.eu">www.rawliving.eu</a> , Europe/the United Kingdom	€ 18.99 / 250 ml	€ 7.60
Activation Panaseeda Premium Chia Seed Oil (organic)	<a href="http://Evolutionorganics.co.uk">Evolutionorganics.co.uk</a> , the United Kingdom	€ 65.30 / 200 ml	€ 32.65
It's Amazing Bio Chiazaadolie (organic)	<a href="http://Gezondheidswinkel.nl">Gezondheidswinkel.nl</a> , The Netherlands	€ 29.95 / 100 ml	€ 29.95
Chiazaadolie	<a href="http://www.zwartzaadolie.nl">www.zwartzaadolie.nl</a> , The Netherlands	€ 19.95 / 100 ml	€ 19.95
Gesund & Lebe Bio Chía Samen-öl (organic)	<a href="http://www.amazon.de">www.amazon.de</a> , Germany	€ 13.95 / 100 ml	€ 13.95
Hübner BIO Chiasamen öl (organic)	<a href="#">Hübner</a> , Germany	€ 15.49 / 100 ml	€ 15.49
Huile de graines de chia	<a href="#">MarketVeg</a> , France	€ 18.30 / 250 ml	€ 7.32
Chiaolja (organic)	<a href="http://Vimishop.se">Vimishop.se</a> , Sweden	€ 23.89 / 250 ml	€ 9.56

**Tips:**

Compare the price of your product with other products on the European market to see who your main competitors are.

Justify the value of your product. Buyers and consumers might be willing to pay a higher price for products which convey quality, sustainability and smart marketing.

Assess whether certification is demanded in your target market. Carry out a cost calculation to decide if certification will provide you with a beneficial margin.

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