

9 tips for finding buyers in the European processed fruit and vegetables market

The processed fruit and vegetables market is one of the largest European food sectors. It has an import value of almost €40 billion and counts thousands of players. There are many ways to identify potential buyers among all these players. The tips below provide you a short but detailed guide on how and where to find buyers for your processed fruit and vegetables products. These tips will also help you identify potential buyers in the European markets. However, finding a buyer does not guarantee that you will sell your products to them. This depends on many factors, some of which are out of your control.

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1. Define yourself and your offer before searching for buyers

Before hunting for buyers, it is important to precisely define two aspects related to your offer. Firstly, clearly define the product you are offering, in measurable terms. Those include factors such as product description, exact quality, quantity, relevant technology, certificates, prices and delivery terms. Secondly, create a unique selling proposition. In other words; show your buyers why your offer is unique and different from your competition.

Defining your offer will decrease the time you need to create the list of relevant buyers. For example, if you can offer ten tonnes of your product, you will remove buyers who only deal with full container loads from your long list. Some buyers may require a specific fruit variety or a level of quality you cannot offer. In this case, you can save time and not focus on those. Also, if you can offer a specific type of product, such as organic, you do not have to look amongst buyers who only trade in conventional products.

Tips:

Be precise in defining your offer. Never offer something that you cannot deliver. This will save you time in the process of creating your list of relevant buyers.

Be precise in the definition of your product specification. You can use a [general product specification template](#) for food products. More specifically; use internationally recognised standards to better define your offer. Examples include the standards of [Codex Alimentarius](#) or UNECE [Standards for Dried Fruit and Vegetables and Edible Nuts](#).

Consider using this [step-by-step guide](#) to create a unique selling proposition.

2. Do proper market research to understand your buyers

The next step in the process of finding buyers should be market research. In the market research process, you should first identify which European market has the best potential for your offer. Be aware that the largest markets or the ones closest to you are not necessarily the best choice. You also need to consider factors such as market growth, level of competition, common buyer requirements, legal requirements, price competitiveness and trends influencing demand.

The best place to start your research is the CBI. Our studies on the European market for processed fruit and vegetables give you a good insight in the general [demand](#), [trends](#) and [market requirements](#). After this you can find more specific information about [promising products](#). If the products you are offering are not included in the CBI list, you can learn how to select the best markets using statistical tools such as the [EU Trade Helpdesk](#) and [TradeMap](#).

After you have identified the best markets, the next step should be to search for buyers on search engines like Google. Remember to use [advanced search](#) options to narrow down searches into more detailed and specific results. For example, you can filter your search to only see pages that are published in your selected market. Also, you can make a search in the language of your target market. If you do not speak the language of your target market you can use the [Google translate](#) service.

Tips:

Learn how to identify the most attractive markets for your products on the ITC [Trade Map video tutorials](#).

Learn how to use [advanced Google search](#) options to easier find your buyers.

Check your market research skills through [5 steps of the export market intelligence](#) process.

3. Decide which type of buyers best fit into your offer

Importers of processed fruit and vegetables can be categorised according to several criteria. It is important to understand that not all of those categories are suitable for emerging exporters from developing countries. For example, some of the European companies already have long-term relationships with leading exporters from larger producing countries. They sometimes even promote offers from specific countries and will not be willing to work with you in order not to ruin their current relationships.

There are also buyers that are constantly working for new suppliers in order to loosen dependency on the countries that are dominating the global market. Those companies may be a better fit for your offer, especially if you are offering a product that is not usually associated with your country of origin. On the other side there is a risk that those buyers will not be committed to you, and buy their products somewhere else if they find a better price.

Buyers of processed fruit and vegetables can be classified into several categories. Keep in mind that this classification is not a rule, as many of the buyers perform different activities (most of them) and may fit in more than one category. Generally, they can be classified according to the following criteria:

- Product and sector specialisation: some importers trade with a range of products (for example companies supplying the retail segment), while some only deal with one type of product (for example frozen vegetables). Usually it is easier to focus on specialised importers, as they know the products, market and competition well and can inform you about important market developments.

- Processing vs trading specialisation: some companies are importing processed fruit and vegetables as ingredients for final products. Many of them do not import products themselves, but buy from European wholesalers. However, there are some companies that may import ingredients directly (for example purees or concentrates for the production of juices). There are also bulk traders, which import and re-sell products unchanged. Bulk traders and wholesalers are the preferred option for suppliers from developing countries, as they have more options for selling your products.
- Market segment specialisation: some companies are equipped with packing facilities and they can sell directly to retailers (under their own brand or private label). Other companies are specialised in supplying the foodservice segment (hotels, restaurants, catering, institutions). Although many suppliers from developing countries prefer to directly supply to the retail segment, this can be very difficult due to high pressure for lower prices and big quality and certification demands. Specialised suppliers of the foodservice segment can be a good option as they will not be under big pressure by the retailers.
- Niche market suppliers: companies that are working with suppliers of specific products such as organic, FairTrade, ethnic or sustainable. These companies can be a good fit for suppliers who can not compete with price pressure and the large quantities offered by big suppliers. A common pitfall is that the market for some of these products (for example “[Demeter](#)” certified) is quite limited.

Specialised importers seem to be the most dominant type of buyers within the processed fruit and vegetables category. Specialised importers are particularly relevant for new suppliers, as supplying to the retail segment directly is very demanding and requires a lot of investments in quality and logistics. However, for the well-equipped and price-competitive producers, packing for private labels can be an option. Still, private label packing is mostly done by importers that make contracts with retail chains in Europe.

Tips:

Read our [product-related studies](#) to learn more about channels and segments for specific products and to find examples of buyers from different categories.

If you are a more experienced exporter, you can try selling directly to markets that are normally served by European importers. However, this requires a lot more effort, and you will have to convince buyers to buy from far-away places.

Be aware that selling directly to retail channels often means higher investments (e.g. renting a warehouse in the target market), participation in the competition procurement calls and possibility to deliver small quantities frequently (such as weekly).

4. Help your potential buyers to find you on the internet

After you define your offer and understand the needs of your buyers, it is time to make your unique selling proposition visible on the internet. The best way is to start with your website. Ideally, your website should attract the attention of visitors in your target markets, create desire for your offer and finally convert the visitor into a paying customer. This can be done by, for example, lining up your unique selling proposition with a strong message on the homepage of your website, with catchy images, videos and interesting content.

One example of successful online promotion is [ARDO](#), a Belgian frozen vegetable company. Their home page makes it very clear what this company is offering. Also there are two “attention grabbing” buttons (“product finder” and “more about ARDO”) right on the home page, to stimulate visitors to look further into the website. ARDO is offering a subscription to the newsletter and promotes its social network pages (Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube). Their unique selling propositions are also visible (innovation, entrepreneur of the year, sustainability).

After you create a website, you need to make it more visible for your potential buyers. This can be done through

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO). SEO is the process of affecting the online visibility of a website in a search engine's results. Having a good website is essential, but it is even more important for you to ensure that European buyers can easily find your company. If someone is searching for the product you are offering, your offer should appear on the first page in major search engines.

European buyers search for new suppliers by typing the product name into a search engine (usually Google). Next to the product name they add words such as “exporter”, “producer” or “supplier”. Sometimes the name of the country is also used, especially if the buyer is looking for products of a specific origin. One search example might be: “cashew nuts producer Ivory Coast”. You should understand that it is very important for your company to be on the first page on Google, after performing this type of search.

Creating a website is the first step and the basis of your online promotional activities. However, it is not enough for successful promotion by itself. You should use social networks too. Social media platforms represent a real-time communication tool for your company to interact with potential buyers abroad. The most famous social platforms recommended for you are LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram.

Tips:

Invest in content writing skills or contract professionals to create content for your website. If you want to do it alone, you can find a lot of [instructional books](#) or online courses on e-learning platforms such as [Udemy](#) or [Lynda](#).

Engage with SEO consultants. Also invest in personal training and training for your staff to use some SEO techniques (the use of keywords, tags, analytics and Google Ads, for example)

Go to the [LinkedIn learning centre](#) for more information about what you can do with LinkedIn.

Use Twitter during trade fairs to increase visibility among potential buyers. Furthermore, [pay-per-tweet](#) is an effective viral marketing tool, where a user re-tweets your message (for example a link or announcement), in order to win a prize.

5. Attend trade fairs and industry events to meet your buyers face-to-face

Food trade events in the European Union include some of the largest exhibitions worldwide. In 2019, ANUGA (the leading food fair in the world) gathered 7,590 exhibitors and about 170,000 visitors. Trade events are used by companies to promote their offer, to find potential buyers and meet with existing customers. One of the main advantages of a trade fair is that companies can meet potential customers face-to-face. This is particularly important in the processed fruit and vegetables sector, as this helps build trust.

Bear in mind that participating in a trade event abroad can be costly. Therefore, you should only invest in event participation after making a cost-benefit calculation. Instead of exhibiting, you can visit selected events and search for potential buyers among exhibiting companies from Europe. Study the list of exhibitors before your visit and make appointments with potential buyers. Also, establishing contact with buyers before the exhibition will save you the time you need for first introductions and make communication easier.

Apart from trade fairs, one of the best opportunities for networking with potential buyers can be found during conferences and annual meetings of relevant European associations. Each of the subsectors within the processed fruit and vegetables market in Europe is organised in the form of European and international associations. There are specific trade associations for processed products (jams, canned and frozen), for juices and for dried fruit and edible nuts. The leading trade fairs you should visit are the following:

- [Anuga](#) - the largest trade fair for food and beverages in the world. It takes place in Cologne, Germany every other year on odd years, and hosts relevant sections for processed fruit and vegetables, including the beverages section for fruit juice concentrates and purees, frozen food section (for frozen fruit and vegetables) and the delicatessen fine food section (for jams, edible nuts, dried fruit and canned produce).
- [SIAL](#) - held every other year in Paris, France. It is a general trade fair of food and beverages, with a strong focus on France. It has similar sections for processed fruit and vegetables as Anuga, including Pavilions of the World, Infood and Organic Food.
- [Food Ingredients Europe](#) (FIE) - a smaller trade fair focussing exclusively on ingredients, including raw materials and semi-finished products offered for sale to the food industry. The trade fair is held at a different location in Europe every year.
- [Biofach](#) - a trade fair focused exclusively on certified organic products. It is surprisingly large for such a specific niche and takes place every year in February in Nuremberg, Germany. Processed fruit and vegetable exporters can be accommodated in the sections with international pavilions. Biofach also includes an annual conference on the developments in the global organic industry.
- [Natural & Organic Products Europe](#) - a relatively small trade fair, compared to the others. It offers good opportunities for products labelled as “natural” or “organic”. It takes place every year in London.
- [ISM Sweets & Snacks](#) - the world's leading trade fair for sweets and snacks held every third year in Cologne, Germany. It is especially relevant for dried fruit and edible nuts industrial suppliers.
- [PLMA](#) - the world's leading trade fair for private label manufacturers. It takes place every year in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. It is the most relevant trade fair for companies willing to supply products to the European retail chains. In order to do this, companies need to be certified with food safety standards and equipped with packing equipment.

European buyers not only visit nearby fairs but also travel to places outside of the Europe Union to look for new suppliers. The most relevant trade fairs attended by European processed fruit and vegetables traders outside Europe include [Gulfood](#) (Dubai, United Arab Emirates, annually), [FOODEX Japan](#) (Tokyo, Japan, annually) and [World Food Moscow](#) (Moscow, Russian Federation, annually). Koelnmesse, the organiser of ANUGA, also organises two important trade shows in [China](#) and in [India](#) called Anufood. The trade show that attracts the interest of European traders in Africa is [Food Africa](#) (Cairo, Egypt) and German trade fair organiser, the [fairtrade Messe](#) company, organises three different trade shows in [Nigeria](#), [Ghana](#) and [Ethiopia](#).

Tips:

Search for potential buyers at the trade fair exhibitors list. Find the lists of [ANUGA](#), [SIAL](#) and [Biofach](#) at these direct links. Make a list of potential contacts and prepare short questions to ask during the visit in order to filter the buyers fitting into your offer.

Obtain as many confirmed appointments with potential customers as possible. A common pitfall among first-time visitors or exhibitors is that they overlook this step. Some trade events, such as BIOFACH, Anuga and SIAL, offer matchmaking services on their website.

Social media sometimes allows attendees of an event to communicate with each other. Try to find out if the organiser of the event uses social media tools. SIAL and Anuga for example have smartphone applications specifically made for particular events.

Visit specific trade events organised by both European and international trade associations. Those events provide opportunities to match with traders focused only to one product group and they are less crowded compared to the large trade fairs. The most relevant events you should attend include [World Nut and Dried Fruit Congress](#) (for suppliers of nuts and dried fruit), [IFU Juice Conference](#) (for suppliers of fruit juice and ingredients), [Juice Summit](#) (for suppliers of juices and ingredients), [Snackex](#) (for suppliers of edible nuts) and [Polaris](#) (for suppliers of frozen fruit and vegetables). Suppliers of canned fruit and vegetables can find interesting matching opportunities during packaging events such as the annual meeting of [Metal Packaging Europe](#) or the international conference on [Food and Beverage Packaging](#).

6. Find buyers among the members of processed fruit and vegetables associations

The European processed fruit and vegetables sector has several industry associations that represent the interests of member companies. These associations can be good sources for finding potential buyers, as they generally have extensive networks. Some of them even offer international memberships and participation in annual conferences, where suppliers can meet with potential buyers directly.

A good way to start engaging with associations at an international and European level, is looking for membership possibilities. European associations put information on their websites about national association members. In turn, the national associations provide information on their websites about their members, which can be target companies for your offer (see list below). You should focus on the national associations in the markets that provide the best opportunities for your offer. To find out which markets those are, check the second tip in this document and read CBI studies about the [demand for processed fruit and vegetables](#).

The most important processed fruit and vegetables trade associations include:

- [European Fruit Juice Association \(AIJN\)](#): umbrella association for the European industry with an international membership. Provides information about European legislation, product guidelines, sustainability and more. Search the [list of members](#) to find national associations and companies.
- [European Association of Fruit and Vegetable Processing Industries \(PROFEL\)](#): provides statistics about the European processed fruit and vegetables sector, information about legislation and [a list of companies and national associations](#).
- [Frucom](#): is the European federation of trade in dried fruit and edible nuts, processed fruit and vegetables, processed fishery products, spices and honey. Search the [list of members](#) to find national associations and companies. Frucom allows membership for non-European companies and associations.
- [European Snacks Association](#): represents European savoury snack producers and traders including those of edible nuts. Search the [list of members](#) to find national associations and snack nut companies.
- [International Nut and Dried Fruit Council \(INC\)](#): statistics and information about the international nuts and dried fruit industry. In order to access a database of members, you must be subscribed.
- [International Fruit and Vegetable Juice Association](#): provides technical guidelines and organises workshops for the industry. Search [the list of members](#) to find potential buyers. Also consider becoming a member to access more information and participate in networking events.

The largest trade associations in the leading European markets for processed fruit and vegetables include:

- [Waren-Verein](#) – association of German importers and brokers of processed fruit and vegetables, honey and related products. You can search the [list of trade members](#). Consider becoming a member as they allow international membership. Waren-Verein organises a European Trade meeting with networking opportunities each year.
- [NZV](#) - Dutch Association for trade in dried fruit, nuts, spices and related products (in Dutch only). For information about membership and members you should [contact the secretariat](#) of the association.
- [NDFTA](#) – the United Kingdom’s National Dried Fruit Trade Association. Provides networking opportunities, promotes consumption and informs members about legislative developments. You can search the [list of members](#) or consider becoming a member.
- [UNILET](#) – French association of frozen fruit and vegetables companies (in French only). Find a list of French frozen fruit and vegetables companies in the [member directory](#).
- [VEGEBE](#) – Belgian association of frozen and other vegetable processors and traders. Search the [member list](#) to find potential partners.
- [ADEPALE](#) – French processed fruit and vegetables industry (in French only). Search the [list of members](#) to find potential partners in the canned, frozen and prepared fruit and vegetables sectors.
- [VDF](#) – German Fruit Juice Association (in German only). You can search the lists of members to find [fruit juice](#)

[producers](#) (bottling and blending companies) or [raw material suppliers](#) (such as purees or concentrates traders).

The largest demand for processed fruit and vegetables in Europe comes from Germany, the Netherlands, France, the United Kingdom and Italy. Suppliers from developing countries should focus their search on sector associations in those countries. Read [our product specific studies](#) for more precise information about different European markets.

Tips:

Follow the leading processed fruit and vegetables associations that are listed above. Keep track of relevant events they promote and check their newest releases or research findings.

Look at each association's members list, as they can provide you with potential prospects for your marketing campaign. Carefully look at the websites of the members to see if they fit your profile or not. It is better to have short list of high potential buyers than a long list without further expectations.

Contact the staff of the associations to find more about the possibilities and data their members can provide.

7. Make an initial list using company databases

Several general and food-specific databases make it easier for suppliers to find names and contacts of buyers. This should be the first step when you start searching for buyers. Keep in mind that none of those databases is complete. Even a paid database can miss some relevant companies from the markets you are targeting. You should use them in combination with other tips given in this document to make your search shorter and easier.

The most popular company databases relevant for processed fruit and vegetables exporters are:

- [EUROPAGES](#) - directory of European companies. You can search by sector (for example "dried fruit" or "fruit and vegetables juices"). You can filter your results and select only companies which are traders and not manufacturers (for example "agent", "distributor" or "wholesaler").
- [Wer liefert was](#) - is a leading B2B online marketplace in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. You can search for products or companies and filter down your results by the size and activity of the company. Use the German names for the products in your search, in addition to the English names.
- [Organic-Bio](#) - database of companies selling and buying organic products.
- [Food Companies](#) - food directory where you can search for buyers under many product categories.
- [Kompass](#) - large database of companies. You can apply several filters to find potential buyers. Available upon subscription. You can perform the basic search free of charge by typing the product name and select "importers" in the list of the results to narrow down your search.

Another opportunity to find buyers is by the use of matchmaking services. Some of those services are free of charge but the majority asks for a subscription or some other fee. Examples of matchmaking online platforms relevant for exporters of processed fruit and vegetables are:

- [Frozen B2B](#) - online marketplace for frozen food. Available upon subscription although some simple searches can be performed free of charge.
- [GreenTrade](#) - online marketplace for organic food. You can search current buyer announcements under several categories relevant for processed fruit and vegetables (for example "fruit and vegetable", "grocery products" or "drinks"). In order to see the contact information of the company you need to subscribe.

Tips:

When making your list of companies using the databases, do not send the same email to all of them. This will be considered “spam” by most of buyers.

Carefully study the websites of the companies you found on the databases. Also search for additional information about those companies on the internet to better understand if they are a good match for your company. For companies that are not from the United Kingdom, perform a search in the language of the country where it is headquartered.

After sending the first email, follow up with a telephone call to increase the response rate and to check if the contacted company is really relevant for you.

8. Find organisations that can provide support for your export

There are many business support organisations (BSOs) that can support your export activities. They can be located in your own country or your target market, or they can perform support activities on an international level. Some of those organisations have customised export promotion programmes (such as CBI) specifically focused on export to Europe and targeted at specific regions. National export promotion organisations usually fund activities such as export market research, participation in trade fairs or matchmaking activities.

The most well known international BSOs supporting exporters in developing countries are:

- [Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries](#) (CBI). A government funded organisation that supports more than 800 entrepreneurs in becoming successful exporters on the European market. They offer market information for various products and services, they offer export coaching programmes, technical support, they inform and influence policy makers and involve importers in the development and implementation of their programmes.
- [The Swiss Import Promotion Programme](#) (SIPPO). A government-funded organisation that supports BSOs in improving their services for exporting companies and strengthening their own institutional set-up, as well as connecting them to an extensive network.
- [The Import Promotion Desk](#) (IPD). A government-funded organisation from Germany that aims to offer sustained and structured promotion for the import of certain products and services from selected partner countries. They bring together the interests of German importers with those of exporters in emerging growth markets.
- [International Trade Centre](#) (ITC). Agency of the United Nations based in Geneva (Switzerland), dedicated to support the internationalisation of small and medium-sized enterprises around the globe. Most of the activities are aimed to support exporters from developing countries.
- [Enterprise Europe Network](#) (EUN), founded by a commission of the European Commission. Aiming, to help companies of all kinds of products and services, to innovate and grow internationally. You can find check if your country has a [focal point](#) of EUN.

Although the above mentioned BSOs can help you in your export activities you should always start by checking the possibilities for getting support from your own country. Organisations such as export promotion agencies, chambers of commerce or embassies of your country in your target markets can help you with promotional activities. Also, some sector-specific associations deal with export promotion activities.

Tips:

Establish personal contacts with staff of an export promotion organisation located in your country.

Check if there is a diaspora organisation for your country located in Europe. Diaspora refers to members of a population who have moved abroad, but who maintain close ties with their homeland.

Diaspora can play an important role in trade. Diaspora members can create connections between your company and potential buyers.

Check [export promotion programmes](#) for processed fruit and vegetables on the CBI website. Also, contact IPD, SIPPO and ITC to check if there are any export support projects suitable for your company.

Do not forget to contact local organisations within your country. Local establishments, such as regional chambers of commerce, regional development agencies or business support offices in local towns and districts can also provide you contacts and include your company in export support projects.

9. Find names of leading importers and get more export tips from our processed fruit and vegetables studies

CBI has created several product-specific studies where you can find additional information on where and how to find buyers.

Tips:

Read the [European market analysis studies](#) for several processed fruit and vegetables products. In the market analysis chapter, you will find profiles of the markets with the best potential and examples of several leading importers. If there is no existing study for your product, you can read studies explaining the markets for similar products (for example importers of macadamia nuts also import other types of nuts and dried fruit as well). You are also welcome to [contact CBI](#) and ask for help or even propose new studies or programmes that can be developed.


Read CBI [Tips for Organising Exports](#) of processed fruit and vegetables to Europe to find practical tips related to logistics.


Read CBI [Tips for Doing Business](#) with European Buyers to find tips for making your business easier.


This study has been carried out on behalf of CBI by [Autentika Global](#).

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