CBI Product Factsheet: 
Sesame seeds in the Netherlands

‘Practical market insights into your product’

For sesame seed exporters, the Netherlands is an important entry point into Europe. The country sources most of its sesame seeds directly from developing countries and is the largest re-exporter in the region. Within the Netherlands, sesame seeds are increasingly used in ethnic cuisines and vegetarian and vegan diets. Opportunities can also be found in the organic market, which is small but has growth potential.

Product definition

Sesame seeds (Sesamum indicum) are grown primarily for their oil content. In Europe, sesame seeds are primarily used for toppings on bakery products, e.g. bread, bagels, hamburger buns, and confectionery. Restaurants and natural food consumers purchase sesame seeds for use in ethnic dishes. Sesame seeds can also be used in snacks and crackers, often in the form of “sesame sticks”. Sesame seeds are supplied by countries in Africa, Latin America and South Asia.

Codes for sesame seeds:
- Harmonised System (HS) ➔ sesame seeds, excl. for sowing, are included in:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HS code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1207 4090</td>
<td>Sesame seeds, excl. for sowing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Product specifications

Quality

General:
- There are different types and qualities of sesame seeds. White seeds are a white-to-golden colour and receive a higher market price than mixed seeds, which range from yellow to dark brown. White seeds are used primarily in natural or hulled form because of their aesthetic value, whereas mixed seeds are generally crushed into oil.
- Make sure that the sesame seeds are fresh and that there are no long delays between harvesting and transportation. Sesame seeds should also be free from sand, stalk, plant debris and other foreign materials.
- Some of the most important quality factors concerning sesame seeds are: colour, odour, flavour, oil content, moisture content, size, uniformity of seeds, purity and damaged/mouldy seeds. Sesame seeds should also be free from mycotoxins and harmful microbiological activity. Aflatoxin and Salmonella contamination are known to be a problem for many producers, and buyers closely monitor these aspects.
• The minimum quality requirements for sesame seeds will depend greatly on the end-product the seed will be used for, e.g. tahini needs a sweet taste and aroma (some origins are not suitable), bakery purposes (high purity levels required), sesame oil (clarity is important); the use of either natural or hulled sesame seeds will also depend on the end-product.
• Prevent contamination by keeping facilities and equipment clean.
• Ensure proper storage and transportation (see ‘Packaging’).

Organic (if relevant)
• Comply with organic standards for the production of sesame seeds. Refer to the section on ‘Niche requirements’ for further details on organic production and labelling.

Labelling
• Ensure traceability of individual batches.
• Use the English language for labelling unless your buyer has indicated otherwise.
• Labels must include the following:
  o Product name
  o Manufacturer’s lot or batch code
  o If the product is destined for use in food products
  o Name and address of exporter
  o Product’s country of origin
  o Shelf life: best before date/ use by date
  o Net weight/volume in metric units
  o Recommended storage conditions

Organic (if relevant): Name/code of the certifying body and certification number.

Packaging
• Sesame seeds for the European market are transported in containers in paper sacks, bags of woven natural materials (e.g. jute) or woven plastic polypropylene / polyethylene (PP/PE) bags. Buyers may have specific additional packaging requirements.
• They are usually shipped in containers with a capacity of between 16 and 19 tonnes, and in 25kg or 50kg bags.
• Organic sesame seeds should remain physically separated from conventional sesame seeds.
• Ensure preservation of quality by:
  o Thoroughly cleaning and fumigating the holds or containers before loading the seeds.
  o Protecting the cargo from moisture during loading so as to avoid mould, spoilage and self-heating.
  o Ensuring appropriate temperature, humidity/moisture and ventilation conditions during transportation.
  o Protecting the cargo from pests such as beetles, moths, etc.
Trade and macro-economic statistics

Imports

Figure 1: Total sesame seed imports to the Netherlands, in 1000 tonnes

- The Netherlands is an important entry point as it is one of the main trade hubs for sesame seeds. In 2015, the total amount of sesame seeds imported into Europe amounted to 161 thousand tonnes (€288 million). The Netherlands accounted for 16% of total imports in volume and 14% in value.
- In 2015, the Netherlands imported 26 thousand tonnes of sesame seeds (€41 million), representing an average annual increase of 10% in volume and 19% in value since 2011.
- The Netherlands mainly sources sesame seeds directly from developing countries, which had a share of 96% (in volume) of total Dutch imports in 2015. Since both sesame seed imports as well as the share of developing country suppliers in these imports have increased, the Netherlands is and will remain an important entry point for suppliers.
- The remaining share comes from transit countries in Europe. Sesame seeds also enter the market in the form of processed products, which are not accounted for by these statistics.

Tips: Understand the trade dynamics for sesame seeds in the Netherlands. Identify whether the country is your end market or simply a trading hub.

An interesting source for getting acquainted with the Dutch market and its trade dynamics is the website of the Dutch Foreign Trade Agency. More specifically for sesame seeds, websites of Dutch companies such as Dipasa can be useful.

Monitor developments in the Dutch trade for sesame seeds and identify developments such as the emergence of new suppliers and decline of established ones.
The major developing country sesame seed supplier to the Netherlands is India (31%), followed by Nigeria (23%) and Kenya (12%). Smaller but significant exporters to the Dutch market are Uganda (7.2%), Mexico (5.8%), and Burkina Faso (4.0%). In 2015, Indian exports of sesame seeds to the Netherlands amounted to 8.0 thousand tonnes in volume and around €13 million in value. In the same year, Nigeria supplied 6.0 thousand tonnes (€8.7 million) of sesame seeds to the Netherlands, while Kenya supplied 3.1 thousand tonnes (€4.5 million).

In general, exports of sesame seeds from India is declining in the long run, due to the increasing pressure on land and rising consumption. A general shift in sesame production from India (and China) to Africa and Latin America is being witnessed in the international market. This provides further opportunities for African and Latin American sesame seed suppliers in Europe.

Among the large developing country sesame seed exporters, Uganda is the country which has increased its exports since 2011 to the Netherlands most significantly, by 142% in volume and 163% in value. Nigeria, Argentina and Sudan also recorded significant growth of sesame seed exports to the Netherlands. Nigeria’s increased its exports since 2011 at an average annual rate of 59% in volume and 74% in value, while this was 120% and 145% respectively for Argentina, and 71% and 83% for Sudan.

India reported a decrease of 6.0% in volume, but a slight increase in value (by 2.8%). This indicates that the decline in India’s sesame production has affected its share of the Dutch market, thus opening up opportunities for emerging suppliers in other countries. Production of sesame in India is declining in the long run due to the increasing pressure on land. A general shift in sesame production from India (and China) to Africa is being witnessed in the international market.

Tips: A good source for analysing Dutch trade dynamics yourself is the Eurostat Statistics Database.
Identify your potential competitors and learn from them in terms of:
Marketing: website, social media, trade fair participation, etc. Well-structured websites are for example Grover (India) and Sindan Organic (Bolivia).
• Product characteristics: origin, quality, oil content, etc.
• Value added: certifications, processing techniques.

Exports

Figure 3: Exports of sesame seeds from the Netherlands; and the primary countries importing sesame seeds from the Netherlands (in terms of 2015 volume), 2011–2015 in 1000 tonnes

Source: Eurostat, 2016

• The Netherlands is the largest sesame seed re-exporter in Europe, accounting for 41% of total exports. In 2015, total Dutch re-exports of sesame seeds amounted to 13 thousand tonnes (€26 million), having increased in both volume and value since 2011. The volume of Dutch sesame exports increased at an annual average rate of 0.3% and the value at a rate of 7.0% in the review period.
• The main destinations of Dutch sesame seed exports are Germany, France, Italy, Belgium (and Luxembourg) and Spain.
• Germany accounted for almost half of Dutch re-exports (41% in volume) due to its importance as a trade hub and market in Europe. France and Italy together received 20% of the total Dutch exports of sesame seeds in 2015.

Tips: As the Netherlands re-exports most of its supplies to surrounding European countries (Germany, France, Belgium), consider it as a possible entry point to reach surrounding markets.

The website of FoodDrinkEurope could be an interesting source to understand consumption patterns of food products, including sesame seeds, across different European countries.
Consumption

Figure 4: Apparent consumption\(^1\) of sesame seeds in the Netherlands, in 1000 tonnes

Sources: FAOSTAT, 2016; Eurostat, 2016
* The latest FAOSTAT production statistics (2014) are included into the calculation for apparent consumption for 2015.

- The Netherlands is among the largest markets for sesame seeds in Europe, along with Germany, Greece and Poland. In the Netherlands, sesame seeds are commonly used as a bakery product. The oilseed is in particular used as an ingredient or as a garnish on the surface of bread.
- Apparent consumption of sesame seeds in the Netherlands amounted to 13 thousand tonnes in 2015, having increased at an annual average rate of 14.0% since 2011, resulting from an increase in consumer and industrial demand for sesame seeds in the Netherlands and across Europe. However, these figures do not include processed products containing sesame seeds which are imported as such.
- The Netherlands does not produce sesame seeds, making the country entirely dependent on imports. The bulk of these imports originate from developing countries.

Tips: Study the Netherlands as a target market for sesame seeds. It is important to understand factors such as product application, taste preferences, competing suppliers and potential buyers in the country.

Find out more about consumption and production in the Netherlands through the statistics provided by FAOSTAT and Fediol (Federation of the European Vegetable Oil and Protein meal Industry).

See our study on Trade Statistics for Oilseeds for more information.

Market trends

Healthier lifestyle and ethnic cuisine
- Sesame seeds are an inseparable part of Mediterranean and ethnic cuisines that are increasingly popular in the Netherlands (hummus, tahini, sushi), but are also an essential ingredient for baked goods and crackers.
- Sesame seeds have grown in popularity due to their flavour combined with their versatility and high nutritional value. In the Netherlands, in particular,

\(^1\) Apparent consumption: defined as a calculation of (imports – exports) + production.
Sesame seeds became an important ingredient of vegetarian/vegan diets too, as an alternative for protein intake.

**Tips:** Promote the high nutritional value of sesame seeds and the product’s various applications.

Make sure your product characteristics and quality match your target market and end-user in:
- Taste and odour
- Oil content
- Purity level & uniformity
- Hulled/natural

Keep different types of sesame seeds separate, example: do not mix seeds of different colours or origins.

**Sesame seed allergy in the Netherlands**
- Sesame seed allergy is the most common type of seed allergy in Europe. The popularity of sesame seeds used in ethnic cuisine and bakery products has increased the consumption of sesame seeds in an everyday basis, thus increasing the susceptibility of the Dutch population to allergies related to this product. According to the Dutch Anaphylaxis Network, around 800,000 people suffer from food allergies in the Netherlands. The allergenic protein included in sesame, specifically, can cause allergic reactions both as a whole seed but also when crushed for food production (hummus) or when turned into oil.
- Sesame allergy is often associated with peanut allergy and, similarly, possible sesame traces must be listed on the label of every product.

**Tips:** Read more about food allergens in the European Union on the website of Food Allergy Information.

Emphasize the healthy and nutritional properties of your product in order to avoid a negative/allergy association with sesame seeds.

**Salmonella risk in sesame seeds**
- After the 2001 salmonella outbreak in several European countries caused by contaminated sesame seeds found in halva, food safety concerns have tighten up.
- More recently, in 2010, salmonella presence in sesame seed mixes that were imported from Bolivia was reported in Ireland. In the USA, a multistate outbreak of salmonella in 2011, caused by the consumption of tahini, raised awareness of the food-safety-related issues for sesame seed worldwide. One of the ‘kill steps’ of salmonella is the roasting of sesame seeds, which is not done during the traditional process of making tahini.
- An incident such as those experienced in the past with sesame seed could seriously damage demand and consumer confidence.

**Tips:** If you are an emerging producer/exporter promote the origins of your product in order to avoid unnecessary associations with previous salmonella outbreaks.

On the website of the Food and Feed Safety Alerts (RASFF), you can browse through various border rejections and alerts for ‘sesame seed’ under category ‘nuts, nut products and seeds’. In this manner, you can learn about common problems faced by suppliers during border controls and adopt appropriate measures to avoid them.
Take the appropriate pre and post-harvest measures needed to avoid the occurrence of Salmonella, Aflatoxin and other sources of contamination in your seeds. The Empres Food Safety Guide (in FAO’s website) regarding prevention and control of salmonella and E. coli is a good point of departure.

Be familiar with FEDIOL’s Hygiene Guides, including set procedures dealing with salmonella and other sources of contamination.

**Increasing demand for organic sesame seeds**
- Dutch consumer spending on organic food increased to €1.13 billion in 2014 (organic-market.info, 2016), according to the organisation Bionext. Accordingly, organic retailers have gained market share, now organised under the association Biowinkelvereniging. For sesame seeds, this means that niche applications such as organic-certified baked products, crackers, health bars, hummus, tahini, etc. could offer increasingly interesting market prospects.

**Tips:** Investigate the possibilities for organic certification, including the opportunities and costs involved in the process. Some supply chains may find certification easier than others if pesticides are not part of day-to-day agriculture.

For information on organic certification in Europe, visit the website of Organic Farming in the European Union.

Consult the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements website for information on certification standards.

Consult the website of Bionext for further information on the Dutch organic market.

See our study on trends for oilseeds for more information.

**What legal requirements must my product comply with?**

**Contaminants in food:** The European Union has laid down maximum levels of contaminants in food, including ingredients such as sesame seeds. Specifically for sesame seeds, contamination of salmonella can be an issue. See the Market trends section, for more information on salmonella.

**Tips:** Check out the maximum levels for contaminants in food set by European Union legislation.

**Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs) of pesticides in food:** European Union legislation has been laid down to regulate the presence of pesticide residues (MRLs) in food products.

**Tips:** If the sesame seeds have been treated with pesticides, verify that residues remain within limits. For more information, consult the specific European Union legislation: Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs) of pesticides in food.

**Additives, enzymes and flavourings in food:** The European Union has set a list of permitted flavourings and requirements for their use in foodstuffs intended for human consumption, which includes sesame seed. This is particularly relevant to food manufacturers. However, insight into this legislation can help you to understand their requirements.
**Tips:** Familiarize yourself with the concerns of the end-users of your products by checking European Union legislation on **additives, enzymes and flavourings in food**.

**Hygiene of foodstuffs:** Food business operators shall put in place, implement and maintain a permanent procedure, or procedures, based on the HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points) principles. This also applies to the import of food to the European Union and export from the European Union.

**Tips:** Ensure compliance with European Union legislation on **Hygiene of foodstuffs (HACCP)**.

**What additional requirements do buyers often have?**

**Food safety management:** Buyers commonly require their suppliers to have a quality/food safety management system in place. These systems require companies to demonstrate their ability to control food safety hazards in order to ensure that food is safe at the time of human consumption.

**Tips:** Suppliers can apply a basic HACCP system. However, if you aim to supply food manufacturers with a product ready for direct entry, it is necessary to have a recognised certified food-safety management system such as ISO 22000, British Retail Consortium (BRC) or International Featured Standards (IFS) Food. Visit the website of the Global Food Safety Initiative for more information.

**What are the requirements for niche markets?**

**Regulation (EC) 834/2007 on organic agriculture:** The European Union has established requirements on the production and labelling requirements with which an organic product of agricultural origin **must** comply in order to be marketed in the European Union as “organic”.

**Tips:** In general, the market for organic sesame seed is still a niche segment. If you do choose to obtain a certificate for organic production, find out more about Organic production and labelling.

Make sure that your organic certification is harmonised with the European legislation.

**Fair Trade:** Fairtrade Labelling Organisations International (FLO) is the leading standard-setting and certification organisation for Fairtrade. Products which carry the Fairtrade label indicate that producers are paid a Fairtrade Minimum Price. FLO has a minimum price for sesame seed. Other fair trade standards available in the European market are Fair Trade Ecocert and the Institute for Marketecology’s Fair for Life.

**Tips:** Before engaging in a Fairtrade certification programme, make sure to check (in consultation with your potential buyer) that this label has sufficient demand in your target market and whether it will be cost beneficial for your product.

Although FLO certification is the leading fair trade certification scheme in Europe, you can also check out other schemes such as IMO’s ‘Fair for Life’ and Ecocert Fair Trade.

See our study on **buyer requirements for the oilseeds market** for more information.
Market channels and segments

Market channels

Figure 5: Trade channels for sesame seeds in the Netherlands

Within the Dutch food sector, sesame seed trade channels and segments revolve around their end use:

- The **crushing industry** relates to the segment in which sesame seeds are crushed to produce sesame oil. FEDIOL figures indicate that sesame-crushing activities in the Netherlands are not significant.

- The **edible seed industry** can be divided into two:
  - **Food manufacturing**: sesame seeds are an important ingredient for the Dutch food processing industry in products such as breakfast cereals, snack bars and ethnic foods such as hummus. These industries source mostly through importers, although some larger industries source directly from developing country exporters.
  - **Confectionery**: sesame seeds are also used on the surface of breads and other bakery products to enrich their flavour and aroma.

In Asian markets, sesame seeds can be regarded as a commodity, whereas the European market (including the Netherlands) sees this product as a ‘food ingredient’. In this respect, European buyers are willing to pay higher prices to suppliers who offer high quality and comply with requirements.

Sesame seeds are classified into three main grades, which also relate to the end-use of the seed as described above: 1) crushing grade; 2) food grade; 3) confectionery grade. Within these grades, sesame seeds can be further segmented into: non-certified sesame seeds and certified sesame seeds.
**Figure 6: Segmentation of sesame seeds in the Netherlands**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food market segmentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Edible seed industry</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food manufacturing: breakfast and snack products, ethnic foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Crushing industry (Sesame oil)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-certified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventional high quality sesame seeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified high quality sesame seeds: organic, fair trade, organic plus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tips:**

Analyse your market entry options and consider which channel is most suitable for your own specific strengths, needs and objectives.

If you are able to supply directly to food processors or crushers in terms of volume, as well as ensure consistent delivery and quality, make sure you have adequate quality control systems. The different systems available are described under 'Common requirements'. Make sure to consult your (potential) buyers on the certifications which they require.

If you are dealing with smaller volumes or specialised seeds, importers are quite certainly the most suitable entry point.

If you are a new exporter or new to exporting, brokers can facilitate your market entry process in the Netherlands, enabling you to find and connecting you to the most suitable buyer.

Meet specific quality requirements when targeting the consumer market: uniformity in colour and shape (whole seeds) and a high purity level are key.

Comply with sustainability standards required by your specific segment and stay up-to-date on developments in this respect. For information on the various sustainability standards visit the ITC website on the voluntary standards that are available for exporters.

See our study on [market channels and segments for oilseeds](#) for more information.

**Price**

- Price levels for sesame seeds from different origins show similar developments, thus indicating a price interdependency between the various global suppliers. In addition, the international market strongly depends on the annual volumes produced in both India and China. China produces large quantities of sesame seeds each year to meet the substantial domestic demand for sesame seeds. Any delay or failure in Chinese crops puts a constraint on the global availability of sesame seeds, which has an impact on price levels as well.
• Sesame seed prices have been volatile since 2009, but experienced a steady increase from the end of 2012 due to tightening supplies, reaching prices between USD 2,000 and USD 2,500 per tonne, depending on the origin and quality.
• Nonetheless, prices decreased in 2014 and 2015 as a correction from previous inflated levels, with prices ranging between USD 1,200 and USD 1,500 because of poor Chinese demand and high production levels worldwide. In early 2016, prices decreased even more to USD 800–900 per tonne mainly due to weak demand worldwide.

Tips: Develop sustainable relationships with buyers in order to profit from the current international scenario for sesame seeds in the long run.

Develop good market information systems so as to be aware of market movements in sesame seeds worldwide.

Useful sources
• The EU Vegetable Oil and Protein meal Industry - www.fediol.eu
• The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations has a variety of agricultural databases – http://faostat3.fao.org/home/E
• For information on the latest market developments in the Oils and seeds sector, visit The Public Ledger – http://publicledger.agra-net.com/oils/
• For information on the organic Dutch Market can be found at the website of the Dutch Organic Shop Association - Biowinkelvereniging
• Information and contacts on Dutch intermediaries can be found on the Dutch Intermediaries Association – http://www.vnhi.nl/
• The Dutch Foreign Trade Agency is a division of the Ministry of Economic Affairs where many insightful information on the Dutch market can be found - www.hollandtrade.com/index.asp

More information
CBI market information: Promising EU export markets.

This survey was compiled for CBI by ProFound – Advisers In Development in collaboration with CBI sector experts Joost Pierrot and Jim Fitzpatrick

Disclaimer CBI market information tools: http://www.cbi.eu/disclaimer