

8 tips for finding buyers on the European market for natural ingredients for health products

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There is an increasing demand for natural healthcare products on the European market. In turn, the demand for natural ingredients is also increasing. How can you find European buyers, and how do you make sure that buyers are a good fit for your company? Here are some tips to help.

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1. Get to know your target market and requirements through market research

It is important to do market research into your target market before you start exporting. This will help you understand and select the right export target markets for your company and products. Building your understanding of your target market will also help you set targeted and realistic objectives and will help you build your reputation with potential customers, as buyers expect you to know the market in which you operate.

You should research key elements such as trade flows and structure, distribution networks, market trends and competitors from other producing countries. Find out in which European countries the demand for your ingredient is highest. Also, look at the growth in demand in these countries.

Make sure you know what the buyer requirements are before you contact European buyers. These are the laws and regulations that products and processes need to follow throughout Europe. If you cannot meet those buyer requirements, European buyers will not buy your products.

Look for parts of the market that use your products. Ask yourself what your ingredients can be used for. Natural ingredients for health products have numerous fields of application. Can they be used in products to support healthy immunity, for example? Or for food supplements? Digestive health products? Find out which types of product are getting more popular. If the growth rates for these market segments are high, then there is likely a stronger demand for raw materials used in these market segments.

CBI has created several studies where you can find more information and practical tips. These reports have valuable market information on the natural ingredients for health products sector, as well as specific products.

Tips:

Review the CBI study '[What is the demand for natural ingredients for health products on the European market?](#)', which has information on European markets for natural ingredients for health products with the most opportunities.

See our study on [trends for natural ingredients for health products](#) for more information on developments in the sector.

Review the CBI study '[What requirements must natural ingredients for health products comply with to be allowed on the European market?](#)'. Use this study to familiarise yourself with the legal and additional requirements that European buyers of natural ingredients often have.

Learn about opportunities on the European market for specific products through the CBI website. Here you can find information on exporting [aloe vera](#), [baobab](#), [essential oils](#), [frankincense](#), [hibiscus](#), immune system-boosting botanicals, [moringa](#), [mulberries](#), [plant proteins](#), [seaweed or marine algae](#), and [turmeric](#).

Use the [ITC Trade Map](#) for statistical data. Search for product groups that are used in health products, such as vegetable extracts or medicinal and aromatic plants.

2. Use company databases and trade show exhibitor lists to make an initial buyers list

You can use various online sources to find buyers and create a list of potential customers. Good examples include trade databases which make it easy to search for buyers. No database is complete, and even paid databases may miss potential buyers in your most prospective European target markets.

Popular databases relevant to exporters of natural ingredients for health products include:

- [EUROPAGES](#) – directory of European companies. Here you can search by sector and enter key search terms (for example, [natural ingredients](#), [health products](#) or another keyword). You can also filter your results by selecting traders instead of manufacturers (for example 'agent', 'wholesaler' or 'distributor').
- [Wer liefert was](#) – a leading German B2B online marketplace. You can search for companies and filter the results according to your specifications. Search in German and English, as this will give you a wider range of results.
- [Kompass](#) – a large database of companies. After subscribing (at a cost), you can apply several filters to find buyers. However, you can make basic searches for free by entering a product name or category and filtering results based on location or company type.
- [Green trade](#) – a marketplace for organic products. The marketplace has two directories where companies can offer to sell or buy products in specific categories, such as medicinal and aromatic plants, or raw materials and supplements. In addition to looking for buyers, you can also register your company in the seller directory.

You can also use the online trade show exhibitor catalogues to find potential buyers for your products (see the tip 'Participate in industry trade shows' below for more information). These catalogues usually contain links to the exhibitors' company profiles, contact details and the products they produce or are looking for. You can often search by specific product, product category, target country and type of company.

Also, check the websites of sector associations, as these often have lists of their members who are often potential companies you could target. See the tip 'Connect with sector associations' for more information and examples.

Tips:

Use company databases to build a long list of potential buyers, but it is important to be sure that they are the right fit for you before you contact them. This will help make the process more effective and prevent you from wasting time and resources on companies that are not a good fit. See the tip 'Use selection criteria to find the right buyer for your product offer' for more information.

Perform searches in the language of your target market, as this will give you more results.

If you have limited export experience, be aware of fraudulent companies that sell fake company databases. Try to understand whether [emails are legitimate or sent by fraudulent companies](#), for example by checking a company's online presence; red flags include impersonal greetings and poor presentation, spelling and grammar.

3. Connect with sector associations

Connect with industry associations in Europe and specific European country markets, because they can be a valuable source of information. Sector associations play an important role in European Union regulations and laws. They are actively involved in research programmes and corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes. They may also have country-specific and sector-specific information which is vital to your market research. In addition, they give updates on regulations.

National or European-level associations can have useful contacts in the industry. They will usually give member lists, where you can look for (potential) buyers. Many European buyers join such associations.

Important sector associations include:

- [European Federation of Associations of Health Product Manufacturers \(EHPM\)](#) – this organisation represents [specialist health product manufacturers in Europe, as well as national associations](#). The EHPM also makes regulations for the health products industry.
- [Food Supplements Europe](#) – this association represents the interests of the European food supplement industry and aims to make sure that future EU laws and policies reflect the role of this sector. Its members include [national associations and private companies](#).
- [European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations \(EFPIA\)](#) – this organisation represents 1,900 companies in the European pharmaceutical industry. You can find its members on their website, both [companies and national associations](#).
- [European Federation for Complementary and Alternative Medicine \(EFCAM\)](#) – this organisation represents the complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) sector in Europe, including regulations. You can find a full members list on the [EFCAM](#) website.
- [International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements in Europe \(IFOAM EU\)](#) – this is the umbrella organisation for the organic agriculture movement. You can find information on organic regulations and a [full list of members](#) on their website.

Table 1 shows the national associations for the health products sector in selected countries. Some of the websites listed and their member lists are in the national language. You can use the translate function of your search engine to view them in English.

Table 1: National associations in the health products sector in Europe

Country	Association name	About the association	Members list
Belgium	BE-SUP	Represents and promotes the Belgian food supplements industry.	Members list
France	SYNADIET (French Union of Food Supplements)	Represents the interests of companies in the French food supplements industry, supports growth and coordinates industry action. The website also lists information on the size of the French food supplements market , its developments and laws.	Members list
Germany	BDHI (Federal Association of Industrial and Commercial Companies for Pharmaceuticals, Health Food, Dietary Supplements and Cosmetics)	Protects the interests of German manufacturers and distributors of food supplements and other industries. The association does not list its members but offers a matchmaking programme (information in German).	NA
The Netherlands	NPN (Natural and health products, the Netherlands)	Promotes the interests of manufacturers, raw material suppliers, wholesalers, importers and distributors of nutritional supplements in the Netherlands. The website shares data on the Dutch food supplements market .	Members list
Poland	KRSiO (the Polish Council for Supplements and Nutritional Foods)	Represents the interests of producers of dietary supplements and functional foods in Poland.	Members list

United Kingdom	HFMA (Health Food Manufacturers Association)	Represents the interests of the UK's natural health industry at all levels of the legal, regulatory and Parliamentary process. HFMA also uses consumer surveys on the use of food supplements in the UK (PDF).	Members list (PDF)
Italy	Integratori & Salute	National association for the food supplements sector, one of the largest associations in Europe in this sector. It supports the sector in Italy and promotes consumer health.	Members list
Spain	AFEPADI (Association of Health Food and Supplements)	Represents, manages and defends the interests of the food and food supplement industries in Spain.	Members list

Tips:

Focus on associations in countries that can offer the best opportunities for your natural ingredients. Read [the CBI studies on promising export products](#) for more information about different European markets for natural ingredients for health products.

Regularly check association websites for updates on sector trends, regulations and innovation in the health products industry.

Review the membership list of each association's members list, as it can often show potential buyers that you can target in your marketing campaigns. Carefully review the websites of potential buyers to decide if they are the right fit for you and only contact them if they are good fits.

4. Use selection criteria to find the right buyer for your product offer

When looking for buyers, you need to look for companies that offer the best match for you. This requires a good understanding of your offer and the needs of your potential buyer. Try to understand as best as possible the strengths and weaknesses of your business and what you can deliver. Understanding what you can offer a potential buyer helps you to target the right company and promote your product offer.

From your market research, you will have learned what is on the market and what your competitors are offering.

You need to decide on what your company does well, what the consumer wants and what your competitor does not offer. This is your unique selling point.

You also need to know in which segment your natural ingredients end up and the applications of your ingredient in final products such as food supplements and herbal medicinal products. This may help you find the right buyer and show those potential buyers your expertise.

For example, Baobab Exports (South Africa/Zimbabwe) shows potential buyers that they know their products and applications by including extensive [information on health attributes and composition](#). Also, the company shows that it can advise manufacturers on how to use their baobab as an ingredient, by sharing a guide to [formulating with baobab](#).

Figure 1: End-market segments for natural ingredients for health products



Source: [ProFound](#)

To select the best match for your market, you need to find out as much as you can about your potential buyer. Visit their website to gain as much information as you can about their business, their philosophy, size and business practices. Find out which segment(s) they work in and what type of company they are; for example, are they an importer, processor, distributor, or a final product manufacturer? Do they buy raw materials or other processed products like extracts? Do they expect certification, or do they have specific requirements on quality? Do they already use your ingredient or ingredients with similar applications?

In general, European importers and distributors are your most important entry point into the EU market. Importers/distributors can trade in up to 500 species, together with other ingredients. These companies vary in size and product range. Some may focus on one segment, a limited product offer or certified ingredients.

If you can show that you are a good fit as a partner and that you offer a high-quality product that meets volume and delivery requirements, you could target large and diversified companies. Examples include extractors and traders such as the [Martin Bauer Group](#) (Germany) and distributors such as [IMCD](#) (the Netherlands). These diversified companies can demand additional services from their suppliers (such as audits and certifications) at lower prices. Large buyers also want to limit the number of suppliers they source from by focusing on those that offer reliable (large) quantities and (documented) quality.

If you have the resources available, you could directly supply processors or end-product manufacturers and get a better price. Examples of such processors include [Greentech](#) (France) and [Indena](#) (Italy). To supply such players directly, you must have perfect company and product documentation, and you need to have consistent quality and quantity. In addition, you need to improve your logistics so that you can deliver smaller quantities at short notice. You also need to convince manufacturers to add another supplier instead of using an existing supplier, which will be difficult.

If you are a small supplier, it may be easier for you to trade through smaller processors or specialised importers. They often require lower quantities and are still important to the industry. [Organic Herb Trading Co](#) (UK) is an example of such a company. This trader works directly with producers, building long-term partnerships and focusing on ethical trade and certified organic ingredients.

Tips:

Focus on a few buyers at the start. You can find more information on what countries offer the most opportunities for natural ingredients for health products by reading the CBI report [‘What is the](#)

demand for natural ingredients for health products on the European market?’

Only contact companies that are good fits for you. Find the right contact person and introduce your company and your offer. Make your message specific to the company you are contacting; for example, add something you noticed about the company or their product range.

Make sure that you can meet the demands of large buyers for additional services before you target them. Can you meet their demands regarding quantity, quality, delivery schedules, documentation, financial reporting and auditing and price?

5. Understand and meet buyer demands and requirements

Before you contact European buyers, make sure you are ready. You need to get to know your buyers. They will expect more from you than just meeting the standard legal requirements. Buyer requirements will also differ from company to company. You need to find out what their expectations are and how you can meet them.

European buyers of natural ingredients for health products will expect you to give them well-structured and organised product and company documentation. They use this to confirm that you can meet their requirements and specifications. You will need to make a Safety Data Sheet (SDS), Technical Data Sheet (TDS) and Certificate of Analysis (CoA) for your products.

To be sure that your products and processes meet European standards, many European buyers will ask for an audit of your factory. During the audit your potential as a new supplier will be assessed. European buyers can also send a number of questionnaires for you to fill out. You must take these questionnaires seriously. Your willingness to meet these demands will have very large effect on your chances of a successful business relationship. First impressions count.

The business culture of your (potential) buyers may also be different from your own. Cultural backgrounds play an important part in business transactions, and these cultures and their effects are a little different everywhere in Europe.

Tips:

Talk to European buyers. They are your most direct and important source of information. Meet them face to face at trade shows or make appointments for a meeting at or after the show.

See the CBI study on [tips for doing business with European buyers](#) of natural ingredients for health products.

See an [overview of differences in business culture in Europe](#) on Passport to Trade 2.0. This website has short videos about some of the unique qualities of each country’s culture.

Make sure that you can meet buyer requirements before agreeing to them. Not meeting the agreed requirements can lead to the end of your business relationship with buyers.

Review examples of technical documentation for the raw materials or extracts that you use. For example, see this [Safety Data Sheet for ginseng extract](#) (PDF), this [Technical Data Sheet for organic maca powder](#) (PDF) and this [Certificate of Analysis for echinacea herb extract](#) (PDF).

See the CBI [workbook for preparing a technical dossier and technical documents for cosmetic ingredients](#) for more information. Several documentation requirements, such as Technical and Safety Data Sheets, will be similar for health ingredients.

See the CBI Study on [tips for organising your exports to Europe](#), which contains practical advice on topics such as export insurance, packaging and logistics.

6. Participate in industry trade shows

Trade shows are one of the most important places to meet and interact with potential buyers. They are perfect places to look for new business partners and to gather information on trends and product developments. By visiting and/or exhibiting at trade shows, you can also assess your competition and get direct feedback on your company and products from companies in your target market.

Participating in a trade show can require a lot of investment, especially if you exhibit at a show in person. If the costs are too high for your company, you can consider joining the show as a visitor instead.

To make the most of this investment and have a successful trade show participation, proper preparation is crucial. Preparation starts with finding the right trade show, deciding your budget, planning, making your sales and marketing strategy and setting strategic goals for the show. You need to choose the right product offer for the trade show that you are participating in and be sure that you have all the necessary product and company documentation.

You will need to demonstrate how your products differ from your competitors, both in your communication and promotion. Use your understanding of the market to find the right potential buyer for your products and contact them before the show to set up a meeting.

If you exhibit at a trade show, allow yourself enough time to find a great position for your stand and design and anything else you need to take care of. Make a checklist of materials to bring to the trade show so that you do not forget anything.

Figure 2: Vitafoods trade show



Source: [ProFound](#)

At the trade show, be professional with your behaviour, appearance and time management. As you may meet a lot of people during the trade show, write down all your new business contacts to help you follow up on them. After you have successfully concluded your trade show, you need to follow up on contacts made at the trade show and evaluate your performance against the goals you set before going to the show.

You can use trade shows as a platform to present your products to a wide audience. This could be a national or international audience. There are also niche events for more specialised industries/sectors. Some of the main trade shows focusing on ingredients for health products are the following:

- [Vitafoods](#) is an international trade show based in Geneva, Switzerland. This is the key event for final products and ingredients in supplements, fortified food and herbal medicine. You can network with various stakeholders across the supply chain here, including buyers, wholesalers and retailers.
- [Health Ingredients Europe](#) is a travelling trade show which is combined with Food Ingredients Europe and is a leading European trade show for ingredients in supplements and herbal medicine.
- [Nutraceuticals Europe](#) is an important European trade show and congress in Barcelona, Spain, for functional ingredients, novel foods and finished products such as food supplements and health products. Here, you can

network with companies in the sector and join seminars to increase your knowledge.

- [BioFach](#) is the largest trade show for organic products in the world, held annually in Nuremberg, Germany. The show has a strong focus on organic food, but you can also network with companies in the health product industry here.
- [Natural & Organic Products Europe \(NOPE\)](#) in London, UK, and its Scandinavian edition [Ecolife Scandinavia](#) in Malmö, Sweden, are trade shows focusing on natural and organic finished products. These innovative trade shows are very interesting for learning and networking with end-product manufacturers.

Or, you can visit trade shows in your own region to save money. It is also a good opportunity to find background information on your new target market and present your company directly to potential customers. However, the attendance of European buyers at trade shows in your region may not be that high.

Important trade shows in Asia include:

- [Vitafoods Asia](#) in Bangkok, Thailand, is one of the largest trade shows of nutraceuticals in Asia, where you can find buyers and suppliers of food and health ingredients. The show is co-located with Food Ingredients Asia.
- [Healthplex Expo](#) is one of the main trade shows for nutraceuticals in China. Here you can network with buyers, distributors and manufacturers of food and health ingredients, as well as finished products.
- [Biofach South East Asia](#), [Biofach India](#) and [Biofach China](#) are the Asian versions of the European BioFach trade show. These trade shows focus on the organic food sectors in their respective markets.

Important African trade shows include:

- [Africa Health](#) is one of the largest African trade shows in the healthcare sector. The show includes companies from eight product categories, including Wellness & prevention and Healthcare & general services.
- [Organic & Natural Products Expo Africa](#) in Johannesburg, South Africa, is organised by the Organic & Natural Products Portal Africa. This trade show is for trade buyers and direct consumers in the organic and natural products sector, including ingredients and raw materials, health foods and food supplements.

Important trade shows in Latin America include:

- [Food Ingredients South America](#) in Brazil is the leading trade show for food ingredients in Latin America. Among other things, you can meet with companies working with functional food, natural and organic ingredients, plant and herb extracts, nutraceuticals and probiotics.
- [Biofach Brazil](#) is the leading trade show for organic products in Latin America. The trade show is combined with Naturaltech, which focuses on natural food products, supplements and health products.

Tips:

Select the right trade show for your products. Answer questions such as: What type of products are you bringing? In what market segment are they used? Are your products certified organic? Does the trade show focus on innovation, will you find many new/innovative products there? Is the trade show open for brands from outside of Europe, or is it focused on European companies?

Plan to set aside the money required to attend trade shows at least one year in advance. Attending trade shows is expensive, especially for small to medium-sized suppliers in developing countries.

Make sure you can be found on the online platform of the trade fair. After COVID-19, many European trade shows have set up online versions of their trade shows where you can find and connect with other exhibitors.

Make sure your promotional materials and company and product documentation are up to date and ready for others to see before attending a trade show. This helps you to make a good first impression.

Join networking events at industry trade shows to increase your chances of finding buyers who often participate in such events.

After a trade show, make sure you do the follow-up work and monitor your success. Contact the people you have met based on business cards and notes you took during the trade show discussion. Send them the information you promised them. Keep up those good first and second impressions.

7. Invest in online marketing

Having a strong online presence is the best way to attract the attention of potential buyers. The internet is an important tool for promoting your company and making sure that potential clients find you. This became even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic. Investing time and resources in building an online presence can create long-term opportunities. By accessing a website or social media content, buyers can gain a sense of trust.

Websites are an important element of your product marketing. Buyers associate high-quality websites with modern and professional organisations. In general, a good website should contain:

- your company profile, contact details and mission statement
- a well-presented product range (with product descriptions, specifications and pictures)
- your competitive strengths (for example, quality specification, certifications and delivery reliability)
- information on your production and processing processes and facilities
- information on certifications you hold and your quality management system
- information on what you do in terms of sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility

Content needs to be short and clear, organised and grammatically correct. Professional photographs of products, your team and your production facilities can add a sense of credibility. Another option is to create a video about your company and the products you supply and post it on the website. Additionally, you can also include brochures, presentations and product catalogues on your website.

An example of a company with a professional looking and detailed website is [CPX Peru](#). The company clearly explains its mission, vision and its production [processes, which are supported by good quality pictures](#). Also, for its products, the company includes information on benefits and product applications, like for the [company's key product maca](#).

Also, consider using [Search Engine Optimisation \(SEO\)](#). This can make it easier for search engines to find you. In that way, it will also become easier for potential buyers to find you. All you might have to do to get a big effect is change some minor things on your website.

Social media is also a great way to connect with your customers. It is a fast way to update your activities. Most European buyers use online social networks to communicate with potential suppliers. In turn, they expect suppliers to be active online and communicate at a professional level. This means that you need clear, easy-to-access and up-to-date information about your company and products on online networking platforms. Examples include [LinkedIn](#), which is the most important platform for Business-to-Business contacts, while [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) are more commonly used for Business-to-Consumer promotion.

[Afrigetics](#) (South Africa) is an example of a company that uses its online social media presence to promote its company and its hero ingredient, [PelaPower™, a standardised extract of *Pelargonium sidoides*](#). The company uses its LinkedIn account to share stories with a sense of meaning and purpose about the sustainable trade of *Pelargonium*, rather than selling the product. According to the company's owner, people are more likely to connect with you through powerful and real-sounding storytelling rather than selling. Afrigetics creates its own content, such as blogs and videos on growth sites, and shares posts from European manufacturers working with the same ingredient.

Figure 3: Examples of Afrigetics LinkedIn posts



Source: [Afrigetics](#)

In addition to developing your website and social media presence, you can also advertise on online platforms such as [EUROPAGES](#), [Wer liefert was](#), [Kompass](#), [Green trade](#), [Alibaba](#), [TradeB2B](#), [Global Sources](#) and [Go4WorldBusiness](#). European buyers can use these search engines to find suppliers. You can also advertise in (online) journals that focus on the health product sector, such as [NutraIngredients Europe](#) or [Nutraceuticals World](#).

Tips:

Learn about [search engine optimisation \(SEO\)](#) to generate more traffic to your website. You can find useful information on various [blogs](#) and websites. You can also find online courses on platforms such as [Udemy](#) and [LinkedIn](#). Also, check these [steps to make a Google-friendly site](#).

If you do not have the resources to improve your website, use websites such as [Fiverr](#) and [Upwork](#) to hire experts at affordable rates.

Make sure that you have an attractive and up-to-date website, as poorly managed websites can actually harm your business prospects.

Look at the websites of European buyers: what kind of information do they include? What do they do with respect to sustainability? What information do they share about their suppliers?

Try to understand and decide which social media platform you want to use, based for example on which platform(s) your (potential) buyers use. Create and regularly update social media accounts on platforms such as LinkedIn. You can also use social media to keep in touch with existing buyers and find out what your business partners or competitors are doing.

8. Contact trade promotion agencies, embassies and chambers of commerce providing support for your export activities

Trade promotion agencies, embassies and chambers of commerce can be a valuable source of support and information for your export activities in Europe. These organisations offer help and advice on topics such as buyer requirements, quality issues, legal frameworks, certification and market developments. This information can be helpful when choosing which buyers to target and how to deal with them.

Some of these organisations also organise matchmaking programmes, trade missions, coaching programmes and/or training courses for exporters. These programmes offer a wide range of tools to help you access the European market. For example, by connecting you with potential buyers or supporting trade show participation. Joining such programmes can help you gain valuable skills and information on accessing the European market and finding buyers.

Examples of useful support organisations include:

- [Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries \(CBI\)](#) in the Netherlands
- [Import Promotion Desk \(IPD\)](#) in Germany

- [Open Trade Gate Sweden \(OTGS\)](#)
- [Swiss Import Promotion Programme \(SIPPO\)](#)
- [International Trade Centre \(ITC\)](#)
- [Enterprise Europe Network \(EEN\)](#), also see whether your country has an [EEN local contact point](#)

A trade development association in your country can also help you find new business contacts and connect you with institutions that strengthen trade within Europe. They also organise export support programmes. These are good places to meet other exporters and make your network larger. Examples of organisations with successful export support programmes include:

- [PromPeru \(Peru\)](#)
- [Trade Development Authority of Pakistan - TDAP \(Pakistan\)](#)
- [Directorate General for National Export Development - DGNED \(Indonesia\)](#)
- [Department: Trade, Industry and Competition \(dtic\) \(South Africa\)](#)
- [Agricultural Export Council \(Egypt\)](#)

Tips:

Visit events organised by trade development associations and meet with other exporters. Learn from their experience. Discuss and share experiences on trading channels, legal requirements, buyer requirements and logistics.

Look at international and European trade promotion organisations to find a matchmaking or trade support programme. They are mainly targeted at small and medium-sized companies in selected partner countries that want to export their products.

Connect with business support organisations and trade promotion associations in your home country or region. Examples include the [Brazilian Trade and Investment Promotion Agency \(Apex Brazil\)](#), the [Ghana Export Authority \(GEPA\)](#) and the [Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation \(MATRADE\)](#).

Make sure that you study relevant sector information published by trade promotion agencies, embassies and chambers of commerce as it can help you increase your chances of successfully entering the European market.

Visit the [Eurochambers](#) website for a full list of chambers of commerce in Europe. It is important to check the solvency of your potential customers on the websites of chambers of commerce. This can help you assess your risks and the reliability of the buyers.

This study was carried out on behalf of CBI by [ProFound – Advisers In Development](#).

Please review our [market information disclaimer](#).