

Exporting lucuma to Europe

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Lucuma exporters from developing countries can benefit from opportunities provided by European demand for natural and healthier sweeteners. Northwest Europe offers most opportunities for lucuma suppliers. Consumers are most interested in the health benefits of lucuma. Bloggers are strong influencers of the market for lucuma, because possibilities for making health claims on the product label are limited.

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1. Product description

The lucuma tree (*Pouteria lucuma*, formerly known as *Lucuma obovata*) is native to the Andean region where it grows at high elevations. Peru, Ecuador and Chile are the main producers of the fruit from the tree. Other locations where the trees are grown include California (United States), Mexico, Bolivia and Costa Rica.

In this factsheet, we cover the market for lucuma powder. The powder is made by picking fruit from lucuma trees, washing it and then cutting the fruit into small segments. These segments are dehydrated, while maintaining a temperature below 45°C. The dehydrated fruit is then milled into powder.

Lucuma powder contains about 330 calories per 100 grams. It is composed of carbohydrates including sugars (glucose, fructose, sucrose and inositol) (87%), fibre (2.3%), proteins (4%), minerals (2%) and fat (2.4%).

Lucuma powder has been used as a popular sweetener in Peru and Ecuador for a long time, and is mainly known as Peru's most popular ice cream flavour.

In the Harmonised System (HS) lucuma powder is part of a product group with code 1106 30 90 80: 'Flour, meal and powder of the products of Chapter 8 (EDIBLE FRUIT AND NUTS; PEEL OF CITRUS FRUIT OR MELONS) (excl. Flour, meal and powder of banana, watermelon, hazelnuts and pistachios)'.

According to European Union legislation, lucuma is a 'foodstuff with sweetening properties' and not a 'food additive'. Therefore, lucuma does not have an E-number (a classification for food additives).

What makes Europe an interesting market for lucuma exporters?

No need for approval under Novel Food legislation

In Europe, lucuma is not yet well-known and almost became subject to the Novel Food legislation ([Regulation](#)

258/97). The Novel Food legislation of the European Union is intended to prevent the marketing of products which are potentially unsafe for human consumption. In 2009, the French government provided evidence that lucuma had already been marketed before 1997. This prevented the need for lengthy and expensive procedures to obtain approval under the Novel Food legislation. It opened the entire European market to lucuma.

Properties and health benefits of lucuma are becoming more well-known

In the last few years, the properties and health benefits of lucuma have become only slightly more well known in Europe. Compared to European markets for other alternative sweeteners, such as stevia or Chinese monk fruit (i.e. Lo Hang Guo), the market for lucuma powder is not yet very well developed. Many potential buyers still do not have any information on the benefits and special properties of lucuma powder in comparison to other natural sweeteners that they already know about.

North-western European markets are interested in new products

North-western Europe is the main market for lucuma. The largest concentrations of consumers with an interest in new and innovative, natural, healthy food products, such as lucuma, are located here.

Many suppliers of new and innovative food products choose to introduce their product to the United Kingdom first. In general, countries in mainland Europe follow trends in the United Kingdom concerning new products.

Tip:

- If you want to introduce lucuma to the European market on a large scale, use tasting panels to establish whether consumers will like its taste or not. In addition, you can use a food laboratory to test how lucuma can be used in combination with other natural sweeteners in order to diversify its flavour and end uses.

European countries with ties to Latin America are more familiar with lucuma

Peru is the main supplier of lucuma. The main European markets for Peruvian lucuma are:

- United Kingdom (50 tonnes)
- Spain (17 tonnes)
- Germany (15 tonnes)
- Portugal (13 tonnes)
- Italy (8 tonnes).

The large imports by Spain and Italy may be explained by consumer familiarity with lucuma. Spain and Italy have relatively large populations with ties to the lucuma-producing countries (Peru, Ecuador, Chile, Colombia, Bolivia). For example, in 2010, about 200,000 Peruvians lived in Spain and 100,000 in Italy. These consumers often show a strong interest in products from their countries of birth.

Tip:

- Target the migrant populations of lucuma-producing countries. You may even be able to find European importers specialised in importing products from South America.

Strong demand for raw, unprocessed and organic food

European consumers are starting to focus more on unprocessed and 'natural' foods. They perceive [raw food](#) (food cooked under 45°C), organic foods and 'wholefoods' (unprocessed foods) as more natural and healthier.

The main European raw food market can be found in Germany and raw snacks are the leading raw food category. Lucuma can be used as a raw and unprocessed sweetener in raw snacks. An example is the [Rawr Lucuma Cacao Bar](#).

[Food bloggers and vloggers](#) have a large influence in this market segment. They communicate about new, innovative products to consumers and provide useful information on health benefits and practical applications.

In addition, consumers perceive organic products as healthier and more 'natural' than conventional products. The use of chemicals during organic production and processing is restricted. In 2014, the organic market in Europe increased by 7.6%. More recent figures show a growth rate of the organic market in Sweden of [40% in 2015](#).

Based on what web shops (online retail) have on offer, most lucuma on the European market appears to have organic certification.

Tips:

- You can profit from the raw food and wholefoods trend by marketing your product as natural and unprocessed.
- Contact food bloggers who focus on raw, organic and natural foods who could promote your product. You can send them a sample to test the product and write a short blog about taste, benefits and other characteristics. See for example this list of [British healthy food bloggers](#).
- See the website of the European Union for [more information on trade in organic products in Europe](#).
- If you aim to have your lucuma certified as organic, see our study on [Buyer Requirements for Honey and Sweeteners](#) for more information.

Consumers are looking for sugar replacements

Demand for sugar remains strong. However, the health trend is giving rise to an alternative market for healthier sweeteners, such as lucuma. The low calorie levels of lucuma makes it suitable for sugar replacement. Consumers are more aware than ever of the importance of healthy nutrition and many health specialists condemn sugar. Sugar has been related to many health disorders, such as obesity, heart disease and diabetes.

The negative publicity about sugar will not cause its total replacement. Demand for sugar will remain strong, because it is a key ingredient in many foods and beverages. However, the health trend gives rise to an alternative market for healthier sweeteners such as lucuma. Especially for the development of new products, manufacturers want natural healthy sweeteners to replace sugar.

Tip:

- Promote the possibilities of replacing sugar with lucuma. Give examples of how lucuma can replace sugar.

Growing diabetic population

Lucuma is an interesting product for the growing group of diabetic consumers in Europe. Its low glycaemic index (GI) makes it a suitable alternative for some conventional sweeteners such as cane and beet sugar. A low GI indicates that it takes longer to process the sugar and that blood sugar levels rise slowly. Research has shown that foods with a low GI can help to prevent diabetes and offer a healthier alternative for foods with a high GI.

In 2015, 9% of the European population was diabetic. This group is expected to grow in the upcoming years to

11% of the total European population in 2040. Note that there is also a growing group of consumers who have self-diagnosed themselves with diabetes out of health concerns.

Tips:

- Promote the low glycaemic index (GI) of your lucuma to gain more interest from buyers.

Ethical sourcing

Growing interest of consumers for ethically sourced products provides opportunities for ethically traded products such as lucuma. Consumers in Europe are increasingly concerned about suppliers and the circumstances under which their product is produced, such as the working conditions of producers.

The leading standards organisation in the ethical trade market, Fairtrade International, reports significant growth in their sales.

Fairtrade certification is particularly relevant in conventional market segments, as opposed to the functional food market (e.g. diabetic foods). In the conventional market, a Fairtrade label offers suppliers a competitive edge since it distinguishes a product from other sugar substitutes.

- Check information of [Fairtrade International](#) for opportunities for fair-trade lucuma.
- See our study on [trends for honey and sweeteners](#) for more information.

2. What requirements must lucuma comply with to be allowed on the European market?

Legal requirements

Buyers in the European Union have strict requirements for lucuma powder. You will only be able to successfully market your product in Europe when you comply with these requirements. See our study on [buyer requirements for honey and sweeteners](#) for a detailed analysis of these requirements. The following topics are relevant for lucuma powder exports to Europe:

- food safety – traceability, hygiene and control
- pesticide residues
- food safety certification
- documentation
- representative samples
- payment and delivery terms
- kosher and halal certification
- good agricultural practices (GAP)
- certification of organic production
- Fairtrade certification
- quality
- labelling
- packaging.

Mycotoxin contamination requires special attention

It is important that you have a clear understanding of the requirements listed above. Moreover, European Union legislation regarding [maximum levels for certain contaminants](#) (1831/2003) are of particular concern in the lucuma powder market. Mycotoxins (aflatoxins and ochratoxin A) are common food-safety issues related to powders from fruits and vegetables.

Mycotoxins are produced by certain types of fungi (commonly known as moulds). Contamination with mycotoxins often results from the lack of good agricultural, collection and hygienic practices in production, storage and processing of foods.

European buyers often ask for a certificate that proves that you have a food-safety management system in place. Such a food-safety management system must prevent contamination by mycotoxins. See our study on [buyer requirements for honey and sweeteners](#) for food-safety requirements including certification.

Tips:

- Inform lucuma farmers or collectors on good practices to minimise contamination. Store lucuma fruits in a clean, dry, ventilated space before processing to comply with maximum levels for certain contaminants, such as ochratoxin A.
- Read the factsheet of the European Commission on [managing food contaminants: how the EU ensures that our food is safe](#).

Quality requirements

Lucuma powder must be 100% pure (i.e. not mixed with any other products that have similar characteristics) and 100% natural (i.e. no chemicals may be added).

In addition to the quality parameters above, buyers of lucuma powder also consider quality consistency. They prefer a large volume with a consistent quality level over smaller batches of different qualities.

Tips:

- Minimise variation in quality within a lot by following strict grading and sorting standards for raw materials selection (i.e. fruit selection). Variation in physical properties of the raw materials also means the flavour profile will vary.
- You can also standardise your product by mixing fruits from different crops (e.g. early and late crops).
- Apply the [code of hygienic practice for dehydrated fruits and vegetables](#) (CAC/RCP 5-1971) of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). For example, one of the hygienic practices in this code is to keep tools (e.g. grinding equipment) and facilities clean. This prevents contamination and quality degradation.
- When processing your lucuma, dehydrate the fruits at temperatures below 45°C. When the product is not exposed to temperatures exceeding this limit, it may be called a 'raw' food.
- Only add other ingredients to your lucuma powder when this has been specifically agreed upon with your buyer; clearly mention it on the product label.
- Be clear on what quality you can continue to supply over a longer period. Once you develop a quality standard, you must be able to maintain that same level of quality, also when upscaling your production.

Labelling requirements

Source: *Fitness treats.com*

Use markings on your products to track individual production batches. Use the English language for labelling unless your buyer has indicated otherwise and mention the following information:

- product name

- batch code
- whether the product is destined for use in food products
- name and address of exporter
- best before date
- net weight in metric units
- recommended storage conditions
- for organic and Fairtrade include name/code of the inspection body and certification number.

Packaging requirements

Source: Sevenhillwholefoods.com

Lucuma powder is packed in Kraft paper bags or polypropylene (PP) bags with a polyethylene (PE) inner bag. These types of packaging provide protection from contamination and moisture. This is necessary as the powder attracts water. Buyers might have specific packaging requirements as well.

Tips:

- Clean your processing and packaging equipment before packaging the powder.
- Protect the cargo from moisture during loading to avoid mould.
- Keep temperatures and humidity low during transportation with good ventilation.
- Protect the cargo from pests such as beetles and moths.

3. What competition will I be facing on the European lucuma market?

Competition from other natural sweeteners

The competition for lucuma producers mostly comes from exporters of other natural sweeteners that have similar product properties.

For example, palm sugars and agave syrup are high in calories but have a low glycaemic index (GI). They compete with lucuma in the sweetener market segment for products with a low GI. Compared to lucuma, palm sugars and agave syrup are widely known sweeteners, while lucuma still needs to be discovered on the market by many consumers.

Lucuma also faces competition from stevia and yacón. Stevia and yacón not only are natural sweeteners with a low GI, but are also low in calories. While yacón is relatively new on the European market, stevia has already become a mainstream product.

Peru dominates supplies to Europe

Peru remains the dominant supplier of lucuma to Europe. The country accounts for an estimated 90% of global production of lucuma and is one of the leading suppliers of lucuma to Europe. Between 2011 and 2015, Peruvian exports of lucuma (fresh and processed) to Europe increased on average by 44% annually to 116 tonnes. Of Peru's total exports in 2015, around 22.6% consisted of lucuma powder. Destinations outside Latin America, such as the European markets, mainly import powder and pulp.

Competition from other countries is virtually absent at the moment. The small size of the current market in Europe for lucuma does not yet encourage countries to invest in promotion of lucuma trade. However, other lucuma-producing countries such as Chile and Ecuador may also enter the market in the future if the European market grows.

Tips:

- Do not attempt to compete directly with conventional sugars. Lucuma is not price competitive in comparison to conventional sugars.
- Stress the unique selling point of your lucuma, that is as a new product that is healthier than conventional sugar and other natural sweeteners because of its low glycaemic index and low calorie levels.
- See our study on [competition for honey and sweeteners](#) for more information.

4. Which channels can you use to put lucuma on the European market?

Market segments

Lucuma powder for consumers

According to industry sources, new and innovative foods such as lucuma powder are generally introduced to the market as a final product (or consumer product). Food and beverage manufacturers wait to see how consumers respond. Only after consumers respond positively will manufacturers invest in new product development with the respective ingredient.

Currently, most lucuma powder found in Europe is offered to consumers as a final product. This segment requires retail packed lucuma of high quality. The larger retailers of lucuma often require their suppliers to have a [British Retail Consortium](#) (BRC) or [International Food Safety](#) (IFS) certificate. BRC and IFS are certification schemes for advanced food-safety management systems. Investments in implementation of these systems can be high.

Lucuma powder for manufacturers

European manufacturers are starting to launch products with lucuma as an ingredient.

Particularly manufacturers of raw and/or organic products show interest in exotic ingredients (from developing countries). Chocolate tablets such as [Doisy & Dam's Coconut & Lucuma chocolate bar](#) accounted for around a third of new product launches with lucuma in the past five years.

Ice cream is the main application for lucuma in South America and is also one of the potential applications in Europe.

Other potential applications for lucuma powder include milk-based products such as yoghurts and smoothies, cakes, cookies and fillings.

In the European market for alternative sweeteners, success of a product depends to a large extent on its flavour. Lucuma has a sweet caramel flavour and leaves an aftertaste which many consumers do not appreciate. This may prevent lucuma from becoming a mainstream product.

Tips:

- Focus your promotion efforts on importers that supply directly to retailers instead of food and beverage manufacturers. Demand from importers is still much larger than demand from food and beverage manufacturers.
- Only target large retail chains if you have a BRC or IFS certificate. BRC or IFS certification is only

feasible if you already have a strong reputation, regularly supply large retail chains through importers and know you will be supplying these retail chains after certification.

- Target specialised importers of organic products when you have organic certified lucuma.

Market channels

Figure 2: Major market channels for lucuma

In Europe, specialised importers of natural foods (including raw foods) and organic products are the main channels to the market for alternative natural sweeteners. These are of most interest to lucuma exporters. Specialised importers include [Rapunzel](#), [Raw-Superfood](#), [RealFoods](#) and [Naturata](#). Conventional importers are generally less interested in niche products such as lucuma.

Lucuma for the consumer markets is mainly sold at specialised retailers in Europe such as health food shops and retailers focusing on organic products. Due to the high price of lucuma, conventional retailers such as supermarkets show little interest in selling these products.

Tips:

- Link up with sector associations and join cooperatives if you cannot reach the required volumes on your own.
- Do not focus on supplying food manufacturers directly. The latter prefer to purchase from importers, which offer a convenient one-stop shop. Food manufacturers focus their activities on the development, manufacturing and marketing of foods.
- See our study on [market channels and segments for honey and sweeteners](#) for more information.

5. What are the end-market prices for lucuma?

As described in the market segments section, lucuma powder is only sold in Europe by specialized retailers. The end market prices for 1 kilogram of lucuma powder range between € 40 and € 60. You can find examples in Table 1.

For exporters who want to position their product above other sweeteners, premium pricing is also an option. This can be done by organic certification and a good marketing campaign. For such a campaign documentation on product benefits and applications is necessary.

Table 1: Examples of end-market prices in European countries

Brand and details	Retailer	Price and packaging size	Price per kg
Organic Naturya Lucuma Powder (organic)	Holland & Barrett , the United Kingdom	€13.10 / 300 grams	€43.67

Superfoodies Lucuma Powder (organic)	Healthy Supplies, the United Kingdom	€5.95 / 100 grams	€59.50
Lucuma poeder (organic)	Ekoplaza , the Netherlands	€12.99 / 250 grams	€51.96
Lucuma poeder	Vitaminesperost , the Netherlands	€12.95 / 125 grams	€103.60
Lucuma Pulver (organic)	Raw Living, Germany	€10.95 / 250 grams	€43.80
Lucuma Pulver (organic)	Keimling , Austria	€14.95 / 300 grams	€49.83
Poudre de Lucuma (organic)	Myprotein, France	€12.59 / 225 grams	€41.97
Lucuma pulver raw & eko (organic)	Ravarubutiken , Sweden	€12.87 / 250 grams	€51.48
Lucuma Powder (organic)	Superfoodbutikken, Norway	€12.07 / 250 grams	€48.28

Price breakdown for lucuma powder in bulk

1. Raw material supply: 25%
2. Processing and export: 35%
3. Shipment: 5%
4. Import, packaging, processing and distribution to food industry: 35%

Keep in mind that the price breakdown for your product depends on your specific situation and may differ significantly.

Tips:

- Use organic certification to obtain a premium on your product.
- Reduce fluctuations in prices of your raw materials through agreements with your suppliers. Build in price flexibility, but also set minimum and maximum prices for the raw materials. Long-term, mutually beneficial agreements can help to prevent large price fluctuations.

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