

9 tips for organising your export of natural ingredients for health products to Europe

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As an exporter of natural ingredients for health products to Europe, it is important for you to organise your exports to Europe correctly and efficiently. You must therefore have a good understanding of your export readiness as well as practical matters regarding your ingredient exports. It is also important to understand regulations and organise your documents, as well as tackle key topics from a sustainability perspective, such as packaging, logistics and certification schemes.

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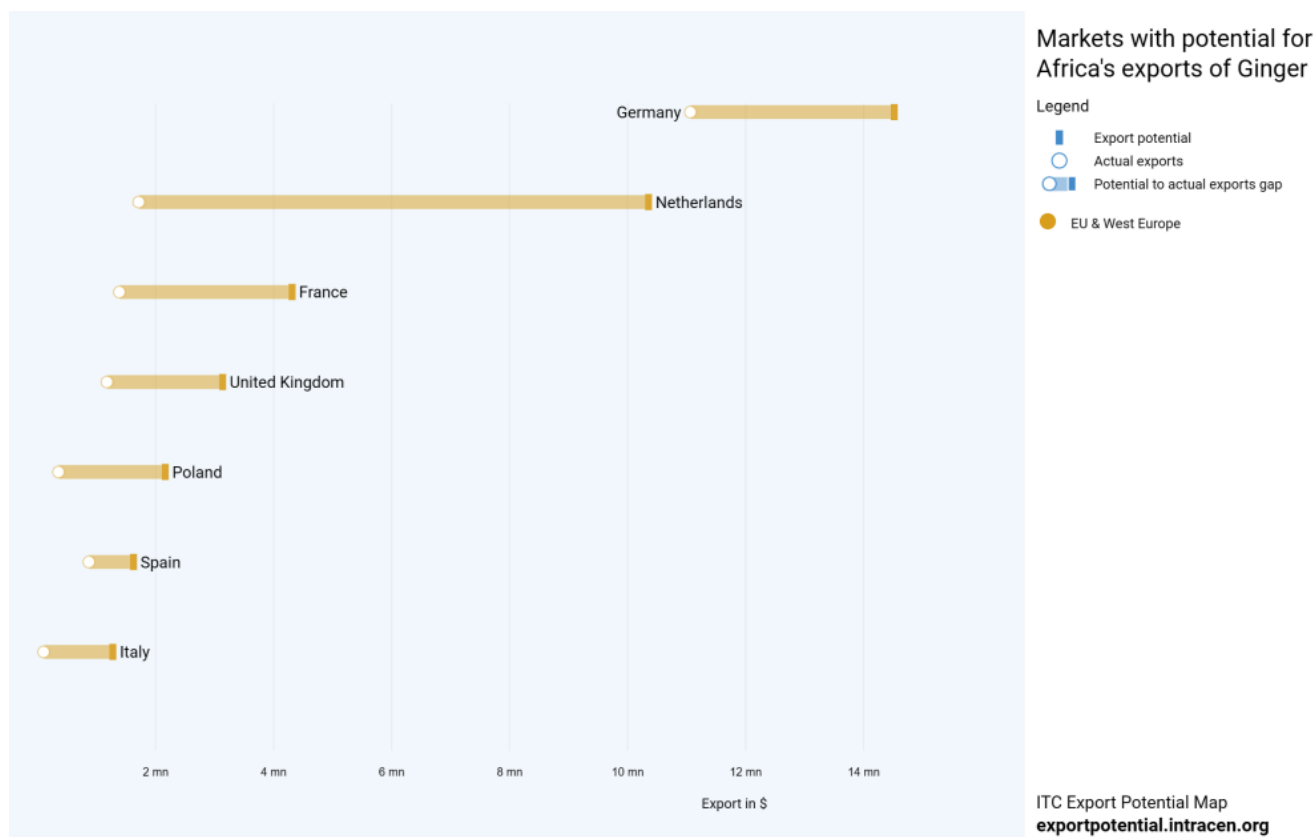
1. Know how to determine your export readiness

When deciding to export to international markets, you should be financially stable and have an established local/regional market presence. The experience you have in regional and local markets will enable you to more easily navigate the cultural, regulatory and logistical challenges associated with exporting. With a good foundation, entering export markets will be easier.

Before entering new markets in the health sector, you should conduct thorough market research to identify the most attractive target markets with a demand for your natural ingredients. Websites such as the [Global Trade Atlas](#) and the [International Trade Centre Market Analysis Tool Portal](#) can provide valuable insights and data to support your market research efforts. Figure 1 below is an example of how you can use the ITC Trade Map Tool (Export Potential Map) to explore the potential export opportunity for your natural ingredient.

When conducting market research for international markets you should have a clear picture of trends, potential competitors, distributions channels and market entry barriers, as well as the potential risks involved.

Figure 1: Example of export potential for ginger on European market



Source: ITC-MAT, 2023

Secondly, you should ensure that your natural ingredients meet the necessary quality, safety and regulatory standards of your target market. As a first step, [conduct product and laboratory testing](#) of your products because this will give you a good idea of where your product stands in terms of quality and which markets you can target as a result. It is likewise advisable to obtain the correct certification for the market that you want to enter. You can collaborate with quality control agencies such as [Eurofins](#) to verify your product's quality and safety for international markets.

Thirdly, you should establish robust logistics and supply chain management processes to be able to handle international shipment efficiently. Ensure you select correct freight forwarders, customs brokers and transportation providers with extensive experience in handling export of natural ingredients. You can use websites like the International Federation of Freight Forwarders Association ([FIATA](#)) and World Customs Organisation ([WCO](#)), which offer resources and information on customs procedures.

Lastly, you should develop a well-defined market entry strategy that outlines your target market, pricing, distribution channels and marketing approach. Your market entry strategy should include your strategy for attending trade shows and exhibitions, as well as leveraging the opportunities of e-commerce and digital marketing sales channels.

If you thoroughly evaluate these factors, you will be able to assess your export readiness and improve your chances of successfully exporting natural ingredients to the health sector in Europe.

Tips:

Conduct a feasibility study to evaluate the potential costs, revenue and risks associated with entering export markets for the natural ingredient you trade in.

Analyse competitors that are already in the market and understand the unique selling points that set

their products and companies apart.

Assess internal capacities to handle the complexities involved in international trade, including export regulations, customs procedures and foreign currency transactions.

Visit trade fairs in Europe to assess your export readiness, or to meet potential buyers. Interesting trade events are [Biofach](#) (Germany, organic products only), [Convention on Pharmaceutical Ingredients](#) (alternating European cities), [Food Ingredients Europe](#) (alternating European cities) and [Vitafoods Europe](#) (Switzerland). Attending such events can also provide you with additional insight into the preferences of European buyers. By understanding the market better, you can ensure that your specific product corresponds with the demand and requirements.

Refer to our study [Tips for finding buyers on the European market for natural ingredients for health products](#) to learn where to find European buyers.

2. Understand European market regulations and standards

Exporting natural ingredients for health products to Europe requires an in-depth understanding of the regulations and standards specific to this market, as well as to each individual country in the region. Europe has very strict regulations in place to ensure the safety, quality and traceability of natural ingredients entering the territory. As an exporter, you should familiarise yourself with the [EU's sanitary and phytosanitary requirements](#), labelling regulations, packaging standards and health ingredient-specific regulations, including:

- Health Claims – The [EU's Health Claim Regulation \(EC\) No 1924/2006](#) establishes rules for making health claims on food products. Health claims refer to statements suggesting a relationship between a food and a health benefit.
- Cosmetics Regulation – intended use in cosmeceuticals requires compliance with the [EU's Cosmetics Regulation \(EC\) No 1223/2009](#). The obligations of this regulation include conducting safety assessments, notifying cosmetics products through the [Cosmetic Product Notification Portal](#) (CPNP) and complying with labelling requirements.

Compliance with the general principles and requirements for food safety can be found under the European Union (EU) [Regulation 178/2002](#). At a minimum, compliance with basic requirements is critical for gaining market access and building trust in your company among importers and manufacturers.

Two of the more common non-compliance issues for buyers are quality and contamination. As a result of this, the demand for organic-certified natural ingredients in Europe is increasing. If you are looking to enter organic markets, then you must meet [EU Regulation 834/2007](#), which outlines the organic production requirements for agricultural products. The EU Commission and EU countries offer [various support measures to organic producers](#), including financial help and advice on best practices or adopting innovative solutions. Additionally, the [International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements](#) (IFOAM) provides support for organic certification from production to training.

Most European buyers purchasing natural ingredients for health products will require adherence to [Good Agricultural and Collection Practices \(GACP\)](#) concerning growing, collecting and primary processing of medicinal plants/herbal substances that are used for medicinal purposes. It covers both cultivated and wild-collected ingredients.

Moreover, there are EU guidelines on [Good Manufacturing Practices](#) (GMP) for medicinal products. The guidelines establish the standards for production, quality control and distribution of medicinal products. Adhering to GMP ensures that your manufacturing process meets the necessary quality and safety

requirements. Although this will most likely not be required for the manufacturing of ingredients, it is important to be aware of specific standards, for example regarding traceability.

European consumers are beginning to place more importance on environmental sustainability and social responsibility. Increasingly, European importers want to establish long-term relationships with their suppliers. One buyer consulted for this study stated that a relationship with their producer 'allows transparency along the supply chain and we can also co-invest to ensure we get the highest-quality natural ingredient'. Through marketing stories, buyers are now using social certifications as a mechanism to show consumers their commitment to the communities they work with.

As an exporter, you should consider acquiring certification that shows your natural ingredient is meeting standards of environmental protection and social responsibility, but making sure to follow specific market demand. Figure 2 below highlights popular certification schemes for sustainable production in Europe.

Figure 2: Certifications that show your commitment to social responsibility



Source: various, 2023

Table 1: Explanation of common social certification standards

Standard	Description
Fairtrade International	Reflects a company's commitment to social sustainability and requires producers to meet a range of economic, environmental and social criteria.
Fair for Life	Reflects a company's commitment to social sustainability and includes more extensive environmental sustainability criteria than Fairtrade. It relates to responsible supply chains and CSR.
FairWild	A standard focusing on social and environmental responsibility of wild-harvested natural ingredients.

Rainforest Alliance	Main goal is to promote sustainable farming and forestry practices, conserve biodiversity, protect ecosystems, and improve livelihoods of workers and communities.
Certified B Corp	Involves an assessment across 5 areas, including governance, workers, communities, environment and customers. This standard is a mixture of social and environmental performance and transparency across the supply chain.
SPP	Aims to address some of the key challenges faced by small-scale farmers and producers, including limited access to markets, low bargaining power and unfair trading practices.
Global GRASP	Standard focused on social responsibility and centred around workers' voice, human and labour rights information, human and labour rights indicators, and child and young workers protection.

Source: ProFound, 2023

By investing time and resources into understanding the European market regulations and standards, you will be better positioned to meet the compliance requirements associated with exporting to the EU. In the process, you will minimise risk and better position your natural ingredients in the European market.

Tips:

Talk to your buyer to better understand what their preferences would be in terms of certification and how the market is generally developing for specific certification schemes.

Check whether your potential buyer would be willing to invest in supporting you achieve a certification standard – some will be willing to do this if they are committed to a long-term relationship with you.

Assess whether the different certification systems you are considering are in line with your vision and mission as a company and whether they align with your marketing strategy.

3. Choose payment terms that are acceptable to both you and your buyer

International trade has many different payment terms to choose from. It is important to realise that each term has its advantages and disadvantages. Different payment terms introduce different risks for all involved parties. This makes it very important to assess the risks for and advantages of each payment term before agreeing on something.

As an exporter, you must consider several factors before selecting an international payment method, including your and the importer's expectations, financial resources, available time, prior experience, and the risks you

want to take. Remember that you want to mitigate potential risks while aiming to find common interest with your European buyers. Choosing the right payment method is essential for building long-lasting relationships with buyers.

Table 2: Advantages and disadvantages of different payment terms

Payment term	Advantage	Disadvantage
Letters of Credit (LC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offers assurance to both exporters and buyers by involving banks in the verification of documents and the guarantee of payment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be aware that LCs are the most expensive option for buyers and require a lot of paperwork.
Cash in Advance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Least risky form of payment for exporters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cash in Advance is the riskiest way for buyers to do business. It is the least competitive payment term.
Open Accounts (only recommended for trusted and established trade relations!)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low-risk for buyers, as they receive goods before payment.• It saves exporters and buyers the administrative costs of an intermediate bank and documentary credit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Higher risks and pressure on an exporter's cash flow.
Documentary Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less risky than Open Accounts.• Lower costs and greater flexibility compared to LC.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Banks do not make payments in the event that a buyer is unwilling to pay upon the arrival of goods.• Documentary Collection is more secure than Open Account but riskier than LC.

Source: ProFound, 2023

Letters of Credit

For both importers and exporters, Letters of Credit (LC) are considered the most secure payment method. This is because an LC allows both parties to engage a neutral party, typically a bank, to resolve disputes. The chosen bank guarantees the exporter full payment upon the dispatch of goods.

Cash in Advance

Cash in Advance benefits exporters because it is relatively risk-free. The payment for natural ingredients is

received before delivery. However, this places buyers at a disadvantage, as payment is made before they receive the ingredients. Cash in Advance payments are typically facilitated through wire transfers or credit card transactions. Internet-based [escrow services](#) are gaining popularity for reducing fraud risk and ensuring compliance with agreement terms.

Consider using Cash in Advance when trading high-value natural ingredients with European buyers, particularly those with weak credit ratings. This approach minimises risks for you. However, relying solely on Cash in Advance may put exporters at a competitive disadvantage, so flexibility and compromise are encouraged to nurture long-lasting relationships.

Open Accounts

Open Account is another international payment method where exporters deliver natural ingredients before receiving payment. This approach carries substantial risks for exporters, especially when there is no established trading relationship with the buyer. In such cases, there is no guarantee of payment after goods are delivered. Nevertheless, once a business relationship is established, the Open Account method becomes more favourable. Exporters should, however, consider purchasing insurance to protect against non-payment scenarios.

Documentary Collections

Documentary Collection is an international payment method that enables exporters to use banks to collect their payment upon delivering the required documentation. Advantages of Documentary Collection include lower costs and greater flexibility compared to LC. But, a drawback is that European buyers might not make payments despite receiving the correct documentation. In such cases, the bank does not take responsibility and will not make payments either. This means that this form of payment requires caution in markets with political instability or in situations where there is an elevated risk of non-payment by the buyer.

Tips:

Familiarise yourself with the expectations of European buyers and the prevalent payment methods for natural ingredients to make more informed decisions.

Make sure to agree on payment terms before signing a contract. Consider your financial and other risks and benefits pursuant to these terms.

Seek the guidance of financial institutions, such as banks or agents, to determine your negotiation capabilities. Several leading financial institutions help exporters who want to export their natural ingredients to Europe, for example [HSBC](#), [Deutsche Bank](#) and [BNP Paribas](#).

Consider multiple factors, including contract type, duration, and the value of natural ingredients when choosing your payment terms. For high-value natural ingredients, prioritise secure payment methods such as Cash in Advance or LC.

4. Choose the most efficient and sustainable mode of international transport

As an exporter of natural ingredients for health products, you must select the most appropriate mode of international transport. This is crucial to ensure successful and efficient trade operations. Choosing the correct transport option will significantly impact your business, as it will affect delivery times, costs, and the overall customer experience.

One of the most important elements of international trade is delivery times and ensuring that your goods arrive

on time. European buyers often prefer shorter delivery times because they want to be able to meet their market demands promptly. Although air freight is faster and more reliable than sea freight in terms of on-time delivery, it is important to note that following the COVID-19 pandemic transportation schedules and costs remained affected. On top of this, European businesses are more concerned about sustainability and their carbon footprint – for this reason, [sea freight is seen as the more sustainable alternative](#). But this depends on your buyer's preference. Stay informed on the latest developments. You can refer to industry websites such as [Freightos](#), which will provide market insights, rates, and information on sea and air freight.

Another important factor to consider when choosing your mode of international transport is the volume or quantity of your shipment. Sea freight is usually more cost-effective for larger volumes, while air freight can be more economical for small quantities. According to industry information, sea freight is estimated to be 4-6 times cheaper than air freight for large volumes. You should [understand the cost implications and trade-offs between the 2 modes of transport](#) to optimise your shipping strategy. Websites like the [World Shipping Council](#) provide valuable resources and data on shipping, including sustainable shipping solutions, statistics and cost comparisons.

Lastly, you must analyse delivery costs and [map out a transportation budget](#) to ensure optimal allocation of resources. To create a transportation budget you should factor in freight charges, insurance, handling fees, customs duties, and any additional charges associated with a specific route you are shipping to. You can work closely with logistics providers and freight forwarders to obtain accurate quotes and understand the breakdown of costs for each mode of transport.

Choosing the right mode of transport plays a critical role in the success of exporters of natural ingredients. It is necessary to consider various factors, such as delivery time, volume, quantity, and cost to make informed decisions. However, choosing the optimal mode of transport can be a challenging task. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct extensive research and analyse the market trends carefully. By studying these factors and staying informed, you can optimise your shipping strategy, meet customer demands, and ensure the success of your natural ingredients export business.

Tips:

Use [Freightos](#) to estimate the shipping costs based on different parameters like origin, destination, volume and mode of transport.

Consult with industry experts and leverage their experience for better decision-making related to cost-saving strategies and efficient modes of transportation.

Familiarise yourself with Incoterms by reading [Tip 6 in this study on Purchase export insurance](#). Remember that the mode of transport is a key factor in choosing the right Incoterm.

Read these [ten tips on international freight](#) and apply some of these lessons to your company.

5. Make a checklist of your export documents and regularly review them

When exporting to international markets, there are many different documents that you will need to have ready in order to finalise the necessary processes and get paid. You therefore need to keep a folder and checklist of all the documents you require for export. In your checklist, it is advisable to group your documents into 3 categories:

1. Required documents for each shipment: for example, your invoice, transportation documents and certificate of origin.
2. Documents that provide you with a competitive edge: these include food safety documents, documents that prove full traceability in your supply chain, and laboratory test results.
3. Documents that will need to be adjusted based on the buyer you are working with: for example, a code of conduct, specific social certification, quality assurance documents and tests on allergens.

You should maintain records of all information related to your product and its origin. This entails invoices, bills of lading, production records, and other supporting documents. If you organise your documents effectively, you can demonstrate compliance, plus future audits or inquiries will be easier to handle.

The main reason to obtain a certificate of origin is because it helps customs officials verify the accuracy of the information provided and ensure compliance with trade regulations. Moreover, with a certificate of origin you can take advantage of specific preferential trade agreements that may exist between the country you are exporting to and the country you are exporting from.

Depending on the type of trade agreement your country has with the EU, 2 types of documents are used:

- Form A – use this form as a document of origin if your country is part of the [Generalised Scheme of Preference](#) (GSP).
- EUR.1 – use this form if your country has signed a [preferential trade agreement](#) with the EU. If the export value is below €6,000, you should only write a statement on your invoice.

There are also some commercial documents required for export:

[Packing List](#) – provides a detailed breakdown of the content of each container being shipped. It includes information such as item description, quantity, weight and dimensions. It is not required by customs authorities, but helps them know what is in the container if they do want to open it.

[Commercial Invoice](#) – provides a detailed description of the goods being exported, including total value, terms of sale and quantity. The commercial invoice serves as a basis for customs valuation and provides information to the buyer.

[Bill of Lading](#) – a transportation document issued by the carrier or agent. It serves as a receipt for goods and provides evidence of the contract of carriage. There are different types of bills of lading, for example, negotiable or non-negotiable. The type depends on the specific requirements and the terms of shipment.

Specific administrative documents are also required:

[Safety Data Sheets](#) – provide information about safe handling, storage, and potential hazards associated with your natural ingredient. It is very important if the ingredient you are exporting is classified as a hazardous substance or requires specific handling warnings and instructions.

[Good Manufacturing Practices](#) (GMP) Certification – demonstrates that your manufacturing processes meet specific quality standards and ensure consistent production of safe and effective health products.

Figure 3: Document checklist for exporting natural ingredients for health products

Required Documents		Checklist	Other Documents	Checklist
Certificate of Origin	Form A – used if your country is part of the Generalised Scheme of Preferences	Y/N	Certificate of Analysis	Y/N
	EUR.1 – used if your country has signed the preferential trade agreement with the EU	Y/N	Product Specification	Y/N
Commercial Documents	Proforma Invoice – used to show importer exact amount to be paid and payment method	Y/N	Export Certificate	Y/N
	Commercial Invoice – used by customs authorities as evidence of export	Y/N	Weight Certificate	Y/N
	Packing List – used to specify number of goods in individual packages and gives gross and net weight	Y/N	Certificate of Inspection	Y/N
Administrative and Transport Documents	Phytosanitary Certificate – some natural ingredients for health products require testing before being exported	Y/N	Blacklist Certificate	Y/N
	Health Certificate – suppliers must provide to EU customs authority if exporter country is part of a stricter import condition	Y/N	CITES Certificate	Y/N
	Transport Documents – depending on mode of transport, including Bill of Lading, Road Waybill, Rail Waybill, Airway Bill and FIATA Bill of Lading	Y/N	Voluntary Certificates	Y/N
			Financial Insurance Document	Y/N
			Contract	Y/N

Source: ProFound, 2023

Tips:

Search for a freight forwarder via an association in your country through the website of the [International Federation of Freight Forwarder's Association](#) or find a list of [recognised ship agents and brokers](#) on the website of the Federation of National Associations of Ship Brokers and Agents (FONASBA).

[Download and print this checklist \(PDF\)](#) to organise your ingredients for health products export.

6. Purchase export insurance

As an exporter you need to be aware of and consider insuring against the risk of unexpected events. Some of the risks include non-payment by buyers, cargo damage or loss during transit, political instability, and unforeseen events such as natural disasters or economic crises. By purchasing export insurance you will be covered against the potential risks involved in export procedures. The insurance policy you purchase can help you recover the monetary value of the goods.

Export credit insurance

The main aim of export credit insurance is to protect you from non-payment. The main advantage of purchasing export credit insurance is to protect you against buyer's slow or non-payment for your natural ingredients.

Here are some common export credit insurance schemes you can purchase:

- Short-term insurance: includes a repayment period of up to 1 year
- Single-buyer policy: this insurance is best used to reduce the risk of working with a single buyer
- Multiple-buyer policy: best if you export to a range of customers

Some of the most common credit insurance companies for agricultural products are [Euler Hermes](#), [Zurich Insurance Group](#) and [Credendo](#). The price for insurance depends on the risk involved in the transport, your history and annual turnover.

Incoterms

To better understand the [rules that define the responsibilities of parties involved in the export transaction](#), you need to know about [International Commercial Terms](#) (Incoterms). Incoterms are internationally recognised trade terms that define the responsibilities of buyers and sellers in international transactions. These are useful to exporters because they help you establish clear guidelines for the allocation of costs, risks and obligations. The result from this process is a smoother international trade operation.

Figure 4 below provides a brief outline of the existing Incoterms and related responsibilities. Incoterms are divided into 2 groups: those for any mode of transport (EXW, FCA, CPT, CIP, DAP or DDP) and those specifically for sea and inland waterway transport only (FAS, FOB, CFR and CIF).

One of the most common Incoterms for you as an exporter of natural ingredients for health products is [Free on Board](#) (FOB). FOB states that the importer is responsible for the container when loaded, and for arranging and paying for the insurance.

Another common Incoterm is [Cost, Insurance and Freight](#) (CIF). Although the liability and risk for the container under CIF is still the importer's, CIF requires that the exporter take care and pay for the freight insurance. If you fail to do so and something happens to the goods during transit, the importer will file a lawsuit against you for not having complied with their requirements. In the case of CIF, the insurance policy must be presented to customs upon arrival of the vessel at the destination port.











As an exporter you must have a clear understanding of the obligations related to each Incoterm. Not only is it important for you to be clear on the responsibilities you have, but it will also help you when pricing your goods for export. For example, FOB requires less time investment and expenses for your company – for this reason, your product must be priced accordingly.

Usually, the cost of your freight insurance will depend on the total value of the goods for export as well as the origin of the container and the distance it must travel. For example, a shipment from Nigeria to Europe will be much cheaper than a shipment from Peru.

Some international insurance companies with a department for freight insurance are [Gallagher](#), [Maersk](#) and [AIG](#). You can find many other companies online. Oftentimes, importers have a specific insurance company they will require their supplier to work with.

In general, you should get insurance on time before the shipment is loaded. While the possibility of damage or loss of goods during shipment is generally low, insurance is relatively low-cost and will spare you a lot of problems and expenses if something does go wrong.

Figure 4: Incoterms rules and responsibility quick reference guide

	 LOADING, TRANSIT TO PORT AND EXPORT CUSTOMS	 UNLOADING AT EXPORT PORT	 LOADING AT EXPORT PORT	 TRANSIT TO DESTINATION PORT	 FREIGHT INSURANCE	 UNLOADING AT IMPORT PORT	 LOADING TRUCK AT IMPORT PORT	 TRANSIT TO DESTINATION	 IMPORT CUSTOMS CLEARANCE	 PAYMENT OF IMPORT DUTIES
EXW										
FCA										
FAS										
FOB										
CFR										
CIF										
CPT										
CIP										
DAP										
DPU										
DDP										

Seller
 Buyer
 Negotiable

Source: ProFound, 2024

Tips:

- Ensure that you have detailed information about your business at hand. Information on your revenue plus risk and liabilities is required to create a policy specific to your business as an exporter.
- Speak with an insurance broker to have a better idea of what documentation is needed to purchase insurance. The typical documentation you require will be basic information about your company and a copy of an invoice and the name of your buyer.
- Check whether your government offers export credit insurance or other export insurance programmes.
- Reassess your insurance needs and update coverage as you expand and enter new markets.

7. Ensure you use the correct packaging for export

You should invest in the correct packaging as an exporter of natural ingredients for health products. Not only does good packaging protect your goods, it also makes a good first impression because the packaging of your product will be the first thing your buyer sees.

Good packaging plays a critical role in [preserving the quality of your natural ingredients during transportation and storage](#). It protects against external factors such as moisture, light and physical damage that can alter a product's flavour, freshness and nutritional value. You should therefore choose packaging materials that provide protection against these factors, for example, moisture-resistant bags, airtight containers, or protective layers to shield against exposure to light.

To ensure that you have the correct packaging, speak to your importer first and discuss the ideal packaging. Usually, buyers require well-protected ingredients because the goods are handled by several people along the value chain. Subsequently coordinate with your logistics provider to ensure that natural ingredients maintain their quality and remain in good condition throughout transport. All steps along the supply chain should be covered, from transportation to storage and handling.

European consumers and importers are paying more attention to [transparency and traceability of natural ingredients](#). You should therefore ensure that your packaging includes accurate and detailed information about the natural ingredient you are exporting, its origin, certifications that you hold, and nutritional information as well as any allergen warnings. With the move to digitalisation of supply chains, you can consider using QR codes or other technologies that enable easy access to additional product information or traceability data.

Adding a QR code can be a [great addition to your company's visibility and story-telling ability](#). A code can link to a short story of the origin of the natural ingredients, the people involved and the processing steps that make your export unique. Use this also as an opportunity to market your business by displaying your logo and information, including contact details.

EU regulations on sustainable packaging are changing, and European countries are increasingly committed to environmentally friendly solutions. Through the EU Green Deal, increasing recyclability and reducing waste are key priorities. For example, the Spanish government has imposed a 25% import tax on companies importing plastic-packaged products. This means that Spanish food manufacturing companies will take steps to avoid importing plastic-packaged materials. Check options for using renewable, [biodegradable](#) and recyclable packaging. These can include innovative fibres such as algae, [bamboo](#), wood paper and carton-based materials. Glass and metal may also work, but their weight may affect efforts to reduce freight weight to save fuel in transport.

By prioritising good packaging practices you can safeguard your product quality, meet regulations and maintain a competitive edge in the European market. Invest in good-quality packaging materials and designs that align with your importer's needs and market expectations.

Figure 5: Alternative and sustainable packaging solutions

Alternative material wrap



I'm green
Plastic
Renewable source
Carbon reduction

➤ **Bio-based wrap:** Use plastic wrap that is (partly) made from biological resources, e.g. sugar cane or maize starch

➤ **Biodegradable wrap:** Wrap made of substance that can be decomposed by bacteria or other living organisms



Source: DHL, 2023

Tips:

Read this report on [Packaging Guidelines for Ocean Freight](#) to learn about possible solutions for your product and company.

Work closely with your importer and packaging suppliers to identify the best solution for your product and client.

Choose lightweight and durable material that can withstand transportation conditions while reducing your overall environmental footprint.

8. Find access to sustainable credit and trade finance

If you are an exporter who is just starting out, securing access to credit and trade finance is crucial to be able to finance your export procedures. By obtaining financial support from trusted institutions or sources, you can align your operations with environmental, social, governance (ESG) principles. These are becoming more important for meeting sustainability goals and can help you attract customers who prioritise social responsibility and environmental protection in their supply chain.

Development finance institutions such as the [International Finance Corporation](#) (IFC) are dedicated to providing financial support for sustainable development projects. You can get trade finance solutions, including letters of credit, working capital and guarantees to facilitate your export goals. More specifically, organisations such as [Rabobank](#) provide corporate banking products for food and agri-businesses in African countries. [Triodos](#) provides trade finance up to 70% of the value of export contracts to companies with a sustainability certification. These institutions may provide trade finance facilities, loans and credit lines specifically designed for exporters committed to sustainability.

Here are some further initiatives that you can look into for financial support:

- [Oiko Credit](#) provides loans to organisations active in financial inclusion, agriculture and renewable energy in Africa, Asia and Latin America.
- [Root Capital](#) provides credit and capacity-building to small and growing agricultural businesses around the globe.
- [Impact Finance](#) provides loans to companies who have a focus on 5 subcategories, including small-scale producers, agro-forestry, financial inclusion, circular industry and integrated farming.
- [FMO](#) is a Dutch development bank that provides loans to companies who work in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Take a look at the database of [the Global Environment Facility](#) (GEF), which provides large funding opportunities for country programmes, which also provide funding for individual SMEs.
- Explore [EU programmes to support countries in the area of climate, environment and energy](#).
- Check your local Agriculture Development Bank: they may offer loans for climate finance as well as equipment purchases and other capital needs you may have.

Some of the world's best trade finance providers of 2023 are [BNY Mellon](#), able to promote trade in areas with restrictions or distinct liquidity requirements; [Raistone](#), with a Virtual Cards payment system that allows suppliers to be paid as early as the day they submit an invoice to their customer; and [Societe Generale](#), ranked as the best bank for trade finance in emerging markets.

Tip:

Make sure that any financial support you apply for fits your strategy and business needs. Once your main capacities, story and needs are well defined, focus on the financial solutions that match these elements and can complement them.

9. Look for support from government and non-government

agencies

To increase your chances of exporting to the European market and achieving successful trade outcomes, it might be beneficial to seek support from relevant agencies and organisations. By engaging in export promotion programmes and collaborating with industry groups that facilitate trade with European buyers, you can significantly improve your prospects.

There are numerous export agencies that offer specialised knowledge and support to exporters aiming to enter new markets. The programmes implemented by these organisations involve valuable market insights tailored to specific European industries. It is highly recommended to join these programmes, as they provide insights into the regulations necessary for compliance and offer information on relevant industry trends within the European food industry.

It's important to note that acquiring this knowledge may require adjusting your business operations. Neglecting to use the tools and resources offered by various value chain and matchmaking programmes could result in missing out on crucial opportunities in the European market.

The services provided by these export agencies encompass training, coaching, remote guidance, participation in trade fairs and business-matching. These services are typically delivered by European sector experts who possess extensive knowledge to guide exporters on market entry and trading strategies. For example, these experts are well-informed about the requirements and expectations of European buyers.

Participating in an export promotion programme offers networking opportunities that allow you to connect with potential European buyers. Additionally, your involvement in such networking events enhances your company's credibility and demonstrates your commitment to meeting buyers' needs.

Some government, non-government and commercial organisations that can provide you with assistance are:

Government agencies

- **CBI** – the Centre for the Promotion of Imports from developing countries is a Dutch government agency that assists exporters in developing countries who want to enter European markets for export. They offer coaching, trade fair visits, training and market studies to help exporters access European markets.
- **IPD** – the Import Promotion Desk supports importers and tour operators in their search for overseas business partners, opening up new supply sources for them in selected developing countries and emerging markets. And for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the partner countries, IPD facilitates access to the EU market.
- **OTGS** – Open Trade Gate Sweden supports companies from developing countries to export to Sweden and the European Union. They assist exporters in understanding rules and procedures, as well as in providing them market information.
- **SIPPO** – the Swiss Import Promotion programme's overall objective is to integrate developing and transition countries into world trade by advising and supporting over 40 Business Support Organisations (BSOs) in 11 partner countries.
- **FINNPARTNERSHIP** – Finnpartnership promotes business between Finland and developing countries to generate positive development impacts. It mainly offers services on Business Partnership Support and Matchmaking.

Non-government agencies

- **COLEAD** – the Committee Linking Entrepreneurship-Agriculture-Development is a European-based organisation focused on promoting sustainable and inclusive agricultural trade and development. The organisation provides a range of services including technical assistance, market access and development, standards compliance, institutional strengthening, and networking and advocacy.
- **ITC** – the International Trade Centre is a development agency of the United Nations that promotes sustainable trade for exporters. The organisation provides export management, supply chain management,

packaging, and marketing and branding services.

- **africrops!** – africrops! specialises in sourcing, production and export of African botanical ingredients for the food, beverage, cosmetics and pharmaceutical industries. They focus on sustainable sourcing, processing and value addition, quality control and certification, and export and distribution.

Be sure to also explore opportunities to work with government bodies and local business support organisations in countries you're aiming to export to. Their services are often free of cost.

Figure 6: Logos of different support organisations in Europe



Source: Various, 2023

Tips:

You can participate in international trade fairs and conferences related to health products and natural ingredients to identify potential organisations that can be of support to you.

Join trade associations, as they often have partnerships with government agencies and NGOs and are able to provide valuable networking opportunities.

Establish an online presence so that you can be identified by BSOs and NGOs active in the field of agriculture and international cooperation.

Explore [ITC's SME Trade Academy](#) platform for free resources on everything that involves becoming a successful exporter of agriculture products.

Read our natural ingredients for health products studies for practical tips

CBI has published several studies put together by industry experts containing detailed information for organising your exports to Europe. Consult the product-specific studies, such as [baobab](#), [aloe vera](#), [moringa](#), [plant proteins](#) and [seaweed](#), for specific and in-depth information on your natural ingredient. Following the information and [tips on finding buyers](#), [doing business](#) and [going digital](#) are likely to improve your chances of

entering European export markets.

Tips:

Access the [CBI Market Information platform for Natural Ingredients for Health Products](#) and select the documents that are most relevant to your company and the products you export. You can choose to read them online or download them in PDF format.

[ProFound – Advisers in Development](#) carried out this study on behalf of CBI.

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