

10 tips for finding buyers on the European spices and herbs market

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The spices and herbs market in Europe is a large food sector with an import value of almost €3 billion. There are many ways to identify potential buyers among the many players in this food sector. The tips listed below offer short but detailed guidance on how and where to find buyers for your spices and herbs. However, finding these buyers does not guarantee that you will sell your products to them, as this depends on many factors, some of which are out of your hands.

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1. Define yourself and your offer before searching for buyers

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

Defining your offer will cut the time you need to create a list of relevant buyers. For example, if you can offer ten tonnes of your product, you can remove all buyers that only deal with full containers from your long list. Some buyers may require a specific variety or quality that you cannot offer. And if you can offer specific products, such as organic products, you should not focus on buyers who only trade in conventional products.

Tips:

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

Be precise in defining your product specification. You can use a [general product specification template](#) (pdf) for food products. You can also use internationally recognised standards to better define your offer. Have a look at a [product information standard](#) (Word) of the European Spice Association.

Specifications for individual spices and herbs include standards of [Codex Alimentarius](#) and [ISO standards](#) for spices, culinary herbs and condiments.

Create a unique selling proposition [step by step](#).

2. Conduct proper market research to understand your buyers

The next step in finding buyers is market research. First: identify the European market with the best potential for your offer. Be aware that the largest or the closest market to you is not always the best choice. You need to consider other factors such as market growth, level of competition, common buyer requirements, legal requirements, price competitiveness and trends influencing demand.

The best place to start your research are CBI studies on European markets for spices and herbs. Read them to gain insights on the general [demand](#), [trends](#) and [market requirements](#). After that, you can find more specific information about [promising products](#). If the products you are offering are not included in the CBI list, you can learn how to select the best markets from statistical tools such as [Access2Markets](#) and [TradeMap](#).

After identifying the best markets, continue your search for buyers on a search engine like Google. Remember to use [advanced search](#) options to narrow down searches into more detailed and specific results. For example, you can search only pages that are published in your selected market. You can also search for companies in the language of your target market. If you do not speak the language of your selected market, you can use [Google translate](#).

Tips:

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

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

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

Find more market information on the website of the [European Spice Association](#).

3. Decide which type of buyers best match your offer

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

There are also buyers that are constantly looking for new suppliers to reduce their dependence on the countries that are dominating the global market. Those companies may better match your offer, especially if you are offering a product that is not usually associated with your country of origin. However, there is a risk that the buyer will not be committed enough if he finds a better price or safer (contaminant-free) products in another emerging country.

Buyers of spices and herbs can be classified in several categories. Keep in mind that this classification is not a rule, as most buyers perform different activities and may fit in more than one category. Generally, they can be

classified according to the following criteria:

- **Product and sector specialisation:** some importers trade a range of products (selling pulses, grains and seeds, too) while some limit themselves to spices or even just one product (like chillies). Usually, it is easier to focus on specialised importers, as they are familiar with the products, market and competition and can inform you about important market developments.
- **Processing versus trading specialisation:** some companies import spices and herbs as an ingredient for a final product (such as meat processing companies). Many of them do not import products, but buy from the European wholesalers. However, some of those companies may import ingredients directly. On the other hand, there are bulk traders that import and re-sell products unchanged. Usually, bulk traders and wholesalers are the preferred option for developing country suppliers, as they have more options to sell your products.
- **Market segment specialisation:** some companies are equipped with packing facilities and can sell directly to retailers (under their own brand or private label). Other companies are specialised in supplying the foodservice segment (hotels, restaurants, catering, institutions). There are also spice processing companies that mix and create spice blends. Although many developing country suppliers prefer to directly supply the retail segment, this can be difficult due to high pressure to lower the prices, and big quality and certification demands. Specialised spice blending companies and suppliers of the food service segment can be a good option, as they will not be under significant pressure from the retailers.
- **Niche market suppliers:** companies that are working with suppliers of specific certified products such as organic, FairTrade, ethnic or sustainable. Those companies are a good fit for suppliers of products who cannot compete with price pressure and the large quantities of world-leading suppliers. A common pitfall is that the market for some of those products (such as 'Demeter' certified) is quite limited.

Specialised importers are the most dominant type of buyers within the spices and herbs sector. Specialised importers are particularly relevant for new suppliers, as supplying the retail segment directly is very demanding and requires a lot of quality-related and logistical investments. However, for the well-equipped and price competitive producers, packing for private labels can be an option. Still, private label packing is often done by importers that have contracts with retail chains in Europe.

Examples of the larger European spices and herbs companies include: [Fuchs Group](#) (Germany), [Solina](#) (France), [Albarracin](#) (Spain), [Nedspice](#) (the Netherlands), [British Pepper and Spice](#) (the United Kingdom), [European Spice Services](#) (Belgium), [Sabater](#) (Spain), [Husarich](#) (Germany), [Euroma](#) (the Netherlands), [Santa Maria](#) (Sweden/Finland), [Isfi](#) (Belgium) or [Saran Enterprises](#) (Poland).

Tips:

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

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

Be aware that selling directly to retail channels often means higher investments (for example, renting a warehouse in the target market), participation in the competition procurement calls and the possibility that you may have to deliver small quantities frequently (such as weekly) and just-in-time.

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

After you define your offer and understand your buyers' needs, it is time to make your unique selling proposition visible on the internet. The best way is to start with your website. Ideally, your website should attract the

attention of visitors in your target markets, create a desire for your offer and finally convert the visitor into becoming a customer. This can be done by lining up your unique selling proposition with a strong message on the homepage of your website, with catchy images, videos and interesting content.

There are several good examples of successful online promotion by spices and herbs suppliers. The Turkish oregano supplier [Kutas](#) is such an example. The home page has an attractive photo and a strong message with 'call-to-action buttons'. Specific parts of the website are dedicated to important topics such as sustainability and adulteration. Another interesting example is that of a French company with a significant presence in developing countries: [Touton group](#). To attract attention, the home page has an interesting video. Indian company [ITC Spices](#) uses attractive photos and figures to show its strengths.

After you have created a website, you need to invest time to make it more visible for your potential buyers through Search Engine Optimisation (SEO). SEO is the process of improving the visibility of a website in a search engine's results. Having a good website is essential, but it is even more important for you to ensure that your company can be easily found by European buyers. If someone is searching for the product you are offering, your offer should appear on the first page in major search engines.

European buyers commonly search for new suppliers by typing the product name in the search engine (commonly Google). Next to the product name, words such as 'exporter', 'producer' or 'supplier' are also used. Sometimes buyers also use the country name, when the buyer is looking for products of a specific origin (vanilla producer Madagascar). It is therefore very important that your company is on the first page of the search results for this type of search.

Creating your website is just the foundation and the first of your online promotional activities. You should also use social platforms. Social platforms represent a real-time communication tool for your company to interact with potential buyers abroad. The most popular social platforms recommended for you are LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram.

Tips:

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

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

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

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

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

Food trade events in the European Union include some of the largest exhibitions worldwide. In 2019, ANUGA (the world's leading food fair) gathered 7,590 exhibitors and about 170,000 visitors. Companies use trade events to promote their offer, to find potential buyers and to meet existing customers. One of the biggest advantages of trade fairs is that you have the opportunity to meet potential customers face to face, which is very important in gaining trust in the spices and herbs sector.

Bear in mind that participating in a trade event abroad can be costly, so you should only invest in participating after making a cost-benefit calculation. Instead of exhibiting, you can visit selected events and search for potential buyers among exhibiting companies from Europe. It is always good to search the list of exhibitors before visiting. Establishing contact with buyers before the exhibition will save time for your first introduction, and it makes communication easier.

Apart from trade fairs, some of the best opportunities for networking with potential buyers can be found on the conferences and annual meetings of relevant international and European associations. Leading trade fairs you should consider visiting are the following:

- [Anuga](#) - the largest trade fair for food and beverages in the world. It is held every odd year in Cologne, Germany, and hosts relevant sections for spices and herbs, including a delicatessen section, a meat products section, a bread and baked good section and a 'wellfood' (non-prescription medication, supplements, etc) section. You can also find companies at the specific halls called: Culinary Stage, Taste Innovation Show and Trend Zone.
- [SIAL](#) - held every other year in Paris, France. It is a general trade fair for food and beverages, with a strong focus on France. It has similar sections for spices and herbs as Anuga, including Pavilions of the World, Infood and Organic Food.
- [Spices and Herbs Global Expo](#) - this exhibition will be held for the first time in 2020 in Rimini (Italy) together with MACFRUT, the trade fair for the fruit and vegetable sector. The exhibition aims to be a meeting point for producers, technicians, researchers, traders and processors in the field of spices and officinal and aromatic herbs.
- [Food Ingredients Europe \(FIE\)](#) - a smaller trade fair focussing exclusively on ingredients, including raw materials and semi-finished products offered for sale to the food industry. The trade fair is held at different locations in Europe every year.
- [Biofach](#) - a trade fair focused exclusively on certified organic products. It is surprisingly large for such a specific niche, and held every year in February in Nuremberg, Germany. Spices and herbs exporters can be accommodated in the sections with international pavilions. Biofach also includes an annual conference on developments in the global organic industry.
- [Natural & Organic Products Europe](#) - Relatively small trade fair compared to others, offering a good opportunity for products labelled as 'natural' or 'organic'. It is held every year in London.
- [PLMA](#) - the world's leading trade fair for private label manufacturers. It is held every year in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. It is the most relevant trade fair for the companies willing to supply products for the European retail chains. In order to do this, companies need to be certified with food safety standards, meet specific retailer requirements and possess suitable packing equipment.
- [Alimentaria](#) - International food exhibition held every second year in Spain, Barcelona.

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

Tips:

Search for potential buyers at the trade fair exhibitors list. Here are the exhibitor lists of [Anuga](#), [SIAL](#) and [Biofach](#). Make a long list of potential contacts and prepare short questions to ask during the visit in order to filter out the buyers that do not match your offer.

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

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

Visit specific trade events organised by European and international trade associations. Those events provide opportunities to meet traders in a less-crowded atmosphere and to make appointments in advance. The most relevant events you should consider attending include: the [General Assembly](#) of the European Spice Association (held each year on different locations), the [World Spice Congress](#) (organised by the Indian Spice Board), the [International Spice Conference](#) (held in India with significant participation by Indian companies but also attended by international traders) and [ASTA Annual Meetings and Exhibits](#) (organised by the American Spice Trade Association but with international participation). For pepper, you can attend the [Annual Session and Meetings](#) of the International Pepper Community.

6. Find buyers among members of spices and herbs associations

The international and European spices and herbs sector is organised in several industry associations that represent the interests of member companies. These associations can be good sources to find potential buyers, as they generally have an extensive network. Some of them offer international memberships and participation in annual conferences, where suppliers can directly meet with potential buyers.

Start with the European Spice Association (ESA), as they allow international memberships. Several African and Asian countries are already members of the ESA. European associations put information on their websites about association members. National associations provide information about their members, which may be target companies for your offer (see list below). Focus on national associations in your most promising target markets. To find out which markets are your most promising target markets, check the second tip and read our studies about the [general demand for spices and herbs](#) or [promising export products](#).

The most important spices and herbs trade associations include the following:

- [European Spice Association](#) (ESA) – the umbrella organisation representing the European spices and herbs sector. It supports member companies and national associations with information about legislative requirements, deals with quality issues and organises annual sector meetings. You can find a [list of members](#) (pdf) and search for companies matching your offer.
- [Culinaria Europe](#) – represents national associations as well as producers of culinary products such as soups and broths, emulsified and non-emulsified sauces like ketchup and mayonnaise, salads, mustard, horseradish, condiment products, table olives and vinegar within Europe. Although [member associations](#) do not always exactly represent spice companies, members are users of spices and herbs.
- [Association of the German Spice Industry](#) with nearly 90 [spice processing and refining companies](#) who are members of the German Spice Association. They are primarily engaged in refining spices and producing spice blends, spice preparations and other seasoning ingredients.
- [Dutch Spice Trade Association](#) in the Netherlands – although the website is in Dutch, you can check [the list of member companies](#).
- [Seasonings and Spice Association](#) (SSA) in the United Kingdom - promotes the interests of its members in all aspects of the import, processing and distribution of seasonings, herbs, spices and related products. [SSA members list](#) includes postal and website addresses.
- [Association of Processors and Packers of Spices and Seasonings](#) (AEC) in Spain represents the interests of small and medium-sized [spice member companies](#).
- [Waren-Verein](#) – association of German importers and brokers of food items. Search the [list of trade members](#) to find potential buyers for your product.

The largest demand for spices and herbs in Europe comes from Germany, France, the Netherlands, the United

Kingdom, Spain and Poland. For the best results, you should search within the sector associations of those countries. For more specific analysis of promising target markets, read [our study about the demand for spices and herbs](#) in Europe.

Tips:

Follow the leading spices and herbs associations that are listed above. Keep track of relevant events that they promote, check their newest press releases or research findings.

Look at the member lists of each national association, as they can provide you with potential prospects for your marketing campaign. Carefully look at the websites of the members and judge if those companies fit your profile or not. It is better to have a short list of high-potential buyers than a long list without further explanations.

Contact the staff of the associations to find out more about membership possibilities and the data they provide.

7. Make an initial list using company databases

General and food-specific databases make it easier for suppliers to find buyers. It should be the first step in your 'search for buyers' activities. It is, however, important to keep in mind that none of those databases are complete. Even paid databases can miss relevant companies from your most interesting target markets. However, you should use them in combination with other tips given in this guide to make your search faster and easier.

The most popular company databases relevant for spices and herbs exporters include the following:

- [EUROPAGES](#) – directory of European companies. You can search by sector (for example 'condiments and spices') or by keyword. You can further filter your results and select companies that are traders and not manufacturers (for example 'agent', 'distributor' or 'wholesaler').
- [wlw](#) (*Wer liefert was*, 'Who Supplies What') – the leading business-to-business (B2B) online marketplace in the DACH countries (Germany, Austria and Switzerland). You can search for products or companies and filter down results by size and activity. Most companies are German-speaking, so it is good to search with German product names, in addition to the English ones.
- [Organic-Bio](#) – database of companies selling and buying organic products.
- [Kompass](#) – large database of companies. You can apply several filters to find potential buyers. Available upon subscription, but you can perform a basic search free of charge by entering the product name and selecting 'importers' in the list of the results to narrow down your search.

Another way to find buyers is to use matchmaking services such as [Greentrade](#). This is an online marketplace for organic food. You can search current buyer announcements under the category 'herbs, spices and condiments', to see the contact information of the company you need to subscribe.

Tips:

When making a list of companies from the databases, do not send the same email to all of them. This will be considered 'spam' by most buyers.

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

Carefully study the websites of the companies that you found in the databases. Also search for

additional information about those companies to better understand if they fit your offer. For companies that are not from the United Kingdom, perform searches in the language of the country where the company is headquartered.

8. Participate in digital B2B platforms

The spices and herbs trade is a face-to-face business. Most long-term partnerships still begin after personal introductions, analysis of samples and factory visits. However, due to the travel restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the amount of business conducted online is increasing. According to [McKinsey research](#) from October 2020, only 30% of B2B buyers want to communicate with a supplier in person. The other 70% of purchasing managers only use online communication before making purchasing decisions.

The COVID-19 pandemic is still forcing more businesses to source online, which is contributing to the fast development of new B2B online marketplaces. The British company Hokodo has developed a [directory of European B2B marketplaces](#). According to this directory, there are 30 B2B online marketplaces in Europe that specialise in the trade in agricultural and food products.

In the spices and herbs sector, B2B marketplaces are mainly used to connect European buyers and suppliers from other continents, but the actual overseas orders are not commonly placed online. Online orders are frequently used by food operators within Europe (such as processors or home delivery restaurants), but very rarely for imports from countries outside of Europe.

Some of the B2B marketplaces are permanent, while others are time limited and are connected to special trade events. An example of a permanent B2B platform is [Saladplate](#), created by the famous international event organiser Informa Markets. An example of a B2B platform connected to a special event is [talque](#), which was used during the online edition of [Biofach](#) during 2021.

You can use B2B marketplaces to increase your chances of finding buyers. To increase your chances for export, follow our tips for successful participation in trade events. You should search for buyers on platforms as well as elsewhere. Although most of the platforms have developed different tools for B2B matchmaking, many international spices and herbs traders are not part of B2B marketplaces (yet). Therefore, you need to invite your potential buyers to participate.

Tips:

Visit the websites of the leading trade fairs in Europe to check if they are planning to organise online events.

Before paying for a subscription to a B2B platform, ask the managing team how many buyers of your products are included in the platform, either as visitors or as suppliers. Ask for a trial subscription to check if the platform is suitable for you and your product.

Ask for free vouchers or coupons during B2B events connected with trade fairs. Usually, organisers provide a number of free tickets for exhibitors. You should offer those free tickets to potential buyers so they will participate in online meetings with you.

Visit the [European B2B marketplaces directory](#) (Excel) to find the most suitable platforms for your offer.

9. Find organisations that provide export support

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

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

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

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

Tips:

Establish personal contacts with staff of export promotion organisation located in your country. This will allow you to better understand the support services and even give suggestions on how to improve them.

Check if there is a diaspora organisation of your country located in Europe. Diaspora refers to members of a population who have moved abroad, but who maintain close ties with their homeland. Diaspora can play an important role in trade. Diaspora members can create connections between your company and potential buyers.

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

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

10. Find names of the leading importers and get export tips through our spices and herbs studies

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

Tips:

Read our [European market analyses studies](#) for several spices and herbs products. In the market analyses chapter, you will find profiles of the markets with the best potential and examples of several leading importers. If there is no existing study for your product, you can read studies explaining the markets for similar products (for example, importers of pepper also usually import other types of spices). You can use this opportunity to [contact CBI](#) and to ask for help or even to propose new studies or programmes to be developed.


Read our [Tips for Organising Exports of Spices and Herbs to Europe](#) to find practical tips related to logistics.


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


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

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