The European market potential for Ayurvedic ingredients for health products

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There is an increasing focus on alternative medicines such as Ayurveda on the European market. In addition, the natural food supplement market is growing, creating opportunities for exporters of Ayurvedic herbs. Europe is a large importer of medicinal and aromatic plants and extracts. However, it is important to take into account the increasing importance of safety assessments, sustainability standards and other requirements on the European market.

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1. Product description

Ayurveda is an ancient system of traditional medicine that originated in India over 3,000 years ago. It emphasises a balance between mind, body, and spirit to promote overall health and well-being. Typically, the Ayurvedic approach involves herbal preparations, specific cosmetic procedures, physical exercises (like yoga), and spiritual practices (such as meditation), along with Ayurvedic dietary choices like vegetarian meals and medicinal plant teas. This is believed to enable individuals to heal in a safe way without encountering any unwanted side effects.

The Ayurvedic system includes various botanicals with therapeutic properties. Some of the most commonly used are:

1. Ashwagandha (Withania somnifera): one of the most popular Ayurvedic ingredients, ashwagandha is an adaptogen, known for reducing stress and anxiety.
2. Brahmi (Bacopa monnieri): used to enhance cognitive function and support memory.
3. Gotu Kola (Centella asiatica): renowned for enhancing cognitive function and its wound-healing and regenerative properties.
4. Triphala, an Ayurvedic remedy consisting of three small fruits: 1) amla, also known as Indian gooseberry (Phyllanthus emblica or Emblica officinalis); 2) haritaki (Terminalia chebula); 3) bibhitaki (Terminalia bellirica). Triphala is said to reduce joint inflammation, improve digestion, and promote oral health.
5. Tulsi, also known as holy basil (Ocimum tenuiflorum or Ocimum sanctum): a libido enhancer and anti-fertility agent in Ayurveda, Tulsi is also used for its antioxidant properties.
6. Neem (Azadirachta indica): commonly used to treat inflammation of the gums and parasitic infections, and to improve skin and hair health.
7. Bitter melon (Momordica charantia): said to help lower glycemia in people with type 2 diabetes.

This list is not exhaustive, as the number of ingredients used in Ayurveda practices is very long. Other ingredients often used in Ayurvedic products include Indian frankincense, liquorice root and turmeric. Refer to our specific studies on Boswellia (Indian frankincense or *Boswellia serrata*), liquorice root, and turmeric to learn more about opportunities for these ingredients on the European market. This factsheet does not include those ingredients to avoid any overlap.

Use and product form

Of the above ingredients, most are authorised for use in food supplements on the European market and are included in the BELFRIT list. None of them is described in Pharmacopoeia monographs, however, meaning they are not permitted to be sold as herbal medicines on the European market. There have been calls to include ashwagandha in the monographs, but this has not been approved due to the lack of scientific evidence of its curative effect.

In addition to being sold as food supplements, some of these ingredients are also offered in the form of powders, herbal teas or candy-style products.

Figure 1: Examples of products containing Ayurvedic ingredients on the European health product market

Sources: Holland & Barrett and Healthy Food Factory (2023)

Trade data

Most Ayurvedic ingredients are traded under HS code 121190, which refers to ‘plants and parts of plants (including seeds and fruits), of a kind used primarily in perfumery, in pharmacy or for insecticidal, fungicidal or similar purposes, fresh, chilled, frozen or dried, whether or not cut, crushed or powdered’. When traded as extracts, they are included in HS code 130219, ‘vegetable saps and extracts, excluding opium, liquorice and hops’.

This study uses trading data relating to these HS codes as an indication of important developments on the market. The data available on Ayurvedic medicine and the food supplement markets are used to supplement the trading data, as more products are traded under these codes and so they provide a fuller picture.

Tips:

Note that not all species are permitted in food supplements, and not all parts of the plant either. Check positive lists to determine which (part of) botanicals may be used in food supplements. For instance, check the BELFRIT list, or consult health authorities and/or experts regarding what is allowed under EU regulations.

Be careful when making health claims about your products. Health claims are regulated in the European Union (EU). See the European Union (EU) portal on health claims to see what is permitted.

2. What makes Europe an interesting market for Ayurvedic ingredients?

Europe is a large importer of medicinal and aromatic plants, including Ayurvedic plants. Knowledge of and interest in alternative medicines such as Ayurveda are growing. The natural food supplement market is also growing, providing opportunities for exporters of Ayurvedic herbs used in such supplements.

Growing European imports of medicinal and aromatic plants

Ayurvedic ingredients are included under Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (MAPs - HS code 121190). In 2022, Europe imported 237,000 tonnes of MAPs, representing a value of €1.3 billion. Between 2018 and 2022, European imports increased at an average annual rate of 2.1% in terms of volume, and 9.1% in terms of value. This increase is explained by rising demand and more costly raw materials.

In 2022, 52% of European imports (by value) originated from developing market economies, up from 46% in 2018. This indicates that developing countries are an increasingly important source of medicinal and aromatic plants imported into Europe. The largest non-European supplier of MAPs to Europe by far is India, with imports worth €163 million in 2022; India is followed by China, with imports into the EU worth almost €69 million.

Source: ITC Trade Map & Access2Markets, 2023

The leading European importers of MAPs in 2022 were Germany, Spain, France, the United Kingdom (UK), Poland and Italy.

Imports of botanical extracts from developing countries are also growing

Many of the ingredients used in Ayurvedic products are imported into Europe as extracts. Botanical extracts are made by processing MAPs or herbs using a solvent or other extraction methods. Generally, the original plant components are unchanged, although botanical extracts have higher concentrations of active substances or nutrients.

European imports of these extracts (HS code 130219) amounted to nearly 83,000 tonnes in 2022 representing a value of over €1.2 billion. Between 2018 and 2022, European imports of botanical extracts increased at an average annual rate of 6.0% in terms of volume and 7.4% in terms of value. This increase is explained by rising demand and prices for processing and raw materials.

In 2022, 43% of European imports (by value) originated in developing market economies, up from 32% in 2018. This indicates that developing countries are an increasingly important source of botanical extracts imported into Europe. This is associated with cost-reduction strategies by European players as well as increased capacity and higher manufacturing standards in emerging markets. The largest supplier of botanical extracts to Europe by far is China, with about 19% of total imports and an import value of €233 million in 2022, followed by France (11%), Germany (8.0%) and Vietnam (7.3%).

The main European importers of botanical extracts in 2022 were the Netherlands, France, Italy, Spain, Germany and Belgium.

Source: ITC Trade Map, 2023

Europe is the largest market for alternative medicine

Europe is the largest market for complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), with an estimated value of $33 billion (around €33 billion) in 2021. Ayurveda is considered a CAM. The European CAM market is expected to grow at an average annual rate of almost 21% from 2021 to 2028, reaching $125 billion (around €125.6 billion) in 2028. Other examples of CAM are acupuncture, Chinese medicine, osteopathy, and homeopathy.

Ayurveda is experiencing an increase in popularity among European citizens, as more consumers look for a holistic and natural approach to health and wellness. This is also evident from the growing number of Ayurveda institutes and study centers across Europe. Examples of study centers include Ayurvedic Point (Italy), Europe Ayurveda Academy (France) and Ayurveda Academy Netherlands.

According to research, the European market for Ayurvedic is projected to reach €1.6 billion by 2028, with an average annual growth rate of 12% from 2022 to 2028. The COVID-19 pandemic was one of the factors driving consumers to become more aware of their personal health and to look for alternative ways to achieve this.

For exporters of natural Ayurvedic ingredients, the rising popularity of Ayurveda presents opportunities. However, it is important to emphasise that Ayurveda is not fully acknowledged as an official system of medicine in Europe. Even in countries where doctors are allowed to practice Ayurveda under the law, treatments are often not available under government healthcare plans. This means that people have to pay for these treatments out of their own pocket, or rely on private insurance. This situation may make it less likely that a broader segment of the population will become familiar with Ayurvedic therapies and the ingredients used in food supplements.

The fact that consumers mainly take supplements after recommendations from medical professionals (40%) and pharmacists (31%) makes this even more likely. Even among the few European consumers who had never taken supplements (one in ten), about 46% mentioned that a doctor's or healthcare professional's recommendation would make them reconsider the possibility of doing so in the future.

Several organisations across Europe aim to promote, integrate and safeguard the quality of Ayurvedic treatments and the associated products and also to overcome regulatory restrictions and cultural prejudices. Examples include the British Association of Accredited Ayurvedic Practitioners (BAAAP), which is the professional affiliate of the British Ayurvedic Medical Council (BAMC). Another example is the German Ayurveda umbrella organisation ADAVED or the German Medical Society for Ayurveda Medicine (DÄGAM); all these organisations are improving the position of Ayurveda in their specific country and/or across Europe, which will eventually lead to increased recognition of Ayurvedic ingredients in Europe.

Increasing demand for natural food supplements

The European population is increasingly health-conscious, resulting in an increased demand for nutritional supplements that boost personal health. The European nutrition and supplement market is expected to expand at an average annual rate of 5.8% from 2022 to 2030. In 2030, the market is expected to reach over $61.8 billion. This will create opportunities for Ayurvedic ingredients used in food supplements, since they originate from plant sources. The demand for food supplements is strongest in Western Europe, in particular Germany, France, Italy and the UK.

Tips:

- See our CBI study on the demand for natural ingredients for health products on the European market for more statistics and tips.
- Check online sources such as ITC Trade Map or the EU Access2Markets for more statistics on medicinal and aromatic plants.
- Educate consumers about Ayurveda and its benefits through blogs, webinars, and articles. Providing educational content can help to get established in the field. For instance, see how Siddhaya does this. Siddhaya is an Indian manufacturer and brand of finished Ayurveda products which are distributed globally.
- Research the European market by, for instance, accessing market information from sector associations. A good source would be to check the European Federation of Associations of Health Product Manufacturers for this.

3. Which European countries offer the most opportunities for Ayurvedic ingredients?

The European countries that present opportunities for Ayurvedic ingredients have a combination of positive attributes. These include substantial demand for natural food supplements, a positive attitude towards alternative medicine and Ayurveda specifically, a robust market structure for imports and market players engaged in trading and processing Ayurvedic ingredients. The key markets include the Germany, the UK, France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands.

Source: ITC Trade Map, 2023

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Germany: large food supplement market and interest in Ayurveda

The large size of the German market in food supplements and the prevailing positive attitude towards Ayurvedic treatments make it an interesting market for exporters of Ayurvedic ingredients. Germany is also a key importer of natural ingredients for health products.

Food supplements market: The food supplements market in Germany was valued at €2.7 billion in retail sales in 2021, an increase of 2.1% compared to the year before. The market is thriving due to increased health awareness, the pursuit of self-improvement, and a desire to age in a healthy manner. An estimated one third of the German population consumes pills, powders or capsules as part of their daily routine. Germany is the second-largest European market for food supplements, representing 19% of the European market.

Vitamins and minerals are particularly popular among German consumers, and these represent over half the country’s food supplements market. Nevertheless, consumers are increasingly interested in herbal supplements, since over 60% of German consumers believe that botanicals have medicinal properties. The demand for health products and supplements is expected to continue to rise in the years to come. Herbal products in particular are expected to make up a significant share of the food supplement market.

Ayurveda and food supplements containing Ayurvedic herbs are on fertile ground in Germany. Nearly 70% of people in Germany believe that natural treatments can be helpful alongside regular treatments and about 20% say they prefer *only* alternative or traditional medicine. Examples of German companies that focus on selling Ayurvedic products, including food supplements are Amla and Cosmoveda. Another example is Euroved, which develops and offers Ayurvedic products in the segments of nutritional supplements, foods, and oils across Europe under the Euroved and New Age Ayurveda brands.

Imports of MAPs and extracts: With respect to imports, Germany is Europe's largest importer of medicinal and aromatic plants. In 2022, imports amounted to almost 76,000 tonnes worth nearly €413 million, of which 53% originated from developing countries. Between 2018 and 2022, German imports of medicinal plants increased by 1.2% in volume and 10% in value. Leading non-European suppliers were India (13% of total imports into Germany), Egypt (12%), and China (5.3%).

In terms of volume, Germany is Europe's the fifth-largest importer of botanical extracts into Europe. In terms of value, however, it is the largest importer of botanical extracts. Between 2018 and 2022, the volume of imports decreased slightly by 2.2% while the value of imports increased by 2.1%. In 2022, about 37% of botanical extracts imported into Germany originated from developing countries. The main non-European suppliers of botanical extracts were China (16% of the total German imports), Mexico (13%), and India (6.5%).

Examples of German traders that handle the natural ingredients used in Ayurveda are Aakansha, Denk Ingredients, Bio Import Europa, and Pfannenschmidt. Examples of companies active in both sourcing and manufacturing are Salus and Pharma Waldhof.

France: large and growing consumer market of plant-based food supplements

France is an attractive market for exporters of Ayurvedic ingredients. It is a large and growing consumer market in which consumers value plant-based supplements.

Food supplement market: A 2022 survey by the French food supplement association Synadiet showed that 59% of the French population have consumed supplements in the past 24 months. Of this group, 71% consume food supplements continuously or several times a year. The number one reason why consumers choose a supplement is that they are natural.

A wide range of food supplements, including Ayurvedic ingredients, are available in France. Examples include Natura Force with its ashwagandha supplements and Boutique Nature with its *Bacopa monnieri* supplements. Ayur-vana is a French company that focuses exclusively on Ayurvedic products. They specialise in manufacturing Ayurvedic food supplements and cosmetics and source all their plants from India.

In 2022, the French food supplements market was worth €2.6 billion, an increase of 3.0% compared to 2021. The market is expected to grow at an average year-to-year rate of 6.1% from 2023 to 2028. The popularity of online distribution channels is partly driving this growth. France is the third-largest food supplement market in Europe, representing 15% of the European market.

Sales of organic food supplements increased at a higher rate in France than sales of conventional food supplements. Organic products sold in pharmacies and beauty and health shops increased by 15%, compared to 6-9% for conventional supplements in the same channels. Total sales of organic food supplements in 2021 amounted to €87.8 million. This means it is becoming increasingly important for exporters to consider obtaining organic certification.

Imports of MAPs and extracts: With respect to import volume, France is the third-largest importer of MAPs in Europe, after Germany and Spain. Imports were relatively stable from 2018 to 2022, amounting to 21,000 tonnes and a value of €123 million in 2022. French imports from developing countries remained relatively stable between 2018 and 2022, with 59% of imported MAPs originating from developing countries in 2022. The leading non-European suppliers in 2022 were Morocco (11% of total imports), India (10%) and China (8.9%).

Regarding botanical extracts, France was the second-largest importer in 2022. Imports amounted to nearly 15,000 tonnes and a value of €154 million. Import volumes decreased by 6.1% between 2018 and 2022, while imports by value remained stable. The share of direct imports from developing countries increased from 32% in 2018 to 40% in 2022. About 62% of France’s imports of botanical extracts (by volume) were sourced from Italy. The largest non-European supplier was Mexico, with 3.5% of total imports (by volume) in 2022, followed by China at 3.3%.

An example of a trader of natural ingredients for health products in France, which includes Ayurvedic herbs, is Vidya Europe Herbs. France also has several manufacturers that source directly from origin while also producing a combination of food supplements, herbal medicinal, and aromatherapy products, such as Lustrel Laboratoires and Arkopharma.

Italy: the largest food supplements market in Europe

For exporters of Ayurvedic ingredients, Italy is an attractive market. It is the largest food supplements market in Europe and among the world’s six largest importers of natural ingredients.

Food supplement market: Italy has the largest food supplement market in Europe by far. It accounts for 26% of the total European food supplements market and was valued at €4 billion in 2021. Between 2014 and 2021, the Italian food supplement market grew by 8.2% annually on average. Data from Ipsos market research indicate that Italian consumers use food supplements to feel fitter (87%) and because they want to take care of their bodies (84%). Important product groups are vitamins and minerals, digestive health products, and probiotics.

Sustainability and quality of raw materials are key in the Italian food supplements market. This means that the ability to demonstrate a commitment to environmental and social responsibility and showing proof of high-quality are important selling points in the Italian market.

Companies selling Ayurvedic food supplements in the Italian market include Ayurera and Shankara. Biogena is an example of a food supplement brand in Italy with Ayurvedic ingredients such as ashwagandha.

Imports of MAPs and extracts: Italian imports of MAPs reached 13,000 tonnes in 2022, with an average year-to-year growth of 3.6% since 2018. Imports were worth €86 million in 2022, and reached €69 million in 2018. In 2022, 51% of Italian imports originated from developing countries, up from 39% in 2018. The largest non-European suppliers in 2022 were India (17% of total imports) and Morocco (6.0%).

Regarding imports of botanical extracts, Italy ranked as the third-largest importer in Europe in 2022, when 11,000 tonnes were imported, representing a value of €202 million. Imports by volume increased at an average annual rate of 24% between 2018 and 2022, and imports by value increased by 28%, possibly led by higher demand during the COVID-19 pandemic. An estimated 69% of imports (by value) originated from developing countries in 2022, notably from Vietnam (39% of total Italian import volume in 2022), Mexico (15%), and China (8.4%).

Examples of companies trading and processing herbal ingredients for health products, including Ayurvedic ingredients, in Italy include EPO and ACEF.

UK: increasing imports directly from developing countries

The UK is an interesting market for exporters of Ayurvedic ingredients because it has a strong herbal medicine sector, in which traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and Ayurvedic medicine hold a strong position. This is partly because the UK is home to large Southern Asian and South-East Asian communities. Direct imports from developing countries have also increased since Brexit.

Food supplement market: In 2022, the UK food supplements market reached a value of £520 million (around €609 million), according to Mintel. This number includes sales of vitamins, minerals, and other food supplements. The retail value of sales of food supplements grew by 17% between 2017 and 2022. About 38% of people living in the UK consumed food supplements on a daily basis in 2022. Mintel estimates that the food supplement market will grow at an average annual rate of 2%, reaching £559 million (€655 million) by 2025. Key consumer reasons for taking food supplements include general health and wellness (60.7% of UK consumers) and to optimise health (20.4%).

An example of a UK brand that sells supplements including Ayurvedic ingredients is Simply Supplements. UK-based companies that distribute Ayurveda products include Ayurveda 101 and Pranava Kerala.

Imports of MAPs and extracts: The UK is the fourth-largest importer of MAPs in Europe. In 2022, import volumes amounted to 18,000 tonnes, worth €99 million. Between 2018 and 2022, imports by volume decreased by 6.7% while imports by value increased by 3.5%. What makes the UK a particularly attractive market is that it sources about 68% of its MAPs directly from developing market economies, up from 35% in 2018. Its largest non-European suppliers in 2022 were India, with a total share of 13%, followed by Kenya (7.8%), Morocco (7.3%), China (6.7%) and Egypt (6.1%).

With respect to botanical extracts, the UK is Europe's seventh-largest importer. Total imports amounted to 2,900 tonnes in 2022, at a value of €65 million. Between 2018 and 2022, imports by volume decreased by 11% while imports by value increased by 1.5%. In 2022, about 38% of botanical extracts imported into the UK originated from developing countries, up from 25% in 2018. The main non-European suppliers of botanical extracts were the United States (20% of total UK imports), China (13%) and India (12%).

The UK is expected to remain an important market for the import of MAPs and botanical extracts in the years to come. Although Brexit (Britain's departure from the European Union) disrupted international supply chains, it seems to have had a positive effect on imports directly from developing countries. Although total UK imports of MAPs and extracts has decreased since Brexit, direct imports from developing countries have actually increased.

Examples of UK traders of ingredients for health products include Organic Herb Trading and Super Nutrients.

Spain: smaller food supplement market but strong growth

Although the Spanish food supplement market is smaller than other countries in Europe, its steady growth offers opportunities to exporters of Ayurvedic herbs. Due to this growth, new companies are entering the food supplements market, leading to the diversification of products on offer and presenting opportunities for suppliers in developing countries.

Food supplement market: Around 75% of the Spanish population consume some type of nutritional supplements. Historically, the consumption of food supplements has been much lower than in other West European countries, but this is changing. One factor behind this is that Spain is one of the European countries that has the highest level of trust in the food supplement industry. According to a survey conducted by Food Supplements Europe (FSE) and IPSOS, Spanish consumers have the third-highest level of trust in food supplements in Europe, closely behind Italy and the Netherlands, and sharing the same level of trust as German consumers.

In 2020, the Spanish food supplements market was valued at €400 million by market researcher DBK. Before COVID-19, this market was growing at an average annual rate of 6%. In 2020, the market expanded by 12% due to the pandemic, but the market is not expected to sustain this high rate of growth. Spanish consumers mainly take food supplements to improve their general health, to strengthen their immune system, and to boost energy levels.

Santiveri is an example of a supplement manufacturer in Spain that offers natural food supplements, including Ayurvedic ingredients such as ashwagandha. Another example is Laboratorios Nale. Shops distributing Ayurvedic products in Spain include Indiaveda, Ayurveda Health, and Ayurveda. Some general health shops in Spain have a specific 'Ayurveda products' products' category on their website, such as Naturitas and Ecco Verde. This would appear to indicate the increasing popularity and recognition of Ayurvedic products among consumers in Spain.

Imports of MAPs and extracts: Spanish imports of MAPs increased by 4.1% between 2018 and 2022, amounting to 27,000 tonnes and a value of €111 million in 2022. About 45% of Spanish imports of MAPs originated in developing countries. The main non-European suppliers were Morocco (27% of total imports), followed by Egypt (7.6%) and Paraguay (4.9%). It is important to note that Spain is a significant European producer and processor of MAPs, serving both local and international markets.

Regarding imports of botanical extracts, Spain ranked as the fourth-largest importer in Europe in 2022. Total imports amounted to 7,700 tonnes in 2022, with a value of €112 million. Imports of extracts by volume increased by 3.6% between 2018 and 2022, while imports by value increased by 12%. The share of extracts originating from developing countries was 46% in 2022, up from 33% in 2018. Brazil was the largest supplier of botanical extracts to Spain, with a share of 36% of total Spanish imports, followed by China (12%) and the United States (8.8%).

Spain is home to several trading companies, including Gonmisol, which trades in various raw materials and extracts. Furthermore, international traders such as IMCD are also active in the Spanish market.

The Netherlands: trade hub for botanical extracts

The Netherlands is a key trade hub for various natural ingredients, especially botanical extracts. This creates interesting opportunities for exporters of Ayurvedic herbs to use the country as a gateway to the wider European market. The Netherlands is a medium-sized importer of MAPs. Countries like Germany, Spain, France, and Italy import larger volumes and are home to more robust processing industries to serve their own substantial domestic production of MAPs.

Food supplement market: The Dutch food supplement association (known as the NPN) estimates that the market reached €693 million euros in 2020, an increase of 3.4% compared to the year before. The demand for supplements is expected to continue growing. Although the COVID-19 pandemic boosted the demand for supplements, the Dutch market had been growing even before it. Around 66% of Dutch consumers aged over 17 years old take supplements. Consumers mainly use supplements to prevent illness.

Examples of companies distributing Ayurvedic products, including food supplements, on the Dutch market include Superfoodsonline and Surya. Sri Sri Tattva has its European base in the Netherlands, while manufacturing most of its products in India. Sri Sri Tattva is also collaborating with leading manufacturers in Europe to design, develop and manufacture products that minimise carbon footprints. Maharishi Ayurveda is another example of a company located in the Netherlands that produces Ayurvedic products in India, which are distributed all across Europe from the Netherlands.

Imports of MAPs and extracts: The Netherlands is a leading importer and a key re-exporter of European botanical extracts. Because of its significant position as an entry point for natural ingredients into Europe, the Netherlands is likely to remain an important export destination for botanical extracts for the foreseeable future.

In terms of volume, Dutch imports of botanical extracts reached 20,000 tonnes in 2022, and a value of €85 million. Although the Netherlands is the largest European importer in terms of volume, it ranked in fifth place in terms of import value. This is due to an increase in imports of lower-value extracts, indicating the presence of opportunities for exporters of higher-volume extracts of standard qualities. An estimated 57% of imports (by value) were sourced from developing countries in 2022, notably from Vietnam (41% of total Dutch imports) and the Dominican Republic (37%).

The Netherlands is a medium-sized importer of MAPs. Dutch imports of MAPs decreased by 8.0% between 2018 and 2022, amounting to 8,800 tonnes and a value of €55 million. This could indicate that some imports now go directly to other European companies and/or that supplies enter the market in more processed forms. The share of Dutch imports originating from developing countries is high, at 70% in 2022. About 36% of imports were sourced from Kenya in 2022, followed by India (12%). Other non-European suppliers were Israel (5.4%), Vietnam (3.5%), and China (3.3%). Important Dutch traders include Trading Organic (for organic ingredients) and IMCD.

Tips:

Decide which market offers the best opportunities for your company and products. You can get market information from sector associations, online product portfolios of distributors and the retailers mentioned in the section above. Examples of Ayurvedic associations in Europe are AAPUK (the Association of Ayurvedic Professionals in the UK) or the Europe Ayurveda Academy located in France.

Read the CBI study Tips for finding buyers on the European market for natural ingredients for health products for valuable information on how to approach European buyers successfully.

Target Western countries for your Ayurvedic ingredients exports to the European market, such as Germany, the UK, Italy, France, the Netherlands and Spain. These countries offer significant opportunities. They have a large market in food supplements, a strong focus on plant-based products, and robust infrastructure for importing MAPs and extracts.

4. Which trends offer opportunities or pose threats on the European Ayurvedic ingredients market for health products?

The growing interest in healthy living in Europe presents an opportunity for exporters of Ayurvedic ingredients. While awareness of their potential health benefits is increasing (such as stress relief and immune support) there, it remains limited, partly due to the status of Ayurvedic medicine in Europe. Stricter regulations and a lack of standardisation across Europe puts pressure on the import and availability of some Ayurvedic herbs used in food supplements. Exporters must ensure that their products meet the specific quality and safety requirements while finding a way to differentiate themselves and compete successfully.

Growing interest in well-being drives demand for supplements, including Ayurvedic herbs

In Europe, people’s increasing desire to live healthily and enhance their well-being is driving the demand for both health products and interest in alternative systems of medicine like Ayurveda. This combination means that the market for specific Ayurvedic ingredients is growing. A large share of European brands offering food supplements include Ayurvedic herb supplements in their portfolio. The top botanicals in terms of sales are ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*), triphala (combining amla, haritaki and bibhitaki) and brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri*), while one of the fastest growth is expected to be bitter melon (*Momordica charantia*).

Many of the Ayurvedic ingredients are sold as single-ingredient supplements, highlighting the benefits of each plant. For instance, the UK supplement manufacturer Focus Supplements sells Bacopa monnieri, highlighting its benefit “to protect the brain from age-related cognitive decline”. Ayurvedic products such as teas are also widely available on the European market. These products address a wide range of issues, from good sleep to oral health and digestive health (see figure 6).

For exporters, this means it is even more important to know the specific nutritional profile and benefits of your products. These should be well-documented and backed up with laboratory analyses. This will help buyers in Europe to understand why they should buy your product and do business with your company.

Despite the growth and wider availability of these Ayurvedic products, there remains a lack of awareness about Ayurvedic products among consumers in Europe. One reason for this is the lack of standardisation and legislation about Ayurvedic practice in Europe, which impedes product recognition. In addition, European consumers tend to prefer vitamins and minerals over other plant-based supplements.

Figure 6: Examples of Ayurvedic teas

Source: Maharishi Ayurveda, 2023

Stricter regulatory framework: ashwagandha under scrutiny in Europe

Over the years, challenges have arisen regarding the import of Ayurvedic products and/or plants into Europe. The European Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) provides a record of cases in which products were rejected at the European border. One of the major issues identified is high levels of metals and unauthorised pesticide residues (ethylene oxide).

In response to concerns over contaminated Ayurvedic products, Germany has introduced a verification logo specifically for Ayurvedic food supplements. The 'Heavy Metal Controlled' test mark of BDIH is placed on Ayurvedic food supplements tested for toxic heavy metals and certified as safe. The organisation offers a product list on the internet. Products of Ayurveda Handel, for instance, have the BDIH quality certificate 'Heavy Metal Controlled'.

Ensuring food safety for European consumers is very important for the European Union. As a result, the European Commission introduced the Regulation (EU) 2023/915 on food contaminants in May 2023. It is important to be familiar with this stricter European regulation as it sets newly established maximum levels for mycotoxins, plant toxins, metals and processing-related contaminants.

At the same time, there are rising concerns around the safety and history of the use of botanical extracts in food supplements on the European market. The number of reports of negative health effects and unfavourable scientific findings involving botanical extracts is rising. Ashwagandha, one of the most popular Ayurvedic ingredients on the European market, for instance, is under scrutiny. According to a 2020 evaluation by the Danish Technical University, ashwagandha can have a negative hormonal effect on reproduction in both animals and humans. In addition, other studies indicate other negative side effects such as stomach upset, liver damage and very low blood sugar levels.

The consequences of these studies are serious: Denmark has prohibited the use of ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*) in food supplements in the country. RASFF shows how a number of ashwagandha exports are being banned from entry into the country. As indicated by Nutra Ingredients, other Nordic countries, such as Finland and Sweden, are currently considering whether to prohibit the use of ashwagandha too. Experts in France are also starting to evaluate the potential risks linked to the inclusion of turmeric and ashwagandha in food supplements. In Poland, maximum levels for daily intake of ashwagandha have already been set.

This means that exporters of Ayurvedic ingredients and products should be very familiar with European regulations, and have well-documented data that can demonstrate the safety of their products to human health.

Sustainability increasingly important

Sustainability is increasingly important on the European market for health ingredients, from the perspectives of both consumers and buyers. European consumers are increasingly demanding sustainable products and want to know where these products are coming from. This trend may have important implications for exporters of Ayurvedic ingredients. It is important to realise that demand for sustainable sourcing not only covers (organic) certification, but also the sustainable management of natural resources and supply chains.

European buyers are becoming much more involved in the sustainable management of the natural resources that they use. Companies are making significant investments in product development, documentation and market authorisation for botanicals. They value supply sustainability in terms of quantity and quality, especially for ingredients collected from the wild. Buyers also expect more transparent supply chains and traceability, and to take more responsibility for the sustainability of your products.

With regard to certification, consumers are increasingly interested in health products that are certified as organic to support a healthy lifestyle. This is driving the demand for organic ingredients and creating opportunities for certified producers. However, in a 2022 survey conducted by Food Supplements Europe, only 56% of consumers indicated that it was important to them that supplements were labelled as organic, natural or free of genetically modified organisms (GMO).

In food supplements, the value of certification depends mainly on the positioning of the producer and product. The value of certification increases when the product is positioned more as a food-type product, rather than as a medicinal-type product. For example, organic certification is more common for Ayurvedic ingredients that are used in teas, such as the organic-certified Ayurvedic teas from European-wide distributor Maharishi. This is in contrast to most of the Ayurvedic food supplements on the European market, which are often not certified as organic. Of course, there are exceptions, such as the organic-certified ashwagandha food supplements from Kenay (Poland).

Organic certification acts as a quality control system and can help to improve your reputation for quality. One example of a supplier of organic-certified Ayurvedic herbs is Cultivator's from India.

Be aware of access and benefit-sharing regulations in your country

The European Commission launched the European Green Deal (EGD) in 2019. The EGD is a set of proposals that aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and minimise the use of resources while safeguarding economic growth. One of its proposals is the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, which is Europe's plan to protect nature and reverse the degradation of ecosystems. A related strategy is Europe's focus on sharing nature's genetic resources, through which the EU aims to ensure that benefits from genetic resources are shared fairly and equitably with countries providing these resources.

Europe's strategy is in line with the international Nagoya Protocol of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). This protocol provides guidelines for accessing and utilising genetic resources and traditional knowledge through access and benefit-sharing (ABS) agreements. Many countries have signed this protocol and incorporated it into national law. If your home country has done this, you will need to comply with these national laws. European companies are legally required to follow the laws that are in force in your country regarding access and benefit sharing. They will expect you to be aware of and compliant with your country's regulations on this topic.

India, for instance, is a signatory to the Nagoya Protocol. Companies exporting and buying Ayurvedic ingredients from India have to comply with Indian laws. One example is Bio India Biologicals, which produces and exports raw materials and finished products worldwide for the health industry. When it exported 2 tonnes of Neem leaves, the company had to pay a royalty payment of 5% of the FoB value to the Indian National Biodiversity Authority. This authority transferred a share of the amount to the local Biodiversity Management Committee, where the leaves were collected, for the purpose of planting Neem saplings and raising awareness of biodiversity conservation in India. The government is expected to use these funds to support the conservation of biodiversity.

European companies have also signed the Nagoya Protocol. One example is SILAB, a French company that develops, manufactures, and markets patented natural active ingredients. SILAB imports ashwagandha from its partner in India, ensuring a traceable supply and compliance with the requirements of ABS regulations in the framework of the Nagoya protocol.

Tips:

- Look for credible literature on the benefits of your Ayurvedic ingredient. Use these references in your product documentation and marketing material. Use scientific resources, because this will give you credibility, such as the database Examine.com through Elsevier Science Direct (not for free). Also consider becoming a member of the Society for Medicinal Plant and Natural Product Research (GA) to access their research.
- Create a nutrient profile for your ingredients and products to share with potential buyers. If possible, conduct research on the efficacy of your products by building research partnerships. Use scientific research and data to support any claims you make, as this will give you more credibility.
- Conduct further market research on trends for Ayurvedic ingredients yourself. Check online magazines such as Nutra Ingredients, Nutraceuticals World, or Vitafoods Insights.
- Promote the sustainable and ethical aspects of your production process. Buyers might ask you to support your claims with certification or documentation on your sourcing practices and/or your corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices.
- Explore whether getting certified is an interesting proposition for your company, and matches the market segment that you are targeting. It could help guarantee buyers that your product meets environmental and/or social standards. However, before applying for certifications, always talk to (potential) buyers about whether they are interested in certified ingredients. If you are already certified, tell prospective buyers about the certification that you already have. Display this clearly on your company website and marketing materials.

ProFound – Advisers In Development carried out this study on behalf of CBI.