

Which trends offer opportunities or pose threats on the European grains, pulses and oilseeds market?

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The European market is influenced by a series of powerful trends. These changes bring both opportunities and challenges for producers of grains, pulses and oilseeds. From the growing plant protein popularity to the impact of geopolitical events, these forces are reshaping trade dynamics. Sustainability and social compliance have become non-negotiable standards, while a growing preference for authenticity in ingredients is creating new markets. Convenience, health-consciousness and the rise of e-commerce are further driving this transformation.

Contents of this page

1. [Inflation poses a threat to high-value products](#)
2. [Popularity of plant protein is increasing](#)
3. [Health-conscious consumer group is growing](#)
4. [Geopolitics and nationalism are affecting trade flows](#)
5. [Sustainability and social compliance have become standard practice](#)
6. [Legislative requirements make Europe a challenging market](#)
7. [Search for authenticity creates market for new flavours and traditional ingredients](#)
8. [Convenience drives the market for value-added products](#)
9. [Opportunity: added value from developing countries](#)
10. [E-commerce will gain market share](#)

Sector transformation is on the way

Several of the trends explained in this study will contribute to a transition of the European grains, pulses and oilseeds market. By 2033, Western and Northern European markets will look different because:

- Europeans increasingly understand they can get their protein from plants: not only vegans or vegetarians, but all types of health and/or planet-conscious consumers. This group is growing fast.
- European consumers are interested in authentic and new flavours. This has created substantial markets for lesser known grains, pulses and oilseeds and more traditional ingredients.
- European grains, pulses and oilseeds importers and distributors put more effort into making their supply chain transparent and report on environmental sustainability performance (footprints).
- More grains, pulses and oilseeds come from socially and ethically certified production. This means prices will have become higher and farmers and workers earn a fairer income.

The variety of food products will continue to expand. Supplying or using original and authentic ingredients is a good way to offer a unique product. Through well-designed storytelling you can make it

stand out and differentiate from other products, thus gaining consumer interest and market share.

The changes will be driven by several of the trends explained below. Note that the trends are listed in range of actuality. For example, the first trend is currently having a huge impact on the market but won't contribute to the sector transformation explained above.

1. Inflation poses a threat to high-value products

Inflation – the increase of prices – is the latest major concern in the food industry. It is not certain how inflation will influence consumption in the long term, but the common expectation is that high-value products will suffer more than less expensive food products.

In 2023, this is already visible through the crisis in the European organic food market. Consumers prefer to buy less expensive products, which goes at the cost of the more expensive organic products. Also, consumers of organic products switch from specialised organic retail chains to cheaper mainstream supermarkets with an organic product range. This also harms sales in the organic market.

The worst period for the organic market was the first half of 2023, as the third quarter of 2023 showed an improvement in sales of organic products in most European countries.

Figure 1: Organic chickpeas in a mainstream supermarket in Spain, September 2023



Source: [Globally Cool](#)

Since COVID-19, prices throughout the supply chain have increased for several reasons, including the pandemic itself, the war in Ukraine, high energy prices and a lack of labour capacity in a few European countries. Another complicating factor is the rise of minimum wages in a few European countries. In Germany, this higher minimum wage causes higher production costs and may negatively impact production of certain grains, pulses or oilseeds. [Minimum wage in Germany](#) grew by more than 40%, from €8.5 in 2016 to €12 in 2022.

Overall, production and logistics costs within Europe rose to record heights in 2022 and 2023 (note that logistics

costs came down again in the first half of 2023). Such high costs make the future of high-value products uncertain. High-volume and affordable grains, pulses or oilseeds will likely be preferred over higher-priced, imported products. Retailers will maintain pressure on prices and thus profit margins.

In the years to come, you can expect an ongoing pressure on margins. Supply chains need to become even more efficient by cutting costs and innovating. The future will place high demands on producers both in and outside Europe. As a producer you will need to implement technological improvements. As an exporter, it has become even more important to find efficient logistics and ensure a sustainable, clean and certified production. The gap between successful and less successful suppliers will grow.

Tips:

Read CBI's [What is the demand for grains, pulses and oilseeds on the European market?](#) For a general outlook and organic market specifics in Europe's most important markets.

Find information on freight rates and the latest logistical developments on [Freightos](#) or [Searates.com](#).

Make sure to understand well the European guidelines for organic products. Browse [Organics at a glance](#) on the European Commission's website.

Check the [yearbook *The World of Organic Agriculture*](#) for key data and developments on organic agriculture.

2. Popularity of plant protein is increasing

Plant protein is increasingly popular in Europe. This trend is driven by a combination of health consciousness, environmental concerns, culinary innovation, and an increasing focus on diets to build muscle. Grains, pulses and oilseeds that are used as plant protein sources include quinoa, chickpeas, soy and oats. This trend can lead to an even higher demand for protein-rich grains, pulses and oilseeds.

There are many sources available that give insights into how much protein can be obtained by eating a certain grain, pulse or oilseed. [Protein-rich grains](#) include kamut, teff, amaranth, quinoa, whole wheat pasta, wild rice, millet, couscous, oats and buckwheat. [Protein-rich pulses](#) include black lentils, green lentils, split peas, navy beans, chickpeas, black beans and kidney beans.

Oilseeds can be a [very good source of plant-based protein too](#), especially oilseed cakes. Oilseed cakes are left after the oil extraction. They are often used as cattle feed, compost amendment or plant conditioner. But they are increasingly used for human consumption too.

The quality and functional properties of extracted oilseed cake proteins not only supplement the existing protein sources for human consumption but also solve the problem of oilseed cakes disposal, along with generating additional income to the oilseed crop producers and processors. Production of proteins for human consumption from oilseed cakes may also reduce carbon and water footprints while producing animal feed.

Figure 2: Alternative flours in a European supermarket, August 2023



Source: [Globally Cool](#)

Flexitarians are here to stay

The growth in popularity of plant-based diets and flexitarianism has dramatically boosted the demand for plant proteins. With an increasing awareness of the health benefits associated with reduced meat consumption, many Europeans are turning to alternative protein sources derived from grains, pulses and oilseeds. These plant-based proteins offer a wealth of nutrients, including fibre, vitamins and minerals, while often being lower in saturated fats and cholesterol compared to animal proteins.

Increasing awareness of environmental impact of food choices

Environmental awareness has also played an important role in the shift towards plant protein in Europe. Concerns over the ecological footprint of animal agriculture, including its contribution to greenhouse gas emissions and deforestation, have led consumers to seek more sustainable protein options. Plant-based protein production generally requires less land, water and energy resources than livestock farming. This aligns with Europe's broader commitment to sustainable and responsible consumption, making plant proteins an attractive choice for environmentally conscious consumers.

Culinary innovations are a driver

Culinary innovation and the increasing popularity of meat substitutes have additionally played a crucial role in popularising plant proteins. Companies across Europe have invested heavily in [research and development](#) to create [plant-based products that mimic the taste and texture of meat](#), making the transition to plant-based diets more accessible and appealing. These innovations have led to a wider variety of plant protein options on the market, ranging from tofu and tempeh to pea protein isolates and beyond.

European governments encourage plant protein consumption

Government policies and initiatives have also supported the growth of plant protein consumption in Europe. Many European countries have implemented policies aimed at promoting sustainable agriculture and reducing the environmental impact of food production. This includes initiatives to incentivise the production and consumption of plant-based proteins, as well as the development of supportive infrastructures for plant protein industries.

The agricultural policy of the European Union (CAP) provides several [measures to support the regional production of protein crops](#). It aims to reduce the supply gap in plant proteins and the dependency on imports, which are connected to environmental and social issues in third countries. The new CAP entered into force in [2023](#).

More demand for protein in general

Last, a growing number of athletes, fitness enthusiasts and health-conscious individuals are turning to plant protein as a means of meeting their dietary needs. The misconception that animal-based proteins are superior for muscle growth and performance is increasingly acknowledged as more research highlights the effectiveness of plant-based protein sources. This has led to a surge in plant-based protein supplements and fortified foods catering to this consumer group.

This trend is likely to reshape the European food landscape, driving further innovation and diversification in the plant protein industry.

Tip:

Stay informed about news in the plant protein market on [New Protein](#) and the developments in food ingredients on the European market by visiting the websites of [The Spoon](#) and [Food Ingredients First](#). By following the developments on the market, as a supplier of protein crops you can benefit from the innovations in plant-based foods.

3. Health-conscious consumer group is growing

For years, many European consumers did not consider grains, pulses or oilseeds as part of a health-conscious lifestyle. Grains equalled white wheat bread, pulses were cheap filling, and oilseeds the standard sunflower oil. This has changed significantly in the last ten years.

European consumers increasingly know about healthier alternatives to the standard grains, pulses and oilseeds that were part of their diet. This has boosted demand for these alternatives. As individuals seek to make more informed decisions about their health and wellbeing, they are increasingly turning to a diverse array of these ingredients to meet their nutritional needs.

One of the driving factors behind this trend is more awareness of dietary diversity and its impact on overall health. Health-conscious consumers are recognising the importance of incorporating a wide range of grains, pulses and oilseeds into their diets to ensure they receive a diverse array of nutrients. This has enhanced demand for lesser-known varieties like amaranth, teff, quinoa, millet and chia seeds, which offer unique nutritional profiles and can complement traditional staples like wheat and rice.

Figure 3: Wide variety of grains and pulses in a European supermarket shelf (August 2023)



Source: [Globally Cool](#)

Furthermore, this trend is influencing product labelling and marketing strategies within the industry. Manufacturers are increasingly highlighting the nutritional content and health benefits of their products, catering to the sophisticated tastes of health-conscious consumers. Labels boasting terms like 'high in fibre', 'rich in antioxidants' and 'source of essential fatty acids' are becoming common, providing consumers with the information they need to make informed choices about their dietary selections.

One producer that has tapped into this trend is the company [Cusiworld](#) from Ecuador.

'Free from' has become a special product category

The 'free from' trend in the food industry refers to products that are marketed as being [free from certain allergens, additives or ingredients](#) that are perceived by consumers as potentially harmful or undesirable. This trend has gained popularity in recent years, driven by various factors:

- Food allergies and sensitivities. An increasing number of people are being diagnosed with food allergies and sensitivities. Common allergens include gluten, dairy, soy and various grains. For individuals with allergies or sensitivities, 'free from' products offer safe alternatives. The EU has a list of [14 food allergens](#) that must be declared when there is actual or potential presence in a product.
- Health and wellness concerns. Many consumers are becoming more health-conscious and are seeking out foods that are perceived as cleaner or more natural. They may choose products free from artificial additives and preservatives; unprocessed (raw) functional foods and ingredients; or products that don't have ingredients that are associated with health issues.
- Dietary restrictions and preferences. Some people follow specific diets, such as vegan, paleo, [Fodmap](#) or gluten-free, for various reasons, including ethical, environmental and health concerns. 'Free from' products cater to such dietary restrictions and preferences.
- Organic and ethically certified products. This is not exactly 'free from' in the traditional sense. However, the large group of consumers that buys organic-certified, or products with an ethical certification such as Fairtrade, do so because they believe that such products are 'free from' harm (or at least less harmful) to their health, to the health of others and to the environment.

Soy, for example, is one of the 13 allergens in the EU list, but there are also consumers who avoid soy for other reasons, for example because of concerns over its phytoestrogen content or its potential for genetic modification.

Tips:

Check the potential of your product in the 'free from' market. To a certain extent, this market has specialised players. It can be worth exploring chances of supplying your product to this niche market. Consider visiting the most important event in this niche market, the [Free-from Food](#) trade fair in Europe.

Check with [The Vegan Society](#) and the [Smart Protein Project](#) for more data related to vegan and plant-based consumption.

Be careful when making nutritional and health claims if you sell to retail directly. These claims are subject to European regulations and the [EU Register of nutrition and health claims made on foods](#). For example, you are not allowed to claim weight loss properties of barley grain.

4. Geopolitics and nationalism are affecting trade flows

Recent developments, including Brexit, the war in Ukraine and increasing nationalism, have affected the trade flows of GPO. Fuel prices are rising, European consumers have turned their focus towards local products, and British companies buy more directly at the source countries.

Brexit could be a motive for more direct imports

From 1 January 2021, the United Kingdom completed Brexit and officially left the European Union and the single market. A last-minute deal prevented heavy taxation for grain and milling companies between the EU and the UK. But trading between the EU and the UK has become complex and expensive, with more bureaucracy and logistical inefficiencies.

For now, favourable trade tariffs between the nations are maintained under the EU-UK [Trade and Cooperation Agreement](#) (TCA), which envisages that goods continue to be traded without tariffs and quotas. At the same time, TCA conditions include more comprehensive customs checks and rules of origin requirements. These additional administrative burdens may provide non-European suppliers (including from North America, non-EU Europe and Asia) with a new window of opportunity, mainly to arrange their direct supply to the UK.

So far we have not seen a serious impact on trade flows to the UK for grains, pulses or oilseeds. In other sectors, like spices, imports from India go more directly to the UK since Brexit.

For the medium-to-long term, imports to the UK from third countries are likely to grow. This will be at the cost of imports from the European Union (EU) of products originally coming from third countries.

Food shortages in supermarkets led to more local sourcing

Disruptions in the supply chain, like the pandemic in 2020-2021 and the uncertainties caused by the war in Ukraine in 2022, led to shortages of several products in European supermarkets.

Lockdowns and BREXIT shrank labour resources, complicating logistics and supply reliability. The pandemic and the war in Ukraine led to consumers having to fall back on the offer of retailers when the food service industry faced severe disruptions. This caused a run on staple foods such as wheat flour and pasta, and sunflower oil,

with empty shelves in supermarkets as a result.

The supply chain disruptions and the sudden increase in demand caused prices to fluctuate. In 2022, shipping and handling costs rose to record levels. Some market experts believe that a way out of such situations may require structural changes, including shorter supply chains, a de-globalisation of food crops, and companies demanding higher levels of flexibility.

The pandemic, BREXIT and the war in Ukraine further supported the [interest in domestic produce](#). Products will be increasingly sourced locally [whenever local sourcing is possible](#). Otherwise they will be sourced from other countries within Europe. The pandemic has also re-emphasised the existing differences between European countries. For example, Italian producers of special pasta products, such as protein pastas, source their ingredients locally as much as possible. Only quinoa (Spain) and teff (Ethiopia) come from outside Italy.

Europe will continue to depend on imported crops; however, buyers will remain very selective in choosing their suppliers or shifting to new supplying countries. Besides the increasing demand for European production, buyers also have an interest in new sources of high-quality beans or unique varieties and in becoming less dependent on China and India.

Within Europe, the tendency among buyers to prefer local sourcing is relatively strong in Italy, Switzerland, France and Germany. This tendency obviously relates to local availability too. Origin of the product typically plays a less important role for grains, pulses and oilseeds traders in Eastern Europe. At the same, in these Eastern European countries traders typically have a good assortment of local products thanks to the domestic production of several oilseeds and grain crops.

Tips:

Plan your production and supply carefully. Make sure to offer continuity through a reliable, constant quality and volume, but do not produce without having assessed the market. Visit the [Food ingredients Europe](#) fair when you decide to specialise in sub-ingredients and natural additives. Check out the [exhibitor list](#) to see what types of ingredients are presented.

Check your export advantage in supplying the UK as a non-European supplier on the [GOV.UK website](#): look into the [UK trade agreements with non-EU countries](#) and read the [summary of the UK's new relationship with the EU](#).

Check the [import tariff for your product in the UK](#), and for the EU in [My Trade Assistant of Access2Markets](#).

5. Sustainability and social compliance have become standard practice

Social and environmental sustainability has become a non-negotiable requirement. Companies at all levels in the value chain are gaining interest in sustainable GPO and supply-chain transparency. This trend relates to many aspects along the supply chain, including working conditions, water use and waste management. Your product is most likely to be accepted by European buyers if it aligns with sustainability initiatives.

Sustainable and ethical production are major concerns in Europe when dealing with agricultural production and the wider agri-food sector. The required transparency and traceability in the GPO value chain puts significant pressure on producers and suppliers. It is not enough to be competitive: sustainability is increasingly becoming a basic feature of every successful business.

More focus on accountability

In the past few decades, a lot has happened in the sector to improve environmental sustainability. The most important driver for this has been the lowering of [maximum residue Levels for certain pesticides sold to the European market](#). A recent example is the banning of Chlorpyrifos as a pesticide on crops. In recent years, several countries have also enacted new regulations that hold domestic companies responsible for human rights violations in their supply chains.

In addition, the EU is currently discussing the [Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive \(CSDDD\)](#). The aim is to make it mandatory for companies with +250 employees and +€40 million turnover to address the environmental and human rights impacts of their operations within as well as outside Europe. The CSDDD is still under construction, but the message is clear: accountability will become increasingly mandatory.

Stimulated by the widening attention being given to accountability – also for European grains, pulses and oilseeds – small and medium-sized enterprises to whom the CSDDD will not apply will need to carefully look at the environmental footprint of their business.

Media exposure influences the market

Lots of media exposure can make certain food products gain in popularity, but it can also highlight environmental and social responsibility concerns. For example, in 2013, when prices and exports of quinoa increased rapidly, [concerns were raised about food security in Bolivia](#). Likewise, with the growth of soy-based vegetarian products, consumer awareness grew about [soybean-driven deforestation](#) in South America, including the Cerrado, Chaco and Amazon regions.

And the same happened with palm oil and the growing concerns about the [poor labour conditions](#) that prevail in the palm oil industry. These debates not only caught the attention of consumers and politicians and became a serious concern for many businesses, it is also one of the reasons why food brands increasingly prefer to source their ingredients from European production.

Whether scientifically proven or not, negative publicity may affect the demand for a specific ingredient as well as the reputation of a brand or product origin. Buyers in Europe are increasingly paying attention to their corporate responsibilities in terms of the social and environmental impact of their businesses. This is why import businesses expect producers and exporters to demonstrate more proof of their current good conduct and improvement plans.

Leading traders, food brands and retailers are increasingly on the forefront of sustainability initiatives besides implementing their own policies, like [Sustainable Soy by the Louis Dreyfus Company](#). Others use available standards, such as the Italian gluten-free pasta producer [Andriani](#), which is [Bcorp](#)-certified (Figure x shows a print screen of a paragraph of Andriani's annual sustainability management report, which is a key requirement for Bcorp certification). Other companies participate in sector initiatives, like the [Sustainable Rice Platform](#) (SRP).

[Mayorga Coffee](#) is a company from South America that is very clear about their sustainability practices. Their passionate sustainability story has a prominent place on their website. Besides coffee, they also buy and sell quinoa and chia seeds. Their [sustainability story about quinoa](#) teaches you about their supply chain, direct relationships and organic products.

Figure 4: Annual report on ethical and responsible procurement in the annual sustainability management report

Ethical and responsible procurement

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In 2022, Andriani renewed its membership in **SEDEX**, an online platform for sharing information on **ethical and social performance** across the **value chain**. In this context, a SMETA audit was completed in January, and all four audit methodology pillars yielded favourable results:

- *Labour Standards;*
- *Business Ethics;*
- *Environment;*
- *Health & Safety.*

Andriani also encouraged its suppliers to adopt this tool, especially sub-suppliers operating in countries at risk.

In 2022, **22%** of Andriani suppliers permanently adopted the SEDEX platform, in line with the numbers from the previous year. For all others, the performance of SMETA audits is assessed on an individual basis and restricted to cases where there is a proven need, especially if it is in response to explicit customer requests.



Source: Andriani (2023)

Consumers do not expect positive sustainability performance and social engagement from large businesses only. Many smaller buyers of GPO have incorporated social and environmental requirements into their sourcing policies too. They may ask you to have a code of conduct in place declaring that you run a responsible business in terms of local environmental and labour laws as a bottom line, and strive for higher ESG standards. You can expect increasing pressure to show additional documentation and certification as proof of your good conduct.

You can turn the demanding market to your advantage by making sustainability a competitive advantage and standing out from other suppliers. However, basic purchase criteria such as price, on-time delivery and product quality are still most important. As a producer or exporter, you must remain price-competitive while complying with increasingly high standards.

Sustainability is not always possible

Unfortunately, not all importers of GPO can find the sustainable product they are looking for. Teff, native to Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea and Djibouti, is available in those countries, but mostly without a sustainability label. This means some European importers end up buying their organic teff from other countries, like Spain, even if they prefer to source from the native countries.

Tips:

Find out more about social sustainability good practices in our [Tips to become a socially responsible exporter of grains, pulses and oilseeds](#).

Use the [ITC Standards Map](#) to learn about the different sustainable and social standards and see which ones are available for your country.

Check your company's current performance and implement the [amfori BSCI code of conduct](#). You can also find many practical tools in the [amfori BSCI resources](#).

Read about [the current range of social certifications](#) to learn about trends and developments in social standards and to read several case studies.

6. Legislative requirements make Europe a challenging market

Legislative requirements make Europe a relatively challenging market, compared to other regions such as the Middle East, large parts of Asia, and even the USA. On a global level, for example, the maximum residue levels (MRLs) for certain pesticides on grains, pulses or oilseeds are among the strictest in the world. If your product contains higher MRLs than European legislation allows, your products cannot be sold on the European market but can be sold on other markets, like the USA. A recent new legal requirement is the [EU Deforestation Regulation \(EUDR\)](#).

Deforestation law

The EU wants to make sure that EU consumers do not contribute to deforestation or forest degradation anywhere in the world. They therefore proposed a [regulation](#) to curb EU-driven deforestation and forest degradation. All palm oil and soybean products exported to the EU must meet the deforestation regulation. As small and medium-sized exporters from developing countries most likely do not export these products, they are not directly feeling the impact of this regulation. However, palm oil products and soybean products may in theory compete with products exported by small and medium-sized exporters. In practice, there is a small chance that small and medium-sized exporters of oilseeds will be affected by this regulation.

The new regulation entered into force on 29 June 2023. Since then, companies have 18 months to meet the new rules. This means that exporters need to meet this regulation by the end of December 2024. [Micro and small enterprises](#) (MSEs) will have an extra six months to comply, which means they would need to be compliant by June 2025.

Here is a brief description of the key elements:

- Due diligence statement. Exporters are only allowed to export palm oil products and soybean products that are both deforestation-free and legal. You need to cover all exports with a due diligence statement.
- Traceability. The regulation requires traceability of the crop to the plot of land where it was produced.
- Deforestation cut-off date. Products from land that was deforested or degraded after 31 December 2020 cannot be sold in the EU.
- Benchmarking system. There will be a benchmarking system that assigns risks to countries and regions. The risk level determines what you need to do.
- Agroforestry is not an alternative. Palm oil products and soybean products produced on degraded or deforested land cannot be sold in the EU.

The European Green Deal

The [European Green Deal](#) will influence how resources are used and greenhouse gas emissions reduced. The new EU policies on sustainability will prepare Europe to become the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. One of the most relevant parts for the grains, pulses and oilseeds industry is the [Farm to Fork Strategy](#) and the new CAP that, amongst others, aims to reduce the dependency on crop protein imports from outside the EU.

The Farm to Fork Strategy aims to make food systems fair, healthy and environmentally friendly. It ensures sustainable food production and [sustainable use of pesticides](#), packaging and food waste. With an [organic farming action plan](#), the European Commission has set a target of "at least 25% of the EU's agricultural land under organic farming and a significant increase in organic aquaculture by 2030". Policies can promote organic production within Europe, but increasing consumption will also offer opportunities for non-European suppliers.

The Green Deal will undoubtedly have an impact on the international food trade. [Several EU trade agreements already include rules on trade and sustainable development](#). These include the agreements with most countries in Latin America plus Moldova, Ukraine and Vietnam. For suppliers of grains, pulses and oilseeds it is important to look ahead of the rising standards and try to be in the frontline of developments.

Policies like the European Green Deal, the Farm to Fork Strategy and the new agricultural policy of the EU (CAP)

prioritise self-sufficiency and sustainable production of GPO products. You could think this might lead to fewer imports from developing countries, yet for the foreseeable future Europe will remain dependent on imports of various grains, pulses and oilseeds from developing countries.

Tips:

Stay ahead of the curve and learn about the possible impacts of the EGD on imports from non-EU countries by checking CBI's publication [EU Green Deal: how will it impact my business?](#) Also read more about this topic in the news article [Pulses and oilseeds in the European protein transition](#).

Find out what is important and implement an environmental policy by using the [Environmental Implementation Guidelines](#) of the [Global Social Compliance Programme](#) (GSCP) and the [Consumer Goods Forum](#) (CGF).

Make sure that you meet the EU [regulations on deforestation-free products](#). Support farmers to make sure they comply. Farmers and cooperatives need to make many investments to have mapping and traceability in place. Provide training and finances, and work with other stakeholders.

Read the [CBI buyer requirements for grains, pulses and oilseeds](#) to see what actions you can take and what type of evidence and certifications buyers require.

Read the [CBI tips to go green in the grain pulses and oilseeds industry](#).

7. Search for authenticity creates market for new flavours and traditional ingredients

This trend reflects a growing consumer preference for traditional ingredients and unique flavours in their food choices. This shift in consumer demand is prompting producers to explore and reintroduce forgotten or underutilised grains, pulses and oilseeds.

One of the driving forces behind this trend is [a renewed interest in heritage and traditional foods](#). Consumers are increasingly seeking out products that connect them to cultural and culinary roots, searching for flavours that evoke a sense of nostalgia or cultural identity. This has boosted use of [ancient grains](#) like [quinoa](#), [teff](#) and [spelt](#), as well as heirloom varieties of pulses and oilseeds. These ingredients are increasingly finding their way into mainstream consumer consciousness, driving the demand.

Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Figure 5: Teff products offered by the British company Tobia's Teff



Source: Tobia Teff

An ancient grain that is gaining popularity through a strong branding strategy is Khorasan wheat, under the trademark [Kamut](#), which has excellent traceability and storytelling.

The search for authenticity also encourages innovation in the grains, pulses and oilseeds sector. Producers are investing in research and development to discover new and exciting flavour profiles within existing crops. This has led to the emergence of unique varieties of quinoa with distinct nutty undertones, or pulses with richer, more complex tastes. Additionally, producers are exploring traditional processing methods and techniques to preserve the integrity of these ingredients, resulting in products that boast a truly authentic culinary experience.

Also fitting with this trend are authentic or ethnic food products such as couscous (milled durum), risotto (arborio [rice](#)), dal (bean paste), hummus ([chickpea](#) paste), tahini ([sesame](#) paste) and sunflower seeds. In the past decade, these products have earned a position in European supermarket shelves.

Figure 6: Sunflower seeds of an ethnic brand in a mainstream German supermarket (October 2023)



Source: [Globally Cool](#)

This trend is creating opportunities for small-scale and local producers. Consumers are increasingly valuing transparency and traceability in their food sources and are willing to pay a premium for products with a good story. As a result, small-scale farmers and artisanal producers who specialise in traditional and heirloom varieties have more opportunities on the European market.

Ethnic retail segment has grown sharply

The ethnic retail trend in the food industry refers to the growing number of specialty stores that cater to specific cultural or ethnic communities. These stores offer a wide range of [products](#) that are not always readily available in mainstream supermarkets. Such ethnic retail outlets are typically started by diaspora in Europe and are found in large and medium-sized European cities, often with a high concentration in certain city areas. In recent years, such outlets have also appeared in smaller cities.

Selling products through ethnic retail outlets can be interesting for you if the following applies:

- you supply consumer products for your local market and your product and brand have a strong reputation in your country.
- your country has a certain diaspora size in Europe or elsewhere, meaning that there is likely a good market in Europe or other countries.

If both conditions apply, then it makes sense to approach the specialised distributors that supply this market. Be prepared: your product, including the product itself, package and label, need to meet the [legal requirements of the EU market](#).

Tips:

Make use of the historic value of your product, its traditional consumption, its unique characteristics,

and the identity of its farmers to brand an authentic product. A good first step in your branding strategy is a well-designed website.

Look at examples of products that have successfully tapped into this authenticity trend. Besides the examples mentioned above, you can also look at the Italian company [Obà](#). In 2019 they received [approval](#) from the [European Food Safety Authority](#) (EFSA) to commercialise fonio grains as a food ingredient. Another example is [Mama Fresh](#) in Ethiopia: they tapped into a traditional, gluten-free food trend with *injera*, a pancake-like bread made of teff.

Check the [EU Novel Food Catalogue](#) for restrictions to marketing your specific product. If your ingredient has not been marketed in Europe before, it may be a novel food.

Visit [Anuga Trade Fair](#) to gauge the interest of ethnic food distributors in Europe, such as [Asia Express Foods](#) and [Unidex](#). These distributors will be also able to give you an idea of how you should adapt your product, package and label.

8. Convenience drives the market for value-added products

As modern lifestyles become busier and more fast-paced, consumers are seeking convenient food solutions that do not compromise on nutrition or quality. This trend revolves around the demand for value-added products and is reshaping consumer preferences and industry practices.

One of the key drivers behind this trend is the desire for time-saving solutions in meal preparation. With hectic schedules and an increasing focus on work-life balance, European consumers are looking for options that reduce the time and effort required to cook wholesome meals. This has led to an increased demand for pre-packaged and ready-to-eat products.

Examples of convenience products that include grains, pulses and oilseeds are [pre-cooked quinoa pouches](#) and convenience-driven [pulse-based snacks](#). These options provide consumers with nutritious options that can be prepared with minimal time and effort.

The convenience-driven trend also leads to innovation in processing and packaging technologies. Producers are investing in advanced techniques to extend the shelf life of value-added products without resorting to artificial preservatives or additives. This has led to the development of modified atmosphere packaging and vacuum-sealed containers, ensuring that consumers have access to convenient options that maintain the freshness and nutritional integrity of the ingredients.

Supermarkets have also added mixed-grain and pulse products to their private-label assortments, for example [Tesco's bulgur wheat, green lentils and barley](#), [Albert Heijn's organic lentil pasta](#) and [Jumbo's three colour quinoa mix](#). The development of private-label products is a good indication of the potential and growth of these products in the mainstream B2C segment. Another good indication of this trend is the [launch of plant-based fast food by large food businesses](#) like McDonald's and Nestlé.

Figure 7: Protein-rich pasta products in a European supermarket shelf (August 2023)



Image by [Globally Cool](#)

This trend is also encouraging collaboration and partnerships between different segments of the food industry. Suppliers of grains, pulses and oilseeds are teaming up with manufacturers of value-added products to create innovative offerings that cater to the convenience-seeking consumer. This collaborative approach is leading to the development of an array of innovative products, from grain-based meal kits to pulse-based protein bars that meet the needs of today's time-pressed consumer.

9. Opportunity: added value from developing countries

Traditionally, European food processors have developed added-value products from food ingredients sourced in developing countries. Added-value products exported from developing countries to Europe are often limited to basic processing, including cleaning, milling, crushing and popping. However, as a supplier from a non-European country you can seize market opportunities by developing consumer products for which there is a market in Europe.

This way of selling your own added-value product is not easy, but it can be done. You can target specialised distributors that are open to engaging in such ventures. One example is the British company [Aduna](#). They have been successfully marketing traditional African ingredients, such as baobab and moringa. Recently they started selling fonio grains, which they source from women farmers in Southern Mali, while their ambition is to process and pack as much as possible in the origin countries.

Another example is the Bolivian company [Coronilla](#). They introduced pastas made with local Bolivian quinoa and amaranth in Germany, the UK and Spain.

Tips:

Visit European trade fairs like [SIAL](#), [Anuga](#) or [Biofach](#) to find food brand companies that use grains, pulses and oilseeds, and to explore the advantages of adding value at origin.

Remain flexible towards the option of private labelling. This can be a preference of your client, but it also saves you on branding and marketing costs. Consider visiting the [PLMA trade fair](#), which is the leading private labelling trade fair in Europe.

Stay on top of product innovations in the food sector. You can do this by regularly visiting news sites such as [FoodIngredientsFirst](#), [FoodNavigator](#) and [New Food](#).

When marketing a finished product, target distributors specialised in fair trade, organic, ethnic or health products, for example. Read the CBI's [tips on how to find buyers](#) for your product.

Be prepared to invest in international marketing activities and logistics when introducing a final product in Europe, such as participating in trade fairs and warehousing. Also, adjust your product presentation to the European style. Get inspiration from existing and successful brands you like.

10. E-commerce will gain market share

The online grocery channel is developing fast in Europe. The COVID-19 pandemic gave online grocery shopping an extra push.

During the first lockdowns in 2020, online grocery shoppers worldwide triggered more than 40% growth in one year. According to [Retaildetail](#), online grocery sales increased by another 16% in 2021, in contrast to 2% for rapidly moving consumer goods in general. In Europe, the market share for online groceries was 6.9% in 2021. Online food shopping is most common in the Netherlands, the UK, Denmark and Sweden.

Online sales of plain and mixed food ingredients directly to consumers has grown significantly since 2018. This includes grains, pulses and oilseeds, as well as dried fruit and nuts, and superfoods. A growing number of consumers prepare breakfast cereals mixes at home, making use of a range of ingredients which are typically different than traditional ingredients such as wheat flakes and raisins. For example:

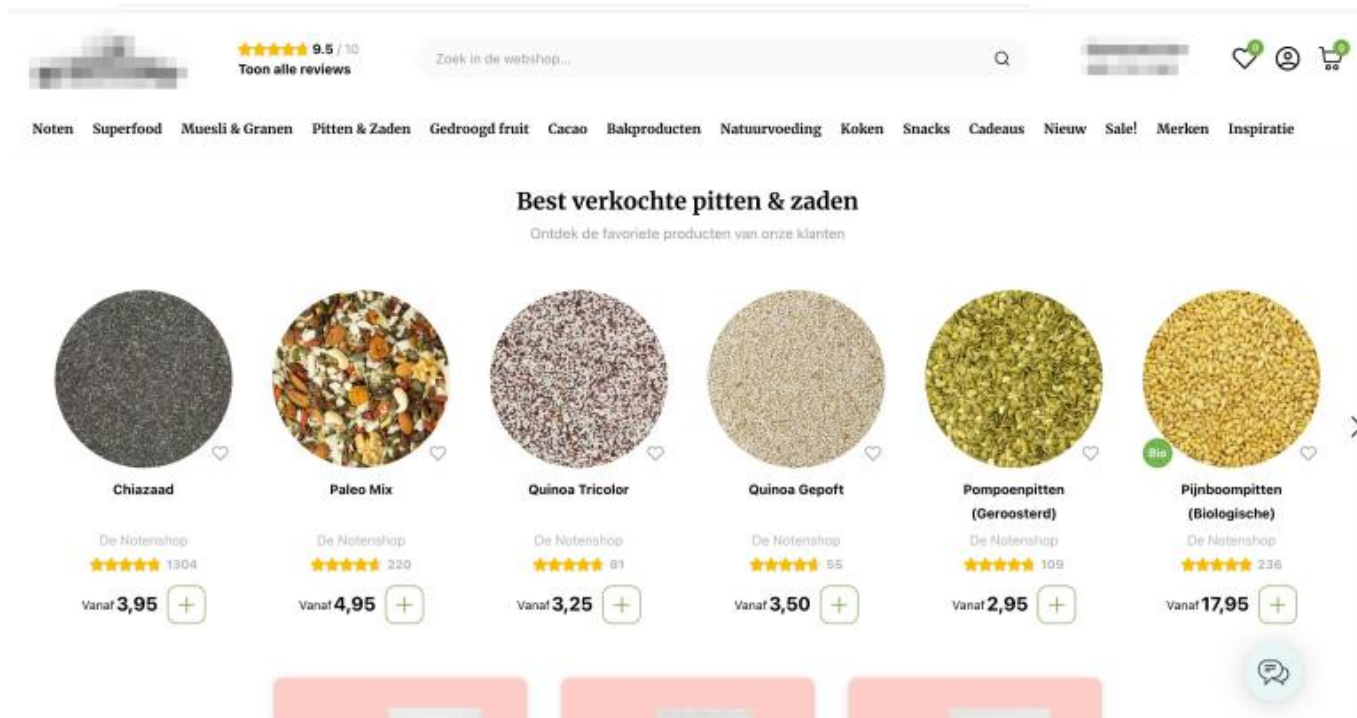
- Flakes or puffs of oats, teff, quinoa, amaranth, fonio
- Cubes of dried apple, apricot, figs, dates, prunes and organic mulberries instead of conventional raisins
- Mix of seeds including sunflower, pumpkin, flax (linseeds), hemp, sesame and chia seeds
- Miscellaneous superfood ingredients including cacao nibs, baobab, moringa and other superfood powders, and superfood spices such as Ceylon cinnamon
- Protein-rich powders based on, for example, pulses

A growing group of consumers buys such a range of ingredients in growing volumes and for different applications. In addition to the breakfast mix, other applications are shakes and smoothies, baking and cooking.

This development is also driven by the ongoing online-sales efforts of mainstream grocery retailers like Sainsbury's in the UK and Albert Heijn in the Netherlands. They are developing their online product range to meet the growing interest among consumers, but their effort is partly out of necessity because many other online concepts have popped up, such as:

- Fully online grocery stores like [Picnic](#) and [Crisp](#) (Netherlands), [Ocado](#) (UK) and [Rohlik](#) (Czechia).
- Delivery of meal boxes with ingredients and recipes, like [HelloFresh](#) and [Gousto](#).
- International online giants like [Amazon Fresh](#), which recently launched in the UK, Germany, Spain and Italy, and has closed partnerships with [Wm Morrison Supermarkets](#) (UK), [Día](#) (Spain), [U2 Supermercato](#) (Italy) and [Monoprix](#) (France).
- Food delivery platforms like [Just Eat Takeaway.com](#), [Deliveroo](#) and [Uber Eats](#), providing food delivery as a service.
- SMEs that do direct sales from the country of origin like [Cusi World](#) or [Mayorga Coffee](#). This is still a very rare sales channel for most grains, pulses or oilseeds SMEs.

Figure 8: Example of a healthy food ingredients webshop from the Netherlands (October 2023)



Source: [Globally Cool](#)

Several European countries have specialised webshops that sell healthy food ingredients, including the above-mentioned grains, pulses and oilseeds. One such specialised shop is [De Notenshop](#) (Netherlands), another is the webshop [Bulk.com](#), which has distribution in a large number of European countries.

Tips:

Discover opportunities to supply the online health ingredients supermarkets directly with your grains, pulses or oilseeds. There isn't a straightforward way to find these companies: the best method is to search online within a certain national domain (like: ".nl" for the Netherlands) and relevant keywords (preferably in the specific country's language).

Read our [tips to go digital](#) and learn about digitalisation in this industry, including e-commerce.

[Globally Cool](#) carried out this study on behalf of CBI.

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

