

10 tips for finding buyers on the European grain, pulses and oilseeds market

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When entering the European market for grains, pulses or oilseeds, there are many sources you can use to find buyers. One good way is to approach sector associations to obtain contact details. It is equally important that buyers can find you, especially online. Trade fairs offer a good platform to interact with buyers in person. Whatever promotional tools you use, make sure they are consistent and leave a professional impression.

Contents of this page

1. [Understand your target group](#)
2. [Visit trade fairs in Europe or online](#)
3. [Use member lists of trade associations](#)
4. [Attract buyers to your website](#)
5. [Register with trade directories](#)
6. [Use food marketplaces, but be selective](#)
7. [Contact support organisations](#)
8. [Start your orientation with food retailers](#)
9. [Use social media for networking](#)
10. [Engage with your business contacts](#)

1. Understand your target group

When trying to find buyers of grains, pulses or oilseeds in Europe, it is important to know your strength as a company and the segment that best suits your products. For grains, pulses and oilseeds you can find large commodity buyers as well as specialised buyers.

Commodity buyers

The commodity buyers focus on bulk, which often goes to the food processing or feed industry. This target group includes multinational companies such as [Cargill](#), [ADM](#), [Bunge](#) and [Olam](#), which are likely to be active in or close to your home market, making export to Europe less necessary. These will be among your targets when focused on high-volume and low-value crops (some commodities are listed on the stock exchange).

Specialised buyers

You must understand that other or specialised buyers try to differentiate from the commodity market in many different ways. They add unique value, focus on special ingredients or supply specific markets. For example, you will find specialised buyers for organic ingredients such as [Tradin Organic](#) (Netherlands), gluten-free such as [Freee by Doves Farm](#) (United Kingdom), additives and functional ingredients that you can find for example at [Neupert Ingredients](#) (Germany) and companies that transform raw material into consumer products, such as the Italian company [Pedon](#).

Select your buyer based on the product and the process you offer. Finding the right buyer often involves

spending time to get to know your potential buyer, but it also means you must live up to the expectations and the requirements that specialised buyers have.

Supply chains of foodstuffs such as grains, pulses or oilseeds may be integrated or blurred due to the fact that companies may both import themselves and purchase via other traders.

Tips:

- Visit the website of the potential buyer, read their company news and then contact them to see how your product can fit in. For example, make sure your target client has no in-house processing if you want to supply semi-processed grains, pulses or oilseeds.
- Do a background check and use credit reports and databases such as [Dun&Bradstreet Business Directory](#) or [Graydon](#) to check if your future buyer is financially sound ('due diligence').
- Prioritise food safety and clean production when targeting clients that are bringing products on the market for direct consumption or special nutrition; these often include organic products, special dietary products, superfoods and healthy raw ingredients. Make sure to have a separate and safe post-harvest process when targeting the free-from (allergens) market. Remember that cross-contamination is a no-go for specialist buyers of gluten-free ingredients. Refer to the [CBI Buyer requirements for grains, pulses and oilseeds](#) to see how to comply with these food requirements.
- Show your understanding of product functionality by including technical data. This is especially important for buyers that supply the food processing industry with functional ingredients and additives such as proteins, starches or vegetable oils. See as an example the [product specifications of organic adzuki beans](#) of the company DO-IT BV.

2. Visit trade fairs in Europe or online

Trade fairs are among the best ways to get in contact with potential buyers. Practically every European company that works with grains, pulses or oilseeds as food ingredients participates in food-related events, if not as an exhibitor they will be present as a visitor for networking. You will find companies in different parts of the value chain, including importers, processors, food brands and distributors. There are several food fairs that may be interesting for you to visit or to exhibit at.

Take into account that most of your potential buyers are present on trade fairs to sell, and less focused on buying. To get the most out of your visit, you must prepare well and try to make contacts and appointments in advance. The exhibitor lists of the trade fairs are a good starting point.

Important: In 2020 and 2021 many trade fairs have been cancelled due the COVID-19 pandemic. When a trade fair does not take place, you can still use the exhibitor lists of previous events to find buyers. In some cases the trade fairs will be replaced by online activities such as digital matchmaking sessions or webinars, so check the trade fair websites regularly. The schedule for 2022 will likely be back to normal again, but additional measures for visitors can be expected in terms of proof of vaccination or negative COVID tests.

The main international trade fairs in Europe that are relevant for grains, pulses, oilseeds among many other food ingredients and products, are the following:

International food trade fairs in Europe

- [Anuga](#) (Cologne, Germany): The biennial trade fair Anuga (once every two years in October) claims to be the world's largest trade fair for food and beverages, with almost 8,000 exhibitors. The [exhibitor search option](#)

provides you with names of exhibitors.

- **SIAL** (Paris, France): SIAL takes place every other year after Anuga, presenting a variety of food innovations and trends, attracting 7200 exhibitors from the agri-food industry. You can search companies in the [exhibitors list](#).

If you are targeting specific European markets, it can be worthwhile to visit trade events that are specialised in a specific industry or market. For example:

Germany

- **Iba** (Munich): Iba is a leading trade fair for the bakery sector, bringing together experts on baking, confectionery and the snack industry. The website allows you to [search among the almost 1400 exhibitors](#) previous to the fair.

United Kingdom

- **IFE** (London): The International Food & Drink Event is an event in the United Kingdom that still mainly exhibits local companies. The event allows you to [join the community on IFE Connects](#) and access content, reports, guides and product solutions, and specifically meet with British food companies.
- **Natural & Organic Europe** (London, United Kingdom): Business event in the United Kingdom with 700 exhibitors in natural food among other natural products.

France

- **Natexpo** (Paris/Lyon): A trade fair for organic products in France. French companies make up 75% of the 1100 exhibitors.

Spain

- **BioCultura** (various cities): Spanish international trade show for organic products and responsible consumption, including a [search engine for exhibitors](#), held in different Spanish cities.

Scandinavia

- **Ecolife Scandinavia** (Malmö): Sustainable living trade show with [500 suppliers of organic food & drink, beauty and healthy lifestyle products](#).

Trade fairs with product or market focus

- Organic products: **Biofach** (Nuremberg, Germany) is the largest trade fair specialising in organic food products. You can [search online for exhibitors and products](#).
- Food ingredients: **FI Europe** (various locations): Food Ingredients Europe comprises food and natural ingredients with a variety of [exhibitors](#), and also has a separate [event for health ingredients](#). The events take place in different locations.
- Free From food: The European **Free From and Functional Food Expo** (held in Amsterdam in 2021) was initiated by the industry and supported by the leading certifying associations. It includes food segments such as Vegan, Plant-Based, Free From, Organic, Functional and Healthy Lifestyle.
- Private label products: **PLMA International** (Amsterdam, Netherlands): PLMA is an international event for private label manufacturers and offers an ideal platform to find buyers for finished products.
- Grains trade: **Global Grain Geneva** (Geneva, Switzerland): annual event in Europe for the grain trade, providing market intelligence and network opportunities. Participants include professionals from the entire supply chain – grain growers, millers, feed/food/drink manufacturers, traders and brokers. See the [full list of companies that attended the event](#) in 2020.

Outside Europe

Outside of Europe, you can also visit trade fairs and obtain valuable contacts for the European market.

- **Africa Food Manufacturing** in Egypt is joining forces with **Food Ingredients Africa**. The fair is still fairly unknown to many European food companies, but that can change over time. See also the [regions of the Food Ingredients trade fairs on the global website](#).
- **SIAL China**: SIAL has expanded their concept to Asia with SIAL Shanghai in China. Besides presenting your

business in Asia, you can find several European participants in the [exhibitor list 2021](#). See also the other SIAL trade fairs worldwide, such as India, Indonesia, Middle East and Canada, on the [SIAL network](#).

Tips:

- Browse for global trade fairs on, for example, [10times](#) and [TradeFairDates](#). Just filter for your target country in Europe and your sector.
- Make use of the [Toolbox with tips to successful trade fair participation](#) by the association of the German Trade Fair Industry.

3. Use member lists of trade associations

Branch associations in the grains, pulses and oilseed industry fulfil an important function in sector-wide issues such as trade barriers, food safety and policy-making at national and European level. As an exporter, these organisations rarely work in your interests, but their market information and member lists can be very helpful to understand the market and find potential buyers for your product. They are especially helpful for traditional commodities; for special or niche ingredients you will have to depend more on alternative sources such as company databases.

For grains and oilseeds, you can check out national organisations in high-demand countries such as Germany, the Netherlands (trade) or Italy. For Pulses, you can look for buyers with national organisations in the United Kingdom or Spain.

Cereals and seeds

Europe: [COCERAL](#) is the Confederation of National Federations representing national and European trade organisations in cereals, rice, animal feed, oilseeds, olive oil, oils and fats and agro-supply. [COCERAL lists several national trade organisations](#), for example in Germany, the Netherlands and Italy.

Germany: The German [Grain traders association of the Hamburg exchange](#) (VdG), the official representation of the German external trade in grains, oilseeds, animal feed, fish-meal and pulses with a [member database](#).

The Netherlands: The [Royal Dutch Grain and Feed Trade Association](#) ('Het Comité') with approximately **150 members in the agri-business**, such as feed producers and traders, collectors and traders of grain, pulses and seeds, flour mills, crushers and more.

Italy: The [National Cerealists Association](#) (ANACER) in Italy represents [the national operators that carry out the commercial activity of import](#), export and wholesale of cereals, oilseeds and derived products.

Vegetable oil and protein meal

Europe: [FEDIOL](#), the EU vegetable oil and protein meal industry association, represents the interests of the European oilseed crushers, vegetable oil refiners and bottlers. The [FEDIOL members](#) are 12 national associations and 5 associated company members that together are responsible for processing approximately 55 million tonnes of commodities a year, both of EU origin and imported from third-country markets.

Germany: [OVID](#) (in German), the German Association for the oilseed processing industry is a member of FEDIOL and mainly lists [multinational companies active in Germany](#).

Pulses

United Kingdom: [Pulses UK](#) is the trade association representing the processors and users of British-produced pulse crops. However, most of the [exporting members also trade internationally in pulses](#).

Spain: [Asociación de Legumbristas de España](#) (ALE, in Spanish), consists of merchants and packers of pulses representing more than 80% of the volume of the legumes marketed in Spain.

Rice

Europe: [The Federation of European Rice Millers](#) (FERM) represents 90% of the European rice milling industry with [21 European company members and 3 national rice milling associations](#) of Italy, Spain and Portugal.

4. Attract buyers to your website

Web searches are very popular among buyers, so be sure that your company can be found by using the most common search engines. Normally, this is the first place where buyers will see whether you have a well-established company. If you do not appear in their web searches, they may assume you are a small exporter that is unable to fulfil their demand. Remember that your website is your main online communication channel, which should fully reflect your business and commercial identity.

Things you can do to optimise your website:

Provide a complete picture: Make sure your website provides a complete picture of your company, its identity, product information (such as technical data sheets), impressions of your production and processing, certifications, activities in social and sustainable practices. Examples of company websites with a good structure are [ONganic](#), an Indian company with specialty rice and [Andes Harvest](#), a Bolivian-Argentinian agricultural company. Both have a unique identity and a clear presentation of their products and experience.

Update your website regularly: A website with up-to-date information ensures a well-working website, but also gives you a higher listing in search engines. Regular news items about your activities or market updates in grains, pulses or oilseeds can add attractive content to your online presentation.

Use proper language: Websites should be written in good English, and if possible in the language of your target market or market(s).

Use Search Engine Optimisation (SEO): SEO will help to get more traffic to your website. To do this, you can register for [Google Webmaster Tools](#).

5. Register with trade directories

You can use trade databases to find potential buyers, but their directories are also useful to present your own products. Some trade directories charge for membership to publish your information or contact other traders. After you have registered, you can either join as a supplier or directly look for buyers. Be selective in the directories you are using and make sure you leave a professional impression. Posting randomly on many sites may look cheap and even desperate.

You can use a free trial to start with and then see if it is worth paying the annual fee. Here are some interesting online trade organisations:

- [Organic Bio](#): International directory of organic food companies.
- [Green trade](#): A marketplace for suppliers and buyers of organic products.
- [Food1](#): International Business2Business (B2B) portal for food suppliers, including the grains industry.
- [Kompass](#): Global B2B multisector database.
- [Global buyers online](#): Search for the latest trade leads from buyers and importers from all over the world.
- [Europages](#): Directory of European companies. This is a professional portal that encourages business-to-business exchanges.
- [Lieberanten.de](#): A database in German to find importers, distributors and wholesalers in Germany.

6. Use food marketplaces, but be selective

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated e-commerce as well as digital trading platforms. Online marketplaces offer a platform for buyers and sellers, and often facilitate the transaction and logistics.

Be aware that in the trade of grains, pulses and oilseeds, personal contacts are key, and trade platforms can attract lots of unwanted attention. For your potential buyers, online marketplaces take away much of the personal relationships and many aspects of quality control and compliance. Therefore these are not preferred by European buyers and you will find mostly sellers from countries such as India, China and Vietnam instead of buyers.

However, extending services of online platforms in transactions, logistics and trade securities can integrate supply chains. They make it possible for many new companies to join the international trade and explore new buyer segments further down the value chain. For this reason, you can expect these platforms to continue their growth and play a bigger role in the future.

Non-specialised trade platforms that have been around for some time include [Tradekey](#) or [Alibaba](#), where you can publish your offer. A relatively new platform is [Tridge](#), which focuses on the global sourcing of food and agricultural products. It also provides [market intelligence and data](#), and facilitates trade transactions.

An interesting new initiative is [RangeMe](#), a global food product discovery platform. This platform allows you to show your branded or added-value product and connect to retailers. RangeMe has expanded into the United Kingdom and the Benelux countries, with leading buyers such as health and wellness retailer [Holland & Barrett](#), which is currently partnering with [RangeMe](#) to find the latest products for their customer base.

7. Contact support organisations

Contact your country's chamber of commerce, governmental trade or export agencies or Business Support Organisations (BSOs), which promote exports from your home country and are in contact with overseas buyers. Commercial attaches working in your country's embassy in Europe are a point of contact as well. They often have useful information about the market and sometimes economic or commercial attachés are very much involved in helping to guide you into a market – the service level is different for each country.

There are also governmental organisations in Europe that promote imports from developing countries. Check with them to see whether they have specific programmes for your country and sector. For instance:

Centre for the Promotion of Import from developing countries (CBI)

[CBI](#) runs export coaching programmes in many developing countries, but they are only open for application during the inscription period and for the selected countries in a programme. In the past, there have been export programmes for chia, rice and natural ingredients. [Check the current projects](#) for the latest details.

Swiss Import Promotion Programme (SIPPO)

[SIPPO](#) helps Business Support Organisations (BSOs), such as chambers of commerce and export promotion agencies, to increase their export promotion capacity and services to export-ready companies. The supported

BSOs that work with natural ingredient exporters can be found in eight countries: Colombia, South Africa, Indonesia, Albania, Macedonia, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Serbia and Tunisia. Additionally, SIPPO supports BSOs export promotion services in processed food products from Peru, Colombia, South Africa, Tunisia and Morocco. See also the [countries where SIPPO has their own offices](#) with further information and contact details.

Import Promotion Desk (IPD)

IPD brings together the interests of German importers with those of exporters in emerging growth markets. One of the sectors they operate in is [natural ingredients](#), which includes grains and seeds (quinoa, amaranth, rice) and pulses (kidney beans, pinto beans, white beans, peas). They organise participation at trade fairs, workshops and matchmaking events. Check the [events calendar](#) to see if there are any interesting activities for your business.

Finnpartnership

The mission of [Finnpartnership](#) is to increase commercial cooperation and promote business partnerships between companies in developing countries and in Finland. They offer a [free-of-charge matchmaking service for companies in developing countries](#) to help find business partners in Finland.

Enterprise Europe Network

[Enterprise Europe Network](#) (EEN) was founded by the European Commission to help companies of all kinds of products and services to connect, innovate and grow internationally. Several non-European countries are connected to the network. You can check if your country has a [local EEN contact point](#).

8. Start your orientation with food retailers

Visit supermarkets, food retailers and webshops to see what kind of products and brands with grains, pulses and oilseeds they sell. Find out which company is behind the brand and contact them to see if they import their ingredients themselves or if they make use of an importer.

This process is time-consuming and sometimes difficult, but it provides you with valuable insight into the value chain and names of importers you had probably never heard of before.

Tip:

- Use the online offer of retailers to find interesting food brands. Find an [overview of supermarkets in Europe on Wikipedia](#) or specialised retailers such as [Germany's top organic retailers](#), or take a look at [the organic retail scene in France on Organic & Wellness News](#).

9. Use social media for networking

In order to find buyers across Europe, you can use business networking platforms such as [LinkedIn](#). LinkedIn is the most important social networking platform for professional use and includes relevant groups for many industries. You can join groups such as [The Grain Trader](#) (>17,000 professionals), [World Grain-Oilseeds](#) (>4,850 professionals) or [Global Pulses Trade](#) (>6,000 professionals).

Other country-specific sites such as [Xing](#) in Germany and [JDN Réseau](#) in France are used as well, but on a much smaller scale. Alternatively, you can also choose to post articles and news about your company, or share videos. These are more passive ways to have buyers find you.

When you are active on social media, make sure that your contributions are professional and enhance your company's image. Do not randomly spam many sites with irrelevant information. All sites operate on the basis

of implicit codes of conduct about how they should be used. The same applies for communication tools such as Twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook: be professional and selective in your posts.

Tips:

- Learn [how to create a B2B social media strategy](#) and about the [3 steps to B2B social media marketing success for your business](#).
- Join specific groups related to the trade in grains, pulses and oilseeds on [LinkedIn](#) to find and communicate with potential trade partners.

10. Engage with your business contacts

When finding buyers, it is important to be consistent with the contacts that you make and to record the contact moments and your communication with them. In the initial stages of selling, it is imperative to have good commercial negotiation skills, but to be successful, you will have to maintain a good relationship with your clients and potential customers.

[Customer Relationship Management](#) (CRM) programmes help you to have an organised overview of your contacts, opportunity management, lead generation and customer service, among other areas. There are several online options irrespective of the size of your business.

Tips:


- Find courses on [ITC SME Trade Academy](#) that can help you improve your commercial skills or [apply for a training course at Import Promotion Desk \(IPD\)](#).
- Find out which CRM best suits your company in the [Top 15 Best CRM Software for Small Businesses](#).


Read our [Tips for Doing Business](#) and [Tips for Organising your export to Europe](#), these can help you further understand how to enter the European market and what it takes to become a successful exporter to Europe.


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