

# The European market potential for cumin seeds

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The popularity of South Asian, North African and Middle Eastern cuisines contributes to the increasing demand for cumin seeds in Europe. The United Kingdom is the largest cumin seed importer in Europe, providing specific opportunities for suppliers of the curry industry. Other opportunities for new suppliers from developing countries can be found in other large or growing markets, such as Germany, the Netherlands, France, and Poland. Proof that your cumin is produced in a sustainable way can increase your export chances.

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## 1. Product description

Cumin seeds are the dried ripe fruits of *Cuminum cyminum*. Although the part of the plant that is used as a spice is commonly called a seed, it is botanically a fruit composed of the pericarp and the seed. The international trade classification does not have an exclusive code for *Cuminum cyminum*, so its code includes black cumin and bitter cumin too.

Black cumin (also known as nigella or black onion seed) is the fruit of *Nigella sativa*, while bitter cumin is the fruit of *Elwendia persica*. Bitter cumin is mostly consumed in India, Pakistan and Iran and is not widely known in Europe. Neither black cumin nor bitter cumin are covered in this study.

There is no precise data on the global production of cumin seeds, but total world production is estimated at 900-1,000 thousand tonnes per year. The main producer is [India, at 726 thousand tonnes in 2022](#), followed by Iran, Syria and Turkey (between 2-4% each). The remaining 5% comes from countries such as Afghanistan, Egypt, Pakistan and Afghanistan. India consumes around half of its own cumin seed production. India is also the leading supplier of black cumin seed. Other black cumin producers are Turkey, Egypt and Ethiopia.

Cumin seeds have a sweet aroma and a slightly bitter and pungent taste. In Indian dishes, cumin powder is an important ingredient in curry sauces and masala mixes. In Turkish and Middle East cuisine, cumin is a common spice in minced and other meat dishes such as köfte or kebab. The spice is also often used as an ingredient in chilli powders and sauces (such as chili con carne). Cumin is increasingly used in Europe due to the popularity of ethnic cuisines, but also in European products such as sausages, soups, cheese, marinades and baked goods.

Post-harvest operations include threshing, drying, cleaning, sorting, heat treatment (often performed to avoid microbiological risks), grading, and packing. They can also include grinding if cumin is processed into powder. The harvesting season differs per country, but it starts in India in February/March, then Syria (April), Iran (May) and lastly in Turkey (August). Agricultural factors such as the quality and variety of the sowing seeds, planting date, density, irrigation, weed control, fertilisation and harvest time, can influence the quality of cumin seeds.

This study covers general information regarding the market for cumin seeds in Europe, which may interest producers in developing countries. When 'Europe' is referred to in this report, it means the 27 member states of the European Union, plus the United Kingdom, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland. Table 1 below lists the products in the cumin seed product group and their product codes. Please note that the statistical analysis also includes black cumin, as this product does not have a specific trade classification code.

**Black cumin (*Nigella sativa* seeds)** is not the same product as cumin, but it is traded under the same statistical code and therefore relevant to mention.

Table 1: Products in the cumin seed product group

Combined Nomenclature Number	Product
090931	Cumin seeds, neither crushed nor ground
090932	Cumin seeds, crushed or ground

## 2. What makes Europe an interesting market for cumin seeds?

Europe accounts for 6-8% of the world's total cumin seed imports. With that share, European consumption of cumin seeds is smaller than that of countries in South Asia, Turkey, North Africa and Middle East. Cumin seeds in Europe are used in the food industry as an ingredient in spice mixtures and in other products. Cumin is also sold as a single spice, both whole and crushed, in food retail and food service channels. Important European users are ethnic restaurants, but also the cheese and meat processing industries.

In the next five years, European cumin seed imports are likely to grow at a small annual rate of 0-2%. Import and consumption will be driven by the healthy eating trend (such as veganism) and the increasing interest in non-European cuisines (such as Asian curries and stews). New product launches will also support the consumption of cumin.

Source: UN Comtrade

The 2018-2022 period was marked by quite a few fluctuations in European cumin imports from developing countries. First, imports went down in 2019 to a period-low of 14.6 thousand tonnes. Then they went up in 2020 and 2021 because cumin is one of the spices that has shown **antiviral activity** in studies. This fact was an important driver of consumption and import growth during the Covid pandemic.

Then in 2022, imports from developing countries dropped again to 14.8 thousand tonnes. This was caused by lower supplies from India and Turkey, the two countries that dominate supply of cumin worldwide.

Intra-European supplies grew in 2018-2022, with some fluctuations. This growth in intra-European trade was mainly caused by imports into Czechia, Germany, the Netherlands and France.

After imports, the seeds are often crushed and heat-treated before further sale. Whole cumin seeds accounted for about 55% of imports, while the remaining 45% was imported in crushed or ground form.

Regular fluctuations in imports are influenced by production variations, since cumin seeds are produced in the open air, making yields vulnerable to weather conditions. Despite these production fluctuations, European demand is rather stable. As cumin is not commercially grown in Europe, consumption is almost equal to imports, because re-exported quantities outside Europe are insignificant.

### 3. Which European countries offer most opportunities for cumin seeds?

As Europe's main importer of cumin, the United Kingdom is an interesting focus market. It has the highest curry consumption in Europe and a highly developed curry industry. The Netherlands is the leading trade hub, and also the largest market for cumin applied in cheese. Germany is an important market, especially because of its large fast-food kebab market. Cumin is the main ingredient of kebab spices. France and Sweden are also promising markets, with increasing import and consumption volumes in the period under review.

Source: UN Comtrade

#### The United Kingdom: Europe's largest market

The United Kingdom makes up about one-quarter of all cumin seed imports in Europe. In 2020, the year of Brexit, they reached a high point with a record 6.8 thousand tonnes. Before Brexit, yearly imports from other European countries remained quite steady at around 500 tonnes. However, after Brexit there was a significant decrease in this indirect flow, with only 140 tonnes imported in 2022. This shows that Brexit did indeed lead to the anticipated shift towards direct imports from the countries of origin.

About half of the UK's imports are whole seeds, with the balance for crushed or ground seeds. Most of the imported cumin seeds in the UK are used for domestic consumption, and less than 7% is re-exported to other European markets.

In 2022, India was the biggest supplier of cumin to the UK, accounting for almost 80% of the supply. Turkey followed with 12%, Vietnam with 4%, Spain (through re-export) with 2%, and Pakistan with 0.9%. There were smaller amounts of cumin imported from China, Sri Lanka and Egypt. However, Syria, which was one of the top-3 suppliers in 2018 with over 300 tonnes, completely stopped its exports to the UK during the period under review.

Indian suppliers dominate the British cumin seed market because the UK has the largest Indian diaspora in Europe. In that country, most cumin seeds are used in curry dishes. The British curry market is the largest in Europe, established by the Indian and Pakistani diaspora. The UK is home to approximately 1.4 million people with an Indian background, 1.1 million of Pakistani descent, and 450,000 who identify as Bangladeshi. Over time, curry dishes have become a regular staple for many British consumers.

There are over 10 thousand curry restaurants across the UK. Restaurant and retail sales of curries are estimated to be worth €4-5 billion annually. The [National Curry Week](#) and the [British Curry Awards](#) promote and celebrate the British curry industry. One of the country's leading importers of cumin powder is [AB World Foods](#), with the established brands [Patak's](#) (curry pastes), [Blue Dragon](#) (Asian food) and [Al'Fez](#) (Middle Eastern and North African food).

There are several brands in the UK producing spice mixes for curries or masalas, with cumin as the main ingredient. Aside from curries, cumin seeds in the United Kingdom are also used as an ingredient in other products, such as pickled and fermented vegetables, spreads like hummus, crispy snacks, pre-cooked rice, falafel, and soups, as well as in Indian (poppadom) and other types of breads and bakery products.

In the retail segment, private labels of retail chains like [Tesco](#), [Sainsbury's](#), [ASDA](#), and [Morrisons](#), have the largest market shares for packed cumin seeds and powders. Some companies specialise in packing, blending and steam sterilisation of spices, such as [Natco](#). The leading brands selling cumin seeds are [Schwartz](#) (owned by McCormick), [East End](#), [Rajah](#) (owned by Westmill Foods), [Bart](#) (part of the Fuchs Group) and [TRS](#). Some companies are specialised in black cumin products such as [Nature's Blends](#).

Cumin seed importers and traders in the United Kingdom include [East End Foods](#), [P&B \(Foods\)](#), [H.J. Langdon](#),

TRs, [British Pepper & Spice](#), [Virani](#) and [Sleaford Quality Foods](#). Most of the leading importers perform processing activities such as grinding, blending, and packing. Generally, British spice traders prefer to import whole cumin seeds, as those are easier to test for the presence of contaminants and allergens. Crushed cumin is mostly imported by ethnic food importers, often from established suppliers that deliver quality according to expectations.

The UK is the largest market for Fairtrade-certified products. This offers opportunities for Fairtrade-certified cumin exporters. Some importers of Fairtrade-certified cumin in the UK are [British Pepper and Spice Company Limited](#), [Cotswold](#) and [Steenbergs](#). While the first two companies trade conventional products and limited volumes of organic and Fairtrade spices, Steenbergs has specialised in organic and Fairtrade-certified spices.

## **The Netherlands: Europe's spice trade hub and cumin cheese producer**

The Netherlands is the second largest importer of cumin seeds in Europe. Since 2018, Dutch cumin seed imports grew at an annual rate of 7.8%, reaching 3.1 thousand tonnes in 2022 – worth almost €12 million. Whole seeds accounted for over 60% of these imports, with the balance for crushed or ground cumin. More than 60% of these imports were in the form of whole seeds, the rest were crushed or ground cumin.

The Netherlands re-exports over 70% of its imported cumin, leaving about 850 tonnes for domestic consumption. One-third of Dutch exports go to Germany (33%). Other important destinations are France (16% of Dutch exports), Belgium (9%) and Sweden (6%).

India is the leading supplier of cumin to the Netherlands with a 55% share, followed by Vietnam (21%), Turkey (9.4%) and Belgium (4.5%). Both India and Vietnam increased their exports of cumin to the Netherlands significantly. India's export growth exceeded 150% per year on average, and the growth of Vietnamese exports was also strong (56% per year on average). India's exports to the Netherlands totalled 1.67 thousand tonnes in 2022, and Vietnam booked an export volume of over 600 tonnes. In 2022, India exported a total of 1.67 thousand tonnes to the Netherlands, while Vietnam's exports surpassed 600 tonnes.

The Netherlands is the largest user of cumin as an ingredient in cheese. The Dutch dairy company Friesland Campina (with [Milner](#) as the main cheese brand) is the most known internationally. [Gouda](#) is the main cheese type produced in the Netherlands, and cumin cheese ('Leidse kaas') is the most prominent specialty cheese. Most cheese (including cumin cheese) in the Netherlands is sold under private label, but it is different for exported Dutch cheese.

The Netherlands is also home to several dedicated cheese producers, such as [DOC Kaas](#), [Uniekaas](#), [Royal A-ware](#), [Royal Lactalis Leerdammer](#) (owned by Lactalis from France), [CONO Kaasmakers](#) and [Henri Willig](#). All these companies together produce cheese in massive quantities, and this often includes cumin cheese. One company, [CZ Rouveen](#), has even specialised in specialty cheeses, typically with herbs and spices as ingredients.

After the food industry as the largest user, the foodservice segment follows with food service cash & carry wholesalers like [Makro](#) and [Sligro](#). Within the foodservice segment, cumin is frequently used in ethnic restaurants such as Indian, Indonesian or Turkish.

The food retail segment is coming in third position in terms of cumin consumption. Retail chains [Albert Heijn](#) and [Jumbo](#) together account for approximately half the retail sales of cumin seeds in the Netherlands. The leading independent brands of cumin seeds and spice mixes with cumin powder in the Netherlands are [Verstegen](#) and [Euroma](#). In the Netherlands, ground cumin seed is also known as 'djintan' or 'djinent', a name of Indonesian origin, used by specialised ethnic food brands such as [Go Tan](#).

Examples of Dutch cumin seed bulk traders include [Nedspice](#) (with production facilities in India), [Catz International](#), [BCFoods](#), [Euroma](#) (especially after it acquired spice trader Intertaste), [Mulder Marne](#), and [AVS](#)

**Spice.** Some companies specialise in mixing and crushing, such as [Huijbregts Groep](#). Other companies developed spice sterilisation services for suppliers, such as [Food Ingredients Service Center Europe](#). Traders of spices in the Netherlands are organised within the [Dutch Spice Association](#).

Figure 3: Cumin cheese in a mainstream Dutch supermarket



## Spain: trader and re-exporter

Spanish cumin imports flourished between 2018-2021, peaking at 3.5 thousand tonnes in 2021. The year 2022 was marked by a huge decline (-38%). To some extent, the extensive imports in 2020 and 2021 resulted in large inventories, while on the other hand private consumption was under pressure due to lower consumer confidence. Also, Indian cumin prices started to climb during 2022. Because of that, Spanish buyers probably delayed purchasing of Indian cumin, anticipating a large 2022-23 harvest with lower prices.

Whole seeds still accounted for more than 75% of Spanish imports in 2022, but this share is evidencing a decline over the period under review. It shows that Spanish importers increasingly have the crushing done in origin countries, instead of in Spain. On average, Spain re-exported about 60% of the imported cumin to other countries, and the remaining 40% was used for domestic consumption.

Of the cumin seeds imported into Spain, 75% come from India, followed by Syria (13%) and Turkey (8.9%). The leading markets for cumin exported by Spain are France with a 32% share, Cuba (16%) and the Netherlands (9%). Interestingly, Spain serves as a trade hub for the supply of cumin seeds to Cuba. Cuba imports 95% of its cumin seeds from Spain.

Cumin is not a traditional spice in Spain, but has become a popular spice in the south of Spain, mostly in Andalusia under the influence of Moroccan cuisine. A famous Andalusian dish, [pinchitos](#) (grilled meat on skewers) is prepared with cumin as one of the main spices.

In the retail segment, cumin is mostly sold under the private labels of Spanish retail chains, such as [Mercadona](#) (Hacendado), [Lidl](#) (Kania) and [Eroski](#) (Eroski). Independent cumin brands in Spain include [Ducros](#) (acquired by McCormick), Artemis (an organic brand by company [Herbes de Moli](#)), [Carmencita](#) (by Jesús Navarro) and [Dani](#). Traders of cumin seeds in Spain include [Ramón Sabater](#), [Dani](#), [Caylan](#), [Paprimpur](#), [Carmencita](#), and [Juan José Albarracín](#).

## France: variety of taste

Except for a peak in imports in 2020 (2.3 thousand tonnes), French imports remained relatively stable at 1.9-2.1 thousand tonnes per year. This resulted in a small average annual growth of 1.7% per year.

France does re-export some of its imported volumes, therefore French cumin seed consumption is a little lower than annual imports. In 2022 the trade balance was 1.6 thousand tonnes, which means that this volume went to the domestic market in that year. Almost 60% of cumin is imported as whole seeds.

In 2022, the leading developing country supplier of cumin seeds to France was India with a 30% share, followed by Syria (6.5%). France also imports large volumes from other European countries, which is all re-exported product. The main European suppliers are the Netherlands (17%), Germany (15%) and Spain (11%).

France's cumin seed consumption is stimulated by the development of Asian, North African and Middle Eastern cuisine in the country, but the French also use it with vegetables, meat, and fish. Similarly to the Netherlands, cumin is used as an ingredient in cheese. The most famous type of cheese with cumin is [Munster](#), which also has a protected designation of origin. Another French speciality is apricot jam/preserve with cumin. This product is used as a side dish with cheese.

Most retail chains sell cumin seeds and powder under their own private labels including [Carrefour](#), [Leclerc](#) (Rustica label), and [Auchan](#) (Auchan label). Curry spice mixes are also mostly sold under private labels. These products have varying ingredients, but all contain cumin powder. A special type of French curry mix is known as [vadouvan](#). Independent spice brands that offer cumin seeds in France include [Ducros](#) (owned by McCormick), [Fuchs](#) (German brand), [Sainte Lucie](#) and [TRS](#) (British brand).

Examples of French cumin traders are [Colin Ingredients](#), [Le Jardin des Epices](#), [Fuchs](#), [Beun'Epices](#), [Spigol](#), and [Eric Bur](#).

## Germany: cumin seeds in spices for kebabs

German imports of cumin seeds witnessed a steady growth in 2018-2021, reaching a record import volume of 3.3 thousand tonnes in 2021. However, they declined sharply in 2022, reaching only about half of the previous year's record at 1.7 thousand tonnes.

Roughly, imports are equally divided between whole cumin seeds and crushed or ground cumin. The German industry prefers whole seeds, as they are easier to test for the presence of allergens and contaminants. Also, whole seeds preserve flavour better than powder. Seed processing includes crushing, mixing, sterilisation, and packing.

Until 2021, Germany was one of the few main European importing countries of cumin seeds where India was not the largest supplier. Yet since 2021, India has become the top-supplying country, replacing Syria and Turkey. In 2022, India provided almost 70% of all cumin to Germany, followed by Syria (14%), the Netherlands (4% through re-export) and Turkey (4%). While Vietnam, Guatemala, Egypt and Afghanistan also supplied cumin to Germany, their volumes have remained minimal.

A significant share of cumin powder in Germany is consumed in the Döner fast-food restaurants. The German [Döner kebab](#) market is the largest in Europe. Cumin is a main ingredient in spice mixes for kebab dishes. It is estimated that the fast-food kebab industry in Germany employs more than 50 thousand people and has a turnover in excess of €2 billion per year.

In Germany, cumin is often used in the production of sausages, curry spice mixes, sauces, pickled vegetables, cheese (like [Hausmacher cheese](#) by Käserei Loose), and even for flavouring liquors such as [Kümmel](#). Another important application are tailor-made spice mixes. Specialised spice mixing companies such as [Hügli Group](#) and [AVO](#) make these customised solutions that are often sold under private label.

In Germany's retail segment, significant volumes of cumin seeds are sold under private labels, including Kania (by discounter chain [Lidl](#)), GUT Bio (organic, by [Aldi Süd](#)), Le Gusto ([Aldi Nord](#)) and REWE and REWE Beste Wahl (by [REWE](#)). [Fuchs Group](#) (official name is DF World of Spices) dominates among the independent brands. Their brands include [Fuchs](#), [Ostmann](#) or [BioWagner](#) (an organic brand). Examples of other brands are [Hartkorn](#) (organic), [Brecht](#) or [Lian Ying](#) (by [Rila Feinkost](#)).

Germany is the [largest European market for organic food](#), so it is a particularly attractive market for organic cumin seeds. Specialised organic food retailers, such as [Biomarkt](#) and [Alnatura](#), sell a large share of the organic spices in Germany.

The [German Spice Association](#) has almost 90 members that are primarily engaged in refining spices and producing spice blends, spice preparations, and other seasoning ingredients. Germany's [Fuchs Group](#) is the leading German spice brand, the largest privately owned spice producer in the country, and Europe's largest spice manufacturer. In addition to their own brand, Fuchs, they also pack cumin and other spices for several German private labels.

Germany and Switzerland are Europe's leading markets for organic certified spices, including cumin. In Germany, organic-certified cumin is sold mostly in organic retail chains as a standalone spice and cumin can

also be found as ingredient in organic-certified spice mixes and prepared food products. The reason that the organic cumin market is still modest lies in the fact that organic-certified products can have a small percentage of non-organic ingredients. Although the volumes are still small, the growth is higher than that of the conventional cumin market.

Germany is the second largest market worldwide for Fairtrade products and offers opportunities for Fairtrade-certified cumin. [Weltpartner](#) is a key importer of Fairtrade products in Germany and sells cumin. Other companies trading Fairtrade certified cumin are [KarmaKollektiv GMBH](#) and [Soul Spice](#). Still, the presence of Fairtrade-certified cumin in the German market is small, and even smaller than the organic market.

## Sweden: a promising market with increasing domestic consumption

Sweden is the second largest market for cumin in Northern Europe, behind the United Kingdom. From 2018 to 2020, Swedish imports stayed at around 0.4 thousand tonnes per year. In 2021 and 2022, the import volume grew to over 0.6 thousand tonnes, rising at an average rate of 11% per year. Turkey and the Netherlands were the countries that benefited the most as suppliers.

India is the main supplier of cumin to Sweden, with an average share of over 60% despite varying export volumes. The Netherlands takes second place with 10% of Swedish imports in 2022, which is twice the share compared to 2018. Vietnam and Turkey are also significant suppliers, with about 5-6% of cumin imports each. Egypt has started exporting cumin to Sweden, while supplies from Syria have been decreasing.

There are hardly any exports to other European countries, which means that almost all imported cumin is destined for the local market.

The largest market segment is ingredients for food processing (70% of the market, most importantly production of spice mixes, seasonings and sauces), followed by food retail (20%) and foodservice (10%).

The leading importer in Sweden is [Santa Maria](#) (Part of the Finnish Paulig group). Santa Maria holds around 40% of the spices market sold to food retail. Other importers are [Culinar](#), [Kockens](#), [Boden & Lindeberg](#) and [Nordic Spice](#). Most of these importers (Culinar, Kockens, Santa Maria and Boden & Lindeberg) sell mostly conventional cumin, but also have organic and fairtrade-certified cumin in their range. Together with the United Kingdom and Denmark, Sweden is among the largest organic markets in Northern Europe.

### Tips:

Learn more about the European seeds market on the websites of national associations, such as the [Seasoning and Spice Association](#) (United Kingdom), the [German Spice Association](#) (Germany), [Association of the Swedish Flavour and Spice Industry](#), the [Royal Dutch Spice Association](#) (the Netherlands), the [National Union of Pepper, Spices, Herbs and Vanilla Processors](#) (France) and the [Spanish Association of Processors and Packers of Spices and Seasonings](#) (Spain).

See our study on [Market Statistics and Outlook for Spices and Herbs](#) for more information and general developments in the European spices sector.

Check the trade statistics of your specific interest through tools such as the ITC's [Trade Map](#) and the European Commission's [Access2Markets](#).

Find details of the Swedish spices and herbs market in this [spices market study about Sweden](#) (OTGS).

## 4. Which trends offer opportunities or pose threats on the European cumin seeds market?

The growing interest in ethnic cuisines combined with buyers' need for stable and sustainable sourcing are the leading drivers behind the stable-to-growing demand for cumin seeds in Europe. Read our study on [trends in the European spices and herbs market](#) to find out more about general trends.

### Popularity of Asian, African and Middle Eastern cuisines

Cumin seeds are part of many spice mixes, sauces, and dishes in various cultures. They are still to a large extent consumed by people in Europe who have Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, and Afghan backgrounds, but also by people with North African and Middle Eastern heritage. At the same time, European consumers who travel internationally and celebrity chefs promote the use of new flavours, including cumin seeds.

Over the years, ethnic non-European cuisine has become a regular part of the diet of many European consumers. South Asian dishes and cuisines are already firmly established in Western Europe, especially the curry restaurants in the United Kingdom. Those cuisines and spices are now also growing in popularity in Central and Eastern European countries. On the other hand, western European consumers are searching for inspiration in [African and Middle Eastern cuisines](#), where cumin seeds are frequent ingredients.

An additional benefit of 'oriental' fast food is that it is perceived as having lower calories and being healthier than traditional fast food, such as hamburgers, sausages, pizzas, wraps, and French fries. In addition, many 'oriental' dishes are made without meat, which is in line with the increasing popularity of [vegan diets](#) in Europe. Many spice mixes of Asian/North African/Middle Eastern origin often combine cumin, coriander and curcuma. Several types of spice mixes and dishes in Europe, which specifically contribute to the consumption of cumin seeds, include:

- Curry - Originally described as a type of dish prepared by stewing a variety of vegetables and meat in a sauce that contains a complex combination of spices. There are many varieties of dishes called 'curries' with cumin powder, coriander powder and curcuma as the main ingredients. Inspired by curry dishes, many European spice companies created their own spice mixes, with cumin seed powder as a regular ingredient. Those mixes are commonly called 'curry powder' or simply 'curry'.
- Garam masala - A powdered spice mix, originally from South Asia, without a standardised recipe. However, similar to curry powder, most garam masala spice combinations contain ground cumin seeds. Almost all European spice companies sell garam masala in retail-branded packaging, including a range of private label packs.
- Turkish meat dishes such as kebab (grilled meat), köfte (meatballs), sucuk (sausage) use cumin as one of the important ingredients in spice mixes.
- Falafel is a deep-fried ball made mostly from ground chickpeas, but it can be also made from broad beans or fava beans and is often prepared with cumin. The popularity of falafel is increasing across Europe, especially driven by the veganism trend. Although falafel is considered a national dish in several countries (for example Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, and Israel), it is now served in non-ethnic restaurants too, especially in vegan and vegetarian restaurants.
- Dukkah - A mix of toasted nuts, seeds, and herbs originally from Egypt. It is mostly used as a dip with bread. The dukkah mix normally contains cumin seeds as an ingredient. Several European companies and a few large retail chains recently launched dukkah blends.

Figure 4: Cumin is an important spice in falafel



Source: [Globally Cool](#)



## Popularity of black cumin seeds and oil

Black cumin (*Nigella sativa* seeds) is not the same product as cumin, but it is traded under the same statistical code, so it is relevant to mention its popularity. Black cumin seeds are used in North African and Middle Eastern cuisine, but they are also promoted for their health benefits. Black cumin seeds are promoted as an anti-inflammatory and [antiviral](#) agent and also as a food supplement which can reduce triglycerides and glucose, and can normalize cholesterol metabolism.

A very popular product derived from black cumin seeds is its oil. While not all of its proposed medicinal uses have been proven to be effective, black seed oil and its plant compounds have been linked to several health benefits. They include antioxidant properties and may help treat asthma, obesity, high blood pressure and cholesterol. The quality of black cumin seed oil is determined by the content of Thymoquinone, a phytochemical compound, which shows promise in the treatment of several health problems.

Ethiopian suppliers benefited from the popularity of black cumin oil and built an image as suppliers of high-quality products with high thymoquinone content. Some of the black cumin oil is produced in sourcing countries, but sometimes black cumin is imported and processed into oil in Europe. While India is the leading supplier of spice oils, Egypt developed an especially strong offer of black cumin oil. For example, the Egyptian company [Spice Kingdom](#) supplies processed spices such as oils, oleoresins and extracts including black cumin oil.

Some Ethiopian producers have started to add value to their products too. One good practice example is the Ethiopian company [Hyat Cosmo Industry](#), which produces black cumin oils as a food supplement, but also cosmetic products made with black cumin, such as soaps, shampoos, and massage oils.

## Sustainable sourcing

Sustainability is an important topic for European buyers. Important sustainability issues in cumin seed production involve the use of soil fertilisers, irrigation water and pesticide residues. Depending on the country, the production of spices itself involves labour issues affecting women, migrant or child labour. Market leaders are investing in sustainability not only to improve their image, but also because of economic benefits, such as cost reduction, shorter supply chains, and easier compliance with European regulations.

With the shared ambition to improve sustainable production and spices sourcing, a group of mainly European companies and organisations formed the [Sustainable Spice Initiative](#) in 2012. Several cumin seed suppliers in developing countries are members of this initiative. The members of the initiative are making additional efforts to support sustainable production, including organic production, food safety investments and support to farmers.

Nedspice, a Dutch company, has a sustainability initiative called the [sustainable cumin programme](#). They produce cumin seeds at various locations in India. In 2012, the company started the Nedspice Farmers Partnership Programme (NFPP) in India with 44 farmers. By 2020 the number of participating farmers had grown to 866, and in 2021 it reached 1200, spread across 64 villages, resulting in a total production of 6.0 thousand tonnes.

Figure 5: An introduction to the Nedspice Farmers Partnership Program (NFPP)

Source: Nedspice on YouTube

These farmers have received regular training on improving their farming in a sustainable way. This has bettered their income and living conditions. Also, Nedspice has started to promote cashless transactions to increase farmers' safety and convenience in cooperation with the Bank of Baroda.

### **Tips:**

Read [CBI's Tips to Go Green study](#) for more insights for producers and exporters to become more sustainable.

Follow the principles of the [Sustainable Agricultural Network \(SAN\)](#) on matters such as environmental integrity, social well-being, and economic resilience.

Follow sustainable agricultural practices for cumin production, such as [the ones promoted by the Sustainable Spice Initiative - India](#).

[Autentika Global](#) carried out this study and [Globally Cool](#) updated it on behalf of CBI.

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