

# Exporting roots and tubers to Europe

Last updated:

14 February 2019

The European market for exotic roots and tubers is small but gradually growing. Yams and cassava are the biggest sellers. The demand for these products started out in ethnic shops and restaurants, but they are gradually becoming more widely available. Increasing interest in exotic vegetables and consumer awareness of the culinary possibilities help develop the market channels for exotic roots and tubers. Your best option for entering the market is to rely on specialised importers that trade exotic vegetables.

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## 1. Product description

This factsheet covers a number of roots and tubers that are exotic to the European market:

- Yam
- Cassava (Manioc)
- Taro
- Yautia

Sweet potato is not included in this factsheet. You can find more information about [exporting sweet potatoes to Europe](#) on the CBI website.

Yams consist of about 600 species, which can differ in size and appearance. Size can vary from 500gr to 5kg. Some examples of commercial varieties are *white yam*, *brown yam*, *yellow yam*, *purple yam*, *Chinese yam* and *elephant foot yam*. *Name* is similar to yam and is also known as *nyami*, *yampi*, *tropical yam*, *true yam*, *greater yam*, *cush-cush* or *mapuey*. Yams are grown in all tropical regions. The main producing countries of yams are Nigeria, Ghana and Ivory Coast.

Cassava is a root crop, also known as (or similar to) *manioc*, *yuca*, *balinghoy* or *kamoteng kahoy* (in the Philippines), *mogo* in Africa, *mandioca*, *tapioca-root* (predominantly in India), *aypu*, and *boniato*. Cassava varieties can be sweet and bitter and grows in tropical regions. The main producing countries of cassava are

Nigeria, Brazil, Thailand, Indonesia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana and Angola.

Taro has over 1000 known varieties. Other names for taro or closely related species are *dasheen*, *eddoe* or *eddo*, *Chinese tayer*, (*old*) *cocoyam*, *kalo*, *keladi* or *kulkas*. In Suriname, taro is known as *aroei* by the native Indians, or commonly as *Chinese tayer*. The variety *eddoe* is also called *Chinese tayer*.

Yautia is closely related to taro, also known as taro *tannia*, *malanga*, *chou caraïbe*, *macabo* or *new cocoyam*. The genus contains about 50 species, mainly grown in tropical America. Nowadays it is also grown in West Africa as a replacement for yams, and in the Philippines.

Table 1: Combined Nomenclature (CN) commodity code for Roots and tubers

Number	Product
07141000	Fresh, chilled, frozen or dried roots and tubers of manioc "CASSAVA", whether or not sliced or in the form of pellets
07143010	YAMS "Dioscorea spp.", either fresh and whole or without skin and frozen, even sliced, for human consumption, in packings <= 28 kg
07144010	TARO "Colocasia spp.", either fresh and whole or without skin and frozen, even sliced, for human consumption, in packings <= 28 kg
07145010	YAUTIA "Xanthosoma spp.", either fresh and whole or without skin and frozen, even sliced, for human consumption, in packings <= 28 kg
07149020	Arrowroot, salep and similar roots and tubers with high starch content, fresh, chilled, frozen or dried, whether or not sliced or in the form of pellets (excl. manioc "cassava", sweet potatoes, yams, taro and yautia)

Source: Eurostat Comext

## 2. Which European markets offer opportunities for exporters of yams and other exotic roots and tubers?

### Roots and tubers are generally imported from developing countries

Exotic roots and tubers are generally grown and exported by tropical regions, almost exclusively in developing countries. European consumers are not very familiar yet with cassava, yams and similar roots and tubers. But the import is slowly increasing together with a growing demand of new exotic vegetables. In the case of yams, imports slightly increased to 24 thousand tonnes. This offers opportunities for professional and up-to-standards exporters from developing countries.

### Countries with ethnic populations offer the best opportunities

Yams and other exotic roots and tubers are often considered ethnic foods. European countries with historical

ties to (sub)tropical countries are naturally main destinations due to their larger populations of ethnic African, South American or Asian people. Therefore the United Kingdom and France are naturally main destinations for exotic roots such as yams due to their larger ethnic populations. Spain is mostly strong in cassava imports. The Netherlands and Belgium also import a significant volume for further distribution in Europe.

The import of exotic roots and tubers is expected to continue to grow, because other types of consumers become more familiar with ethnic food as well. However, it remains a specialty product.

### **Tips:**

- Find a specialised importer in exotic and ethnic fruit and vegetables that has the right logistical facilities and distribution network.
- Visit or participate in trade fairs such as the [Fruit Logistica](#) in Berlin in order to find importers of yams and other exotic roots and tubers.

## **The Netherlands and Belgium and trade hubs for exotic roots and tubers**

A major part of exotic roots and tubers are re-exported by the Netherlands and Belgium. Belgium is becoming an increasingly important trade hub, especially for yams. Being a trusted supplier to one of the specialised European importers in the Netherlands or Belgium may be an opportunity for growth.

### **Tip:**

- Explore the opportunities to deliver your products to the north-western European market through Dutch traders or to importers in the United Kingdom.

## **Yams and cassava are the most popular roots and tubers**

Within the exotic roots and tubers, cassava and yams are the principle varieties that are traded.

The United Kingdom is the most significant importer of yams in Europe. These yams are almost exclusively imported from Ghana and destined for the internal British market. Other countries that import significant quantities of yams are France, Belgium and the Netherlands. Especially Belgium has shown a fast import growth over the past 3 years. Yams are gaining in popularity in Belgium, but just as in the Netherlands, Belgian importers also play an important role in the distribution of yams.

Spain is the leading market for cassava. The Netherlands imports a similar volume, but from there most is being distributed throughout Europe. Cassava is also sold a larger quantities in France and the United Kingdom. Over 80% of the cassava imported in Europe is supplied by Costa Rica.

More exotic roots and tubers such as Taro and Yautia find their way into Europe through the Netherlands, which has a tradition in trading exotic products, or directly to destinations in France and the United Kingdom. Costa Rica is the leading supplier for these small exotics.

### Tip:

- Be sure to realise that cassava and yams are already niche products. When marketing even lesser known roots and tubers, be prepared to invest a lot of time in marketing your product.

## 3. Which trends offer opportunities on the European market for exotic roots and tubers?

### Interest in ethnic food is on the rise

Yams, cassava and other exotic roots and tubers are commonly used in Europe by people with different backgrounds from Africa, South America and Asia. They are familiar with these products and their preparation. The ethnic population in Europe is growing, which means your market for these exotic roots and tubers is expanding.

When exotic vegetables are introduced on the European market, it also reaches consumers that are interested in trying new products. These consumers do not eat exotic roots and tubers out of tradition, so they require more informative marketing. As an exporter you can reach these markets through specialised buyers that are familiar with the marketing of exotic vegetables.

For yams trading companies are experimenting with different small-sized varieties. Smaller varieties fit better the consumption habits of European consumers and smaller households.

### Tips:

- Explore the options to market your product with additional consumer information on storage, cooking methods and recipes. Try to work together with producer organisations, dedicated importers and retailers to increase consumer knowledge and appreciation for these ethnic food crops.
- Read what other [trends offer opportunities in the European market for fresh fruits and vegetables](#) on the CBI market intelligence platform.

### The role of roots and tubers as healthy ingredients

People in Europe are becoming more conscious about healthy diets. They are looking for healthier alternatives for common ingredients or products. For example, many of the exotic roots and tubers are suitable for consumers that follow a [paleo](#) or gluten-free diet. It can be a welcome addition in hot meals or as an ingredient in porridge and bread. As a result you can find opportunities for fresh exotic roots and tubers as well as in the diversification through processing of your product.

### Tips:

- Explore the opportunities of processing your product before export. Always start by analyzing and establishing potential buyer relations.
- Make sure your product is representative, clean and if possible organic. Consumers that focus on health food often favour natural and organic products.

### Growing interest in sustainable vegetables

Increasing attention for social responsibility and natural production methods are key trends in the European

market for fresh fruit and vegetables. Cassava, yam, taro and similar crops are produced mainly in lower and middle income countries. Therefore labour conditions and local impact of exports can be a major point of attention for your buyer. Maintaining good social and agricultural practices will help you stand out as a supplier and increase your chances with European buyers.

### Tips:

- Check the [Global Social Compliance Program \(GSCP\)](#) website for more information about social and environmental conduct.
- Check for information on CSR labels and certification in the [Standards Map database](#).
- Find an experienced importer with a focus on sustainability. You can improve your chances of success with such an importer.

## 4. Which requirements should fresh exotic roots and tubers comply with to be allowed on the European market?

### What legal and non-legal requirements must your product comply with?

#### Minimalise pesticide residues

Pesticide residues are one of the crucial issues for buyers of fruit and vegetables.

With the aim of avoiding health and environmental damage, the European Union has set maximum residue levels (MRLs) for pesticides in and on food products. Products containing more pesticides than allowed will be withdrawn from the European market.

Note that buyers in several countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands and Austria are often more strict than the MRLs laid down in European legislation. Even though pesticides may seem an attractive solution to improve productivity, your buyer will reject your product if it does not comply with their standards.

### Tips:

- Find out the MRLs that are relevant for your product by consulting the European Union [MRL database](#). You can search for your product or the pesticide used.
- Reduce the amount of pesticides by applying [integrated pest management \(IPM\)](#) in production. IPM is an agricultural pest control strategy that includes growing practices and chemical management.
- Read more about [MRLs on the website of the European Commission](#). Check with your buyers if they have additional requirements on MRLs and pesticide use.

#### Comply with phytosanitary requirements

Fruit and vegetables exported to the European Union must comply with the European legislation on plant health. The European Commission has laid down [phytosanitary requirements](#) to prevent introduction and spread of organisms harmful to plants and plant products in Europe. These requirements are managed by the competent food safety authorities in the importing and exporting countries.

## Tips:

- Verify with the [National Plant Protection Organisation](#) or food safety authority in your country if and under which conditions you can export your product to Europe. These authorities normally work with international standards, but always check with your buyer as well.
- Read more about [plant health](#) at the EU Export Helpdesk.
- Consult the [EU Trade Helpdesk](#) for a full list of requirements and procedures for vegetables, including exotic roots and tubers, selecting the product codes within the range of: 0714 (071430 for yams). Failure to follow the right procedures could cause delay of orders, increase costs and result in actions by European enforcement authorities.
- Make sure that the accompanying documents correspond (from A-Z!) with the food products contained in the consignment.

## Avoid contaminants

Contaminants are substances that have not been intentionally added to food, but which may be present as a result of the various stages of its production, packaging, transport or warehousing. To avoid negative impact on the quality of food and risks to human health, the European Union has set limits for several contaminants. You can find the maximum levels in the annex of [Regulation \(EC\) 1881/2006](#).

## Tips:

- Find out more about prevention and reduction of lead Contamination in the [Code of Practice](#) published by the Codex Alimentarius.
- Check the European Commission's factsheet "[Managing food contaminants: how the EU ensures that our food is safe](#)" and their [website about contaminants](#).

## Quality

Exotic roots and tubers are not included in any of the European marketing standards.

The Codex Alimentarius ('Food code' of the Food and Agriculture Organisation) contains marketing standards for [Sweet Cassava](#) and [Bitter Cassava](#).

For yams and other roots and tubers, you can best follow the [general marketing standards](#), found in the annex I of the [European regulation No 543/2011](#):

Minimum quality requirements imply that the product must be:

- Intact;
- Sound; products affected by rotting or deterioration such as to make them unfit for consumption are excluded;
- Clean, practically free of any visible foreign matter;
- Practically free from pests;
- Practically free from damage caused by pests affecting the flesh;
- Free of abnormal external moisture;
- Free of any foreign smell and/or taste.

The condition of the product must be such as to enable them:

- To withstand transport and handling;
- To arrive in satisfactory condition at the place of destination.

As cassava and yams may deteriorate fast after harvesting when kept in a too warm environment, providing cooled storage, proper packaging and cooled transportation are very important.

### Tips:

- Make sure you supply the quality as agreed in the product specifications.
- Pay attention to an effective post-harvest chain, including cold storage. Try to avoid damaging of the produce in any way, as any damage will increase the change of infection and deterioration of the produce.

## Size

For yam, taro and other similar roots (with the exception of cassava), no size classes are defined. Usually, their average length and/or diameter, and average weight is listed in the specifications. The size requirement of your product may vary depending on your buyer.

Sweet cassava should not be less than 300 grams and not less than 20 cm in length. For Sweet Cassava there are 3 size classes defined:

- Class A: 3.5 – 6.0 cm in diameter;
- Class B: 6.1 – 8.0 cm in diameter;
- Class C: > 8 cm in diameter.

See the Codex standard on:

- [Sweet Cassava](#)
- [Bitter Cassava](#)

## Packaging

Wholesale packaging are often cardboard boxes of between 4 and 20kg, depending on the product. For more niche varieties, buyers prefer smaller packaging. Packaging requirements differ between customers. In retail outlets fresh exotic roots and tubers are usually sold right out of the wholesale box or in plastic crates.

### Tip:

- See also the [Recommended International Code of Practice for Packaging and Transport of Tropical Fresh Fruits and Vegetables \(CAC/RCP 44-1995\)](#)

## Labelling

Food placed on the European market must meet the legislation on food labelling. On the label or marking of each box should at least be the following information:

- Name and physical address of the packer and/or dispatcher;
- Product name;
- Country of origin;
- Commercial specifications: Class, size and weight;
- Traceability code (for example [Global Location Number](#));
- Officially recognised code mark such as a GlobalGap Number (GGN) (recommendable);

The name and address of the packer or dispatcher can be replaced by an official control mark. For pre-packages

you must also include the name and the address of a seller established within the European Union with the mention 'Packed for:' or an equivalent mention.

For cassava you must include preparation instructions:

- Cassava must not be eaten raw (bitter cassava);
- Cassava shall be peeled, de-pithed, cut into pieces, rinsed and fully cooked before consumption (bitter/sweet cassava);
- Cooking or rinsing water must not be consumed or used for other food preparation purposes (bitter cassava).

For organic produce you must include the European [organic logo](#) and the code number of the control authorities.

### Tips:

- Read the [EU Marketing standards for fresh fruit and vegetables](#) for more detailed information on labelling and quality requirements.
- For general information see also the [buyer requirements for fresh fruit and vegetables](#) on the CBI Market Intelligence Platform for fresh fruit and vegetables.

## 5. What additional requirements do buyers often have?

### GlobalG.A.P. and other certification as guarantee

Since food safety is a top priority in all European food sectors, you can expect most buyers to request extra guarantees from you in the shape of certification.

The most commonly requested certification is [GLOBALG.A.P.](#), a pre-farm-gate standard that covers the whole agricultural production process, from before the plant is in the ground to the non-processed product (processing is not covered).

Whether GLOBALG.A.P. is strictly required depends on the destination country, market conditions and market channel. For yams it has become more or less a standard requirement, especially in Northern Europe, where it is a standard requirement for practically all supermarkets.

Examples of other food safety management systems that can be required are:

- [BRC](#) (British Retail Consortium)
- [IFS](#) (International Food Standard)
- [FSSC22000](#) (Food Safety System Certification)
- [SQF](#) (Safe Quality Food Programme)

These management systems are supplemental to GLOBALG.A.P. and are recognised by the [Global Food Safety Initiative \(GFSI\)](#).

### Tips:

- Identify the food-safety management systems that are usually requested in your target market. Expect GLOBALG.A.P. to be one of them.
- Read more on the various food-safety management systems at the [Standards Map](#) website.
- Always remember that food safety is a major issue. Work proactively with buyers to improve food safety, taking care to be transparent and remain up to date with regard to buyer requirements and



regulations.

## Social and environmental compliance

There is growing attention in Europe for the social and environmental conditions in producing areas. Most European buyers have a social code of conduct which they expect suppliers to adhere to. Social compliance is important, but product quality has top priority.

It can be a plus to be [GRASP](#) certified. GRASP is part of GLOBALG.A.P. It is one of the most accessible schemes in terms of social certification and it is gaining importance in Europe.

Another good option is implementing standards recognised by the [Sustainability Initiative Fruit and Vegetables \(SIFAV\)](#), which consists of an initiative from traders and retailers to become 100% sustainable in sourcing from Latin America, Africa and Asia by 2020.

### Tips:

- Examine your company's current performance, for example by completing a self-assessment on the [amfori/BSCI website](#).
- For a complete overview of buyer initiatives for social compliance, see the [buyer requirements for fresh fruit and vegetables](#) on the CBI marketing intelligence platform.

## 6. What do niche markets require?

### Growing demand for organic

An increasing number of European consumers prefer food products that are produced and processed using natural methods. The market for organic yams and other exotic roots and tubers is relatively small, but demand is growing and there is a limited supply.

In order to market organic products in the European Union (EU), you must use organic production methods according to [European legislation](#). Furthermore, you have to use these production methods for at least two years before you can market your product as organic.

In addition, you (or your importer) must apply for an import authorisation from organic control bodies. After being audited by an accredited certifier, you may put the [EU organic logo](#) on your products, as well as the logo of the standard holder, such as the [Soil Association](#) (especially relevant in the United Kingdom), [Naturland](#) (Germany) or [BioSuisse](#) (Switzerland). Some of these standards differ slightly, but they all comply with the European legislation on organic production and labelling.

### Tips:

- Implementing organic production and becoming certified can be expensive, so assess the market potential before making any investments.
- Consult the [Standards Map database](#) for information about the various organic certifications.
- For the export of organic roots and tubers to the European market, use a specialised importer, who understands the market and has access to niche markets with their particular requirements. Use, for example, the [Organic-Bio](#) database to find these specialised importers.

## Using fair trade to differentiate your product

The production of yams and other exotic roots and tubers are often produced by smallholders. With the increased attention for social compliance, there is also a niche market for fair-trade certified products. However, before getting into fair certification schemes, it is important to have a potential buyer and you must make sure your pricing is still acceptable.

Examples of social or sustainable labels for fresh fruit and vegetables are:

- [Fair for Life](#)
- [Fairtrade](#)
- [Rainforest Alliance Certification Scheme](#)

### Tip:

- Consult the [Standards Map database](#) for additional information and to learn about differences between fair-trade labels.

## 7. What competition do I face on the European market for exotic roots and tubers?

### Export competition is a fraction of the global production

Most of the worldwide production of yams (66 million tonnes) and cassava (277 million tonnes) in 2017, was destined to local markets. The large productions of cassava and yam mainly reflect the importance of these products as traditional staple crops. Only a fraction is exported to Europe as fresh products. Your potential competition in export is large, but in reality only few suppliers have successfully organised their supply to Europe.

Yams are produced principally in Nigeria, Ghana and Ivory Coast, of which Ghana is most successful in the supply to Europe.

The production of cassava is spread out over tropical regions in Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America. For export to Europe you can expect most competition from Costa Rica.

For cassava, yam and similar exotic roots and tubers there is no European production, which enables suppliers from developing countries to supply year round at reasonable prices.

### Tips:

- Increase your chances on the European market by selecting the best products for export, and maintaining excellent agricultural practices.
- Build partnerships with buyers and strive for excellent product quality and handling. Do not compete on price alone.
- Read the [tips for doing business with European buyers](#) on the CBI market intelligence platform.

### High threshold to enter a niche market

For cassava, yam and similar roots and tubers, the quantities sold per store are usually small. Nevertheless, entering the European market can be a big hurdle for many companies because of certification and meeting

both legal and non-legal requirements.

When supplying indirectly a larger retail organization, your importer will require a significant volume of uniform quality and on a tight schedule. You are not in a position to argue about the rules of the game.

A specialised (ethnic or exotic food) importer may buy smaller quantities or lesser-known varieties.

### Tips:

- Make sure your product can compete with the quality produce of other suppliers: Optimize your production and logistical processes, apply good agricultural practices and maintain focus on the Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs).
- Find an experienced buyer that has a convincing track record of marketing your specific product.

## Exotic roots and tubers as an alternative to traditional foods

European diets and meals are often based on (white) potatoes, rice and wheat (bread, pasta). Sweet potatoes are becoming increasingly popular as an alternative for these starchy products. Although fresh cassava, yam and similar exotic roots and tubers are not an everyday product for Europeans, they can be a welcome addition to regular products in the same way as sweet potatoes.

### Tip:

- Use storytelling (e.g. show its origin and producer), novel packaging and premium quality as methods for setting your product apart.

## 8. What do the trade channels and interesting market segments look like in Europe for fresh exotic roots and tubers?

Figure 6: Market channels for exotic roots and tubers in the European market



### Specialised importers

In the European market, exotic roots and tubers are mainly imported by a relatively small number of specialised importers. Generally these importers trade in a broad assortment of exotic fruit and vegetables. Other less specialised importers may buy cassava and yam on demand or in small quantities to supplement their general assortment. The main importers are located in the UK, the Netherlands and France.

### Tips:

- Visit or participate in trade fairs such as the [Fruit Logistica](#) in Berlin in order to find importers of exotic roots and tubers.
- Read the [tips for finding buyers on the European fresh fruit and vegetables market](#) on the CBI market intelligence platform.

## Processing industry

Products such as yam and cassava are more and more used in the industry, for example for the making of chips. Processing companies in Europe need a reliable supply of cassava and usually require a logistical or importing partner to purchase more exotic roots and tubers.

According to the [European Snacks Association](#) the consumption per capita of savoury snacks and chips is highest in the Netherlands, Norway and Spain. The United Kingdom offers the largest overall market in savoury snacks.

## Ethnic stores offer a steady supply

Grocery stores with ethnic products and street markets offer the steadiest supply of roots and tubers. The main cassava and yam varieties can often be found in the mainstream retail. You can expect to see these products more and more in regular supermarket as people become more familiar with them. However, these supermarkets will demand stricter requirements and purchasing conditions.

### Tip:

- Evaluate your company's performance and readiness to supply large retailers using self-assessment and certification procedures. See also [Standards Map](#).

## Regional differences

In Europe there are regional differences in the composition of market channels. Northern countries like Germany, the UK, the Netherlands and Belgium have a very dominant large retail channel of supermarkets. France and Spain go beyond that with large hypermarkets, alongside smaller specialist shops. Countries in the Alpine region, such as Switzerland and Austria, are more favourably disposed towards small local shops.

### Tip:

- Increase your understanding of the different target countries by visiting buyers, wholesale markets and retailers.

## 9. What are the end market prices for fresh roots and tubers?

Figure 7: Price breakdown in the fresh fruits and vegetables supply chain



European retail prices for cassava are around 2 and 3 euros per kilo.

Yams are less common, which means you have to expect prices to fluctuate more.

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