This article analyses data on trade in agricultural products, concentrating on exports and imports between the European Union (EU) and all countries outside the EU (extra-EU). In 2018, extra-EU trade in agricultural products accounted for 7.0% of the total extra EU-28 international trade in goods. This was 0.4% less than in 2017. Data on trade in agricultural products is central for two important EU policies: the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the common trade policy, which manages trade relations with non-EU countries.

This article is part of an online publication providing recent statistics on international trade in goods, covering information on the EU’s main partners, main products traded, specific characteristics of trade as well as background information.

EU trade in agricultural products: slight deficit

The value of trade (imports plus exports) of agricultural goods between the EU-28 and the rest of the world was EUR 275 billion in 2018. It is almost evenly divided between exports at EUR 137 billion and imports at EUR 138 billion. Thus there was only a small trade deficit. Between 2002 and 2018, trade measured in value more than doubled, equivalent to an average annual growth of 5.0%, with exports (5.8%) growing faster than imports (4.3%) (see Figure 1).
The volume of this trade shows that in 2018 the EU-28 imported 151 million tonnes of agricultural products, while it exported only 99 million tonnes. Between 2002 and 2018 the total trade volume had an average annual growth rate of 2.1 %. Here too, exports (3.1 %) grew faster than imports (1.5 %). The average annual increase in prices for exports (2.6 %) was lower than for imports (2.8 %) (see Figure 2).

**Figure 1: EU-28 exports, imports and trade balance of agricultural products, 2002-2018 (EUR billion)Source: Eurostat (Comext data code: DS-016894)**

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**Figure 2: Value, weight and average price of EU-28 trade in agricultural products, 2002-2018Source: Eurostat (Comext data code: DS-016894)**

**Agricultural products: 3 main groups**

Agricultural products can be subdivided into three main groups: animal products, vegetable products and foodstuffs (see Figure 3). In exports, the largest group, with 57 %, is foodstuffs, while vegetable products (22 %) and animal products (21 %) had almost equal shares. In imports, the largest group, with 48 %, is vegetable products, followed by foodstuffs (32 %) and animal products (20 %).
Each of the categories discussed above can be subdivided into chapters (see Figure 4). The animal products category consists of live animals, meat, fish, crustaceans and aquatic invertebrates, dairy produce, eggs, honey, and other products of animal origin. In exports of animal products, the largest chapters were ‘dairy produce and birds’ eggs’ (35%, EUR 10 billion) and ‘meat and edible meat offal’ (34%, EUR 10 billion). In imports the largest chapter was ‘fish, crustaceans and aquatic invertebrates’ with 76% corresponding to EUR 21 billion.

Vegetable products include trees, plants, vegetables, fruit, coffee, cereals, seeds and oil. The most exported vegetable products were ‘cereals’ and ‘animal or vegetable fats’ (both 19.5%, EUR 6 billion). The ‘edible fruit and nuts’ chapter had the largest share of imports of vegetable products (32%, EUR 20 billion).

Foodstuffs consist of various types of processed goods deriving from vegetable and animal products such as sugar, beverages, tobacco and prepared animal fodder. The most exported foodstuff, ‘beverages, spirits and vinegar’ had a share of 39% corresponding to EUR 31 billion. Products registered under chapter 23 — ‘residues and waste from the food industries; prepared animal fodder’ made up 23% of foodstuff imports equivalent to EUR 10 billion.
Figure 4: EU-28 exports and imports of agricultural products by product category, 2018

Source: Eurostat (Comext data code: DS-016894)

Agricultural products - developments between 2012 and 2018

With the exception of 2013, in the period from 2002 to 2018 the total export value of agricultural products from the EU-28 to extra-EU countries was slightly lower than the value of imports. However looking at the three separate categories we see three different patterns.

Until 2011, EU-28 exports of animal products in terms of monetary value were lower than EU-28 imports (see Figure 5). In 2011, animal products recorded a EUR 0.2 billion trade surplus which fluctuated in the following years, reaching 1.2 billion in 2018. In 2018 animal products exports were around 2.5 times as big as in 2002, equivalent to an annual average growth rate of 5.9 %. In the same period the average annual growth rate of imports was 3.8 %.
Unlike animal products, there was a trade deficit for vegetable products over the whole 2002–2018 period (see Figure 6). Exports and imports both more than doubled. Their average annual growth rates were both 5.2 %. This meant that the trade deficit also more than doubled from EUR 16 billion in 2002 to EUR 36 billion in 2018.

The foodstuffs category showed a continuous surplus from 2002 to 2018 (see Figure 7). Not only have EU-28 exports of foodstuffs exceeded imports, but the trends also show that exports have increased at a faster average annual rate (6.0 %) than imports (3.5 %). Consequently the trade surplus grew from EUR 6 billion in 2002 to EUR 35 billion in 2018.
Main trading partners for agricultural products

The United States was the main recipient of EU-28 exports of agricultural goods, with 16% of the total (see Figure 8). It was followed by China (8%), Switzerland (6%), Japan and Russia (both 5%) and Norway (4%). Brazil and the United States (both 9%) were the main origins of agricultural imports. They were followed by Norway and China (both 5%), Argentina and Ukraine (both 4%). China, the United States and Norway appear as one of the top six partners for both exports and imports. For the United States this is also the case for each of the three product groups discussed below.

The main destinations of EU-28 exports of animal products were China (15%), the United States (10%) and Japan (8%) as shown in Figure 9. Norway was by far the largest origin for EU imports of animal products (24% of the total in 2018); 99% of the animal products imported from Norway fell under the fish chapter, representing EUR 6.4 billion. China followed with 9% (EUR 2.4 billion), from which two thirds were in the
The United States was the EU’s main partner for vegetable products in 2018 with 12 % of EU exports and 11 % of EU imports respectively (see Figure 10). With 9 %, Switzerland was the next largest export destination for vegetable products, while Brazil with 9 % was the second largest partner for EU imports.

Foodstuffs accounted for most of the EU-28 exports of agricultural products. The United States was the main destination in the foodstuffs category, with 20 % of the total in 2018 (see Figure 11). Brazil (12 %) and the United States (9 %) were the EU’s largest import partners for foodstuffs.
Figure 11: EU-28 exports and imports of foodstuffs by main partner, 2018 Source: Eurostat (Comext data code: DS-016894)

**Data sources**

EU data comes from Eurostat’s COMEXT database. COMEXT is the Eurostat reference database for international trade in goods. It provides access not only to both recent and historical data from the EU Member States but also to statistics of a significant number of non-EU countries. International trade aggregated and detailed statistics disseminated from Eurostat website are compiled from COMEXT data according to a monthly process. Because COMEXT is updated on a daily basis, data published on the website may differ from data stored in COMEXT in case of recent revisions.

In this article, agricultural products are classified according to the sub-headings of the Combined Nomenclature (CN), based on the international classification known as the Harmonized commodity description and coding system (HS) administered by the World Customs Organization. The 24 chapters (2-digit codes) of agricultural products in the CN nomenclature are grouped into 3 major types: animal, vegetable and foodstuff products. Chapter 15 (animal or vegetable fats and oils and their cleavage products; prepared edible fats; animal or vegetable waxes) is included in vegetables.

EU data are compiled according to community guidelines and may, therefore, differ from national data published by Member States. Statistics on extra-EU trade are calculated as the sum of trade of each of the 28 Member States with countries outside the EU. In other words, the EU is considered as a single trading entity and trade flows are measured into and out of the area, but not within it.

**Classifications**

In international trade statistics, several classifications are used. Apart from the harmonised commodity description and coding system (HS), managed by the World Customs Organization, data on trade is also available in the United Nations’ Standard International Trade Classification (SITC revision 4) and in the Broad Economic Categories (BEC) classification, the latter using end-use categories more adapted to economic analysis.

**Unit of measure**

Trade values are expressed in millions (10⁶) or in billions (10⁹) of euros. They correspond to the statistical value, i.e. to the amount which would be invoiced in case of sale or purchase at the national border of the reporting country. It is called a FOB value (free on board) for exports and a CIF value (cost, insurance, freight) for imports.

**Source data for tables and graphs**

Extra-EU trade in agricultural goods Excel file
Context
The European Union (EU) is the largest partner in international trade of agricultural products. While the EU-28 imports mostly simple unprocessed agricultural goods, exports from the European Union are principally processed food products.

Data on international trade in agriculture products is used for two of the common EU policies: the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the common trade policy which manages trade relations with non-EU countries. These are major policy areas of the European Union on which decisions are taken at Community level.

Statistics on international trade in agricultural commodities are fundamental in the evaluation and understanding of problems related to several political agendas, such as trade negotiations, food security, cooperation and aid towards developing countries and global sustainability.

Other articles
- International trade in goods
- EU trade in primary goods

Main tables
- International trade in goods, see:
  - International trade data (t_ext)
  - International trade long-term indicators (t_ext_lti)
  - International trade short-term indicators (t_ext_sti)

Database
- International trade in goods
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Dedicated section
- International trade in goods

Data visualisations
- Top 5 partners in trade in goods
- My Country in a bubble

Methodology
- International trade in goods statistics - background
- International trade in goods (ESMS metadata file — ext_go_agg_esms)
- User guide on European statistics on international trade in goods
Legislation


External links

- European Commission – Agriculture and rural development

- European Commission – Trade

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