HM Government

GROWTH GATEWAY
GLOBAL PROSPERITY THROUGH TRADE & INVESTMENT
UK Government

A guide for African fruit and vegetable exporters seeking UK buyers

October 2023

Purpose and contents

This guidance aims to help African fruit and vegetable producers find UK buyers for their exports. It aims to make it as easy as possible for potential exporters to find buyers and successfully approach them. It introduces typical requirements of UK buyers, and answers some frequently asked questions.

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About Growth Gateway: Growth Gateway is a business support service to help African and UK businesses trade and invest. Growth Gateway's joint public-private sector team connects businesses with UK government trade and investment initiatives, provides business advice and expert support, and includes specialist online information tools. Growth Gateway also runs targeted schemes to support trade and investment in high potential sectors and markets. Visit the Growth Gateway website for tailored advice and support.

1. Key messages

1. Research UK buyers and target your approach accordingly by asking:

   - which buyer would be likely to sell your product?
   - can you produce the volume they would like to buy at the required frequency?

2. You can arrange contacts with UK buyers by:

   - searching for UK buyers using our tool
   - meeting buyers in person, if possible, at trade fairs like the London Produce Show
   - using the contact details provided later in this guide

3. You can prepare thoroughly for contacting and meeting UK buyers if you:

   - understand your main competitors and their strengths and weaknesses – what is your unique selling point as a business, or as a region or country?
   - are ready to talk about your experience of exporting
   - read these tips from the Centre for Promotion of Imports on doing business with European buyers
   - have ready good quality photos and concise written descriptions of your produce and operations

4. The UK market is competitive and has strict standards. However, in the UK market:

   - opportunities for non-EU exporters have increased since Brexit, as these firms compete on even terms with EU exporters
   - UK customers are very interested in foreign cuisines and new products
   - the demand for convenience foods presents an added-value opportunity

For tailored advice on engaging with UK buyers, visit the Growth Gateway website.

2. Who the UK buyers are

Introduction

There are 6 general categories of UK grocery buyers. These are:

- large supermarket chains – these make up over 75% of retail sales, with some supermarkets having dedicated sourcing companies – for example, ASDA has IPL and Waitrose has Primafruit
- sourcing companies that buy fruit and vegetables for retailers and caterers – examples include FESA, Fresca Group (which includes Primafruit), Westfalia Fruit UK, Minor, Weir and Willis, and Total Produce
- specialist import firms like Wealmoor (sub-tropical fruit) and Poupart (non-retail sector)
- food processing companies like Blue Skies (freshly-cut fruit processed at source) and Natures Way Foods (convenience foods such as bagged salads)
- wholesalers like Bestway Wholesale, Eurofoods, Booker, and Macro that mainly serve the restaurant and catering sectors
- agents like LDH (own-brand specialist) and World Wise Foods that bring together products from multiple buyers to be sold on

Direct (or near-direct) relationships with major buyers (often supermarkets) provide the most stability for suppliers. These are often known as 'business to business'. Supermarkets have higher quality standards and generally require bigger volumes on a regular basis, relative to other categories of UK grocery buyers.

Smaller suppliers new to exporting may find it easier to begin with other types of buyers. These include importers, distributors, agents, or wholesalers that deal with many suppliers and sell the product on to others in bulk.

Choosing whether to approach a supermarket or a specialised importer will depend on the volumes, frequency of availability, and quality of the product you want to export. If you cannot meet the volumes or frequencies required by UK importers, consider working with a local aggregator.

This guidance gives examples of 3 types of buyers. They are:

- supermarkets
- food processing companies
- wholesalers

Note**: t**his guide focuses mainly on the 10 largest sellers of groceries by market share, and also several major non-retail buyers. Being in the guide does not mean the UK government endorses or recommends the listed companies or people.

Case study: supermarket – Tesco

Tesco:

- is the UK's largest supermarket chain and one of the largest retailers in the world
- has over 345,000 staff and shops across the country
- regularly runs promotional offers, as they compete with other supermarkets
- has a webpage for businesses interested in supplying to Tesco

Potential suppliers can showcase their products to the firm’s buyers by registering on Tesco’s RangeMe system.

As a supplier working directly with a UK supermarket you will need to:

- achieve very high standards of quality
- supply large volumes at regular intervals
- maintain regular, clear communication channels, including in-person visits

In section 4 you can find ways to contact supermarkets.

Case study: food processing company – Natures Way Foods

Natures Way Foods:

- is a UK-based firm employing 1,400 staff
- supplies retailers and food service companies with products like prepared salads
- produces both branded (for example, Heinz) and supermarket own products

Its customers include:

- Tesco
- Sainsbury's
- Aldi
- Greencore Group

Potential suppliers should email the new supplier inbox at Natures Way Foods.

As a supplier selling to a UK food processing company, you will need:

- the capacity to pre-process some products (for example, freezing, freeze-drying cutting, packaging)
- flexibility to process products in new ways, responding to demand
- packaging facilities for processed products

See section 4 for ways to contact food processors.

Case study: wholesaler – Euro Foods

Euro Foods:

- is a UK-based producer with 6 depots around the UK
- serves restaurants, caterers, and specialist supermarkets
- specialises in Asian food products
- asks suppliers to meet standards set by the British Retail Consortium

Potential suppliers should complete the online form for new suppliers to Euro Foods.

As a supplier selling to a UK wholesaler, you will need to:

- achieve high quality standards
- have the capability to be more flexible with quantities and supply regularity than major supermarkets
- maintain regular, clear communication channels

In section 4 you can find ways to contact wholesalers.

3. What UK buyers look for in suppliers

Preferences of buyers

This guide does not cover UK SPS and labelling requirements, like having an export certificate and following sanitary and phytosanitary regulations. Our separate guide covers the requirements, standards, and processes for exporting to the UK.

Preferences by type of buyer

All buyers usually want:

- competitive pricing and certifiable quality
- a unique selling point (USP) – a superior variety or new product that is preferable to their current supply
- clear, regular, possibly even daily communications about products and delivery
- suppliers that are ready to export, with all necessary domestic and UK certifications

Supermarkets and other large buyers usually want:

- stable, high-quality and consistent supply at large volumes
- suppliers that are Global Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certified, the common standard for sustainability, environmental protection, traceability, and health and safety
- suppliers that have a Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) recognised Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP)-based food safety management system
- in some cases, suppliers that have done the Sedex Members Ethical Trade Audit (SMETA), or equivalent

Volume, regularity, and quality of supply

Note that the volumes that are classed as high, medium, and low vary a lot by product. For example, a high volume of broad beans could be 700kg a week, while 100kg a week for Basil is also high.

Supermarkets and wholesalers

Supermarkets and wholesalers usually want:

- a high typical order volume
- a steady supply regularity

They will usually meet additional quality standards like:

- Global Good Agricultural Practices (GAP)
- Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP)-based food safety management system

They will usually meet ethical and social standards like:

- Sedex Members Ethical Trade Audit (SMETA)
- Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI)

Food processing companies

Food processing companies usually want:

- a medium to high typical order volume
- a steady supply regularity

They will usually meet additional quality standards like:

- Global Good Agricultural Practices (GAP)
- Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP)-based food safety management system

They will usually meet ethical and social standards like:

- Sedex Members Ethical Trade Audit (SMETA)
- Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI)

Aggregators

Aggregators usually want:

- a medium to high typical order volume
- a flexible supply regularity

They will usually have fewer additional standards beyond the legal requirements for exporting fruit and vegetables to the UK.

Specialist import firms

Specialist import firms usually want:

- a low to medium typical order volume
- a flexible supply regularity

They will usually have fewer additional standards beyond the legal requirements for exporting fruit and vegetables to the UK.

To find out more on UK Buyers' standards and UK government import requirements you can:

- read the official UK guidance on marketing and labelling standards for fruit and vegetables
- read our separate guide to the requirements, standards, and processes for exporting to the UK
- Visit the Growth Gateway website for tailored support

Consumers’ preferences

UK buyers want to meet the market demand UK customers create for products that fit their culture and diet.

As a general rule, some of these preferences include:

- popular ‘convenience’ fruit and vegetables – examples include seedless grapes and easy-to-peel satsumas and clementines
- a sustainable and ethical approach, including reducing plastic use – these are important factors after price
- multicultural tastes – British consumers eat a diverse array of fruit and vegetables from around the world, which are usually imported

You can find more information from the Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries (CBI). CBI is part of the Netherlands Enterprise Agency, funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Growth Gateway works closely with CBI and other countries’ import agencies to support trade and investment with developing countries.

4. How to contact UK buyers: links to example buyers

Supermarkets usually ask potential suppliers to contact them using an online form. For example:

- Aldi: 'Becoming a Supplier'
- Asda: 'Becoming a Supplier'
- 'How to Supply Ocado'
- 'I'd love to supply Lidl'
- Sainsbury's: 'Becoming a supplier'
- 'Supplying Morrisons'
- Tesco: 'Range Me'
- The Co-Operative Group: 'New Supplier – Registration of Interest'
- Waitrose: 'Become a Supplier'

Importers and distributors usually ask that potential suppliers contact them by email or telephone. Some examples include:

- De Groot Fresh Produce
- DG Imports
- FerryFast
- Fruco
- Jem Fruits (South Africa)
- VegPro (Kenya)
- VIDAFresh
- Wealmoor

Fruit and vegetable processors also usually have a contact email address or telephone number. For example:

- Britvic
- David Berryman Ltd
- Innocent Drinks
- Suntory
- Symrise
- Uren Food Ingredients

You can visit events like the London Produce Show and Fruit Logistica. Visit the Growth Gateway website for more information on upcoming trade events.

Some buyers, like the large organisations highlighted under section 4 ‘links to example buyers’, use an online application form.

Those that do not would usually expect a 'pitch deck'. This would usually include some, or all, of this information:

1. Cover slide with company name, logo, website, social media handles, any awards won.

2. Concise description of your business and what you do, usually including:

    - statistics on growth, revenue, other key performance indicators (KPIs)
    - any research you have done on UK buyer groups you would like to target
    - your unique selling point (USP) and why the buyer would want to replace an existing range with your products

3. Your preparations for export, like:

    - a list of your products, with full specification
    - suggested retail pricing of your products
    - photos of your products
    - your production and export capacity
    - any existing record of successfully exporting to or supplying other buyers
    - a list of hygiene or standard qualifications your business has

5. Next steps

Growth Gateway can help by:

- checking how ready you are to export
- providing lists of buyers and trading intermediaries
- recommending trade events
- recommending routes for possible UK government support, like technical assistance and finance
- identifying investment opportunities

Visit the Growth Gateway webpage
Learn more about UK markets and sectors, trade agreements, UK import regulations and taxes, and support for African businesses from the UK government.

Search for UK buyers
Use UK government trade records to explore buyers of your products and get further advice on networking, trade finance, logistics, and export administration. Tools available include:

- the UK trade data search engine, to find UK businesses that import your product
- the register of UK employers' associations, to find contacts in your sector