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**Report Highlights:**

In 2023, U.S. agriculture exports to El Salvador reached \$860 million, a slight drop of 12 percent compared to 2022 due mainly to lower wheat and oil seeds imports. However, the consumer-oriented products category saw a promising increase from \$349 million to \$364 million, marking a 4.4 percent growth. The top five U.S. consumer-oriented exports to El Salvador, with a higher dollar value, were soups and other food preparations, pork and pork products, dairy products, poultry meat, and processed vegetables. Remittances are significant in the Salvadoran economy and contribute to higher purchasing power. It is estimated that approximately 30 percent of the 6.6 million Salvadorans receive them monthly, further stabilizing the economy and contributing to a higher purchasing power.

# Market Fact Sheet: El Salvador

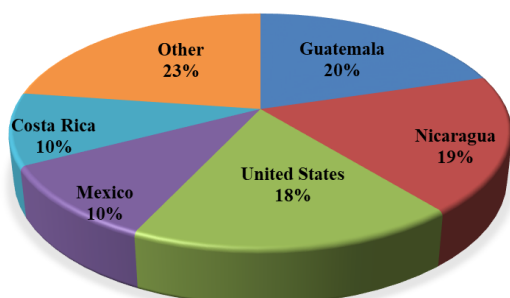
## Executive Summary

El Salvador is the smallest country in Central America, with an estimated population of about 6.6 million. The United States is El Salvador's leading trading partner, with \$4 billion, or 29 percent of total imports, and receives over \$2 billion of Salvadoran products, representing 36 percent of Salvadoran exports worldwide.

## Consumer-Oriented Agricultural Imports

In 2023, the United States was the third largest supplier of consumer-oriented products to El Salvador, with exports valued at about \$364 million.

2023 EL SALVADOR GLOBAL IMPORTS ORIGINS  
CONSUMER- ORIENTED



Source: Trade Data Monitor

## Food Retail Industry

Two leading supermarket chains in El Salvador are Walmart (Mexico and Centroamerica) and local chain Super Selectos. Most consumers prefer to shop at supermarkets because they are perceived to provide a better and more comfortable shopping experience and better offers than traditional open-air markets.

## Food Processing Industry

El Salvador's global imports of agricultural intermediate products reached \$641 million in 2023, a 10 percent drop from 2022. The snack industry has helped El Salvador to keep its regional leadership status, as well as the production of juices and carbonated beverages. The manufacturing of sweet bread targeted to Salvadorans living abroad has positively impacted the growth of baking inputs import numbers.

## Food Service Industry

According to Euromonitor, in 2023 El Salvador registered sales of \$2.6 billion in the Hotel/Catering category, which represents a 7.5 percent increase from 2022. This growth is expected to continue as El Salvador' tourism sector has recovered to pre-pandemic levels and more hotels and restaurants are being established.

### Quick Facts CY 2023

**Imports of Consumer-Oriented Products: (US\$ million): \$2 billion**

#### List of Top 10 Growth Products in El Salvador

- |                                  |                             |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1) Corn                          | 2) Food preparations        |
| 3) Soybean oilcake               | 4) Meat of bovine animals   |
| 5) Cheese                        | 6) Cotton                   |
| 7) Palm oil                      | 8) Durum wheat              |
| 9) Other non-alcoholic beverages | 10) Sauces and preparations |

#### Top 5 Retailers in El Salvador

- |                   |                         |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Super Selectos | 2. Walmart Supercenter  |
| 3. Pricesmart     | 4. Despensa de Don Juan |
| 5. Maxi Despensa  |                         |

#### Trade

El Salvador Ag. Imports from World: \$3.3 billion  
El Salvador Ag. Imports from the U.S.: \$860 million

#### GDP/Population

Population (millions): 6.6  
GDP (billions USD): \$59.537 (2022 est.)  
GDP per capita (USD): \$9,400 (2022 est.)

Source: The CIA Factbook/ Trade Data Monitor

## Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats

Strengths	Weaknesses
* A growing tourism sector contributes to a higher demand of imported foods/beverages.	* High risk of natural disasters directly impacts economic growth and food security.
* Modern supermarket outlets and high-end shopping malls allow for an increased exposure of U.S. brands.	* Bureaucratic and slow process to register new food/beverage products does not facilitate trade.
Opportunities	Threats
* Salvadoran consumers perceive U.S. food products to be of higher quality.	* Strong competition from neighbouring countries exporting most agricultural products at lower prices.
* El Salvador is not self-sufficient in food production, therefore it highly depends on grain commodities, fruits and vegetables imports.	* The low growth economic environment does not attract foreign investment and local manufacturers are reluctant to make large investments.

## SECTION I: MARKET OVERVIEW

El Salvador is the smallest country in Central America, with an estimated 6.6 million inhabitants. It is known for its beautiful beaches, rich culture, and, unfortunately, economic struggles. The economy of El Salvador is a unique mixture of agriculture, industry, and services. In the past, agriculture was the most critical sector of the economy, with coffee being the primary export product; however, in recent years, the industrial and services sectors have grown significantly. El Salvador's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is primarily driven by the service sector, which accounts for over two-thirds of its economy. Approximately 62 percent of the country's citizens live in cities (urban areas), with about 1.7 million living in San Salvador's capital.

El Salvador has experienced modest economic growth in recent decades, with annual GDP growth oscillating between two percent and three percent for the last two decades, with 3.5% in 2023. In addition, remittances continue to play a relevant role in the Salvadoran economy. In 2023, total remittances reached over \$8.2 billion, 4.6 percent more than in 2022. According to El Salvador's Central Reserve Bank, foreign direct investment (FDI) reached about \$760 million, the most significant figure in the last five years. Another economic pillar has been the tourism sector, which provided about \$2.7 billion in additional income (48% increase) and 3.4 million visitors (36% increase), surpassing the government's expectations of 3.3 million.

In 2024, El Salvador hosted the International Surfing Association (ISA) World Longboard Championship from April 19-25 and the Central America Travel Market Tradeshow (CATM) from April 16-19. These events helped to establish El Salvador as a tourist destination and a host for prestigious international events. The country had previously hosted the Miss Universe pageant in 2023.

A faster-paced lifestyle highly influences Salvadoran eating habits. Although companies and institutions have widely adopted teleworking, many have rotating schedules, so traffic has returned to pre-pandemic levels. Long commute times contribute to additional restaurant consumption. The post-pandemic recovery that the restaurant sector has experienced results from adapting to consumers' new demands, such as having a more diverse menu, including healthier entrees to gourmet desserts and coffee. Local tourism over the weekends is another factor that contributes to higher restaurant consumption.

Salvadorans, mainly from large cities, look for restaurants in natural areas, such as volcanoes, coffee plantations, or new amusement parks where they can have an enjoyable dining experience. International cuisine restaurants are sought after by a growing middle class that has become frequent travelers.

According to Euromonitor, in 2023, the monthly expenditure of working Salvadorans on food and non-alcoholic beverages was \$431.69 per household, a slight increase of three percent compared to 2022.

**Table 1**

Consumer Expenditure by Economic Status of Household Head					
Category	Categorization Type	Unit	2022	2023	Monthly
Consumer Expenditure on Food and Non-Alcoholic Beverages	Employee	USD per household	\$ 5,043.50	\$ 5,180.30	\$ 431.69
	Employer and Self-Employed		\$ 5,410.20	\$ 5,562.00	\$ 463.50
	Unemployed		\$ 4,480.70	\$ 4,602.00	\$ 383.50
	Other		\$ 4,705.80	\$ 4,835.20	\$ 402.93

Source: Euromonitor/FAS El Salvador

## Advantages and Challenges of Exporting Agricultural Products to El Salvador:

Table 2

Advantages	Challenges
U.S. agricultural and food products are sought after by El Salvador’s HRI sector, as they have an excellent reputation among consumers and are known for their high quality and food safety standards.	U.S. agricultural and food products are more expensive than some regionally available. Guatemala, Canada, Mexico, and Chile are strong competitors.
Major retailers are developing increasingly sophisticated distribution systems, which will provide more space and better cold chain technology for high-value imports	Importers tend to buy small quantities to test the market. In general, U.S. companies are not interested in exporting small amounts.
Implementing CAFTA-DR has lowered or eliminated duties for most U.S. food products.	Targeting costs (advertising, discounts, sampling, etc.) make it difficult to promote new products.
With the recent boom in urban developments and expansion of shopping centers, new retail outlets are available to sell more U.S. food products.	The increased cost of El Salvador’s basic food basket, which includes essential items such as bread, tortillas, rice, meats, eggs, milk, beans, fruits, and vegetables per family, makes reaching a more extensive customer base for U.S. food products more challenging. As of May 2024, the urban basic food basket costs \$256, and in rural areas \$179. The minimum wage is \$364.80 for services/industry/commerce sector workers and \$243.46 for workers in the agricultural sector.

## SECTION II. EXPORTER BUSINESS TIPS

Successful product introduction into the Salvadoran market depends on local representation and personal contacts. The advantages of local representation include market knowledge, up-to-date information, guidance on business practices, import policies, sales contacts, and market development expertise.

El Salvador is a business card society, and exchanging business cards at the first meeting is essential. Initially, Salvadoran business relationships and meetings are formal. You are expected to use proper titles, shake hands before and after your meeting, and not use a person’s first name until a relationship

has been solidified. Use the formal Señor (Mr.) or Señora (Mrs.) before the last name (i.e., Señor Gomez, Señora Ramirez). It is highly recommended that U.S. exporters reach out to Salvadoran buyers who attend U.S. trade shows or Cooperators-focused Trade Missions, as usually, those participants are experienced buyers or have a good potential to grow their U.S. product portfolios.

Other considerations:

- Support local importers for in-store promotion activities and point-of-sale materials.
- Most importers prefer shipments from the Miami area, and consolidation is the best option when shipping small volumes.
- Establish a collaborative relationship with the importer to facilitate the product registration process and subsequent product entry.
- Traveling to El Salvador to visit potential clients and tour the market is highly encouraged to see trends and understand Salvadoran consumer preferences.

### **SECTION III. IMPORT FOOD STANDARDS, REGULATIONS AND PROCEDURES**

- **Customs Clearance**

Usually, when clearing a product through customs, a customs inspector, a customs officer, and a Ministry of Health (abbreviated MINSAL in Spanish) inspector are involved. English is the commercial language used on import documents. It takes approximately three to five days to clear a product through customs. Most importers use a customs agent to expedite customs clearing procedures as much as possible. Currently, there is no appeal procedure in place for disputed product rejections.

- **Documents Generally Required by the Country Authority for Imported Food:**

The Government of El Salvador (GOES) requires importers to be registered with MINSAL. Importers must also register each product and present the size of the imported product to ensure it is fit for human consumption. Registration of a product, once granted, is valid for five years.

MINSAL has created a new procedure to request an online import permit, and it is the only authorized method to request licenses for food and beverages. The latest online import permit procedure minimizes the processing time for import permits to under three minutes. In general, most products are subject to lab tests performed by MINSAL when undergoing routine controls and when the product is registered. However, in 2022, MINSAL changed the product registration norm for low-risk products and now accepts an export sanitary certificate from a Federal or State institution. For U.S. products, in the case of meat and meat products, MINSAL agrees with the Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) 9060-5 certificate. MINSAL will accept the export certificate issued by an official U.S. government institution for other U.S. food and beverage products.

See our [Food and Agricultural Imports Regulations and Standards \(FAIRS\) GAIN](#) report and our [FAIRS Export Certificate Report](#) for complete guidance on import requirements.

- **Country Language Labeling Requirements**

Currently, food products with U.S. labels are standard throughout the distribution chain. However, the

GOES requires that a sticker in Spanish that includes a list of ingredients, manufacturing method, and expiration date be used until the requirement of Spanish/English labels is fully implemented.

Expiration dates are required for processed products. The manufacturing and expiration date are required for higher-value and fresh products. A country-of-origin certificate is required for all products imported into El Salvador under all free trade agreements.

MINSAL does not require nutritional labeling to be attached to imported food products. However, officials from the Nutrition Department of MINSAL must review the U.S. nutrition label to be accepted. Some locally produced products at the retail level have nutrition facts in English to comply with U.S. regulations due to expectations of exporting to the U.S. market under the Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR). Local health officials say that since most Salvadoran consumers do not speak English, they could be basing their purchasing choices on the pictures used by the U.S. manufacturing companies' labels and, therefore, be misled.

- **Tariffs and Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)**

El Salvador remains committed to free markets and a diversified export-oriented economy. It is a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and signatory to [10 free trade agreements](#).

On August 20, 2018, El Salvador officially joined the Guatemala-Honduras Customs Union. Most U.S. food products have duty-free access to the Salvadoran market under CAFTA-DR. Sensitive products, such as dairy and white corn, are managed under a Tariff Rate Quota (TRQ) system administered by the Ministry of Economy's Free Trade Administration Division (DATCO). For instance, dairy will be liberalized in 2026, and white corn has increased the quota by 700 MT yearly since 2021. In the case of rice and poultry, both are entering free of quota as of 2024. For a detailed TRQ phase-out schedule, please click on the [El Salvador General Notes and Appendix I](#) hyperlink at the Office of the United States Trade Representative website reference.

- **Trademarks and Patents Market Research**

Individuals can acquire exclusive trademark rights by registering a branded product with the National Registry Center (CNR). Trademark registrations are granted for ten years and can be renewed indefinitely for similar periods.

#### **SECTION IV. MARKET SECTOR STRUCTURE AND TRENDS**

Salvadoran consumers are generally very receptive to new food brands, mainly specialty/international foods. Still, education on health benefits and cooking demos with tastings are critical.

The retail sector continues to be a key growth area of the Salvadoran economy, fueled by increasing purchasing power, mainly due to the constant influx of remittances and a steady expansion of consumer credit. Given the large diaspora living in the United States, El Salvador is highly influenced by American culture in general, which includes food preferences, such as U.S. brands for fast food restaurants, of which currently there is a good presence of franchises across the country.

There is also an increasing offer of coffee shops or small bistro-type restaurants. Many solid/extensive

franchises compete with small, gourmet-oriented entrepreneurs looking to sell food and a culinary experience. Salvadorans enjoy getting together at coffee shops or small restaurants for breakfast and informal/business meetings. The boom in this sector brings more demand for baked goods, dairy products, cocktails, smoothies, milkshakes, fresh fruits, and fruit juices.

Another trend is opening different shopping/commercial buildings in other areas of El Salvador. The most recent and emblematic is Millennium Plaza (<https://www.millennium-plaza.com/>), the tallest San Salvador building with 24 office floors, a three-floor shopping area, and a good range of restaurants and coffee shops. There is still pending the construction of a second phase of this project, which will include a hotel as a penthouse, residential apartments, a large area for restaurants, a sports court, and the main attraction: Millennium Skydeck, which will be a 110-meter, or 361 feet, tall building that will offer a 360° view of the city, along with a restaurant and lounge. All these projects represent a great venue to promote imported foods/beverages.

With the pandemic, large retailers continued their expansion plans. They revamped their online stores, which allowed for increased sales and attracted consumers to use the digital channels to shop and interact with them. For more details on this topic, please read our special GAIN report.

[“El Salvador: e-Commerce flourishes with COVID-19”](#).

Consumer-oriented products with a health-benefit focus are best sellers, as Salvadorans are more concerned about adopting healthier lifestyles. Other best-performing categories in 2023 were soups and other food preparations, pork and pork products, dairy products, poultry meat, and processed vegetables.

For more information on Salvadoran sector trends, please see our [Retail Foods GAIN Report](#), [Food Processing Ingredients GAIN Report](#), and the [Food Service-Hotel, Restaurant Institutional GAIN Report](#).

### **Competitive Situation**

Central American countries (Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica) and Mexico are the leading trade competitors for the United States regarding consumer-oriented products. Although the Salvadoran food industry is less developed than other Central American countries, it is currently the regional leader in producing and exporting snacks, juices, and carbonated beverages. Salvadoran food manufacturers generally rely on imported ingredients. High food safety standards, excellent quality, and technical support or assistance in developing new products give U.S. food ingredients a competitive advantage.

## **SECTION V. AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD IMPORTS**

According to the latest edition of RANKING® of Industrials Report/2024

(<https://industriaelsalvador.com/ranking-exportadores/>), El Salvador imported \$1.5 billion of food products in 2023, reflecting a 6.9% increase compared to the previous year. This growth demonstrates the greater dynamism in the imports of meat products (\$433 million) and dairy products (\$356 million), as these two categories accounted for 51% of all food product imports during 2023. On the other hand, the beverages imported in 2023 recorded a total of \$250 million, which represents a 1.3% decrease or

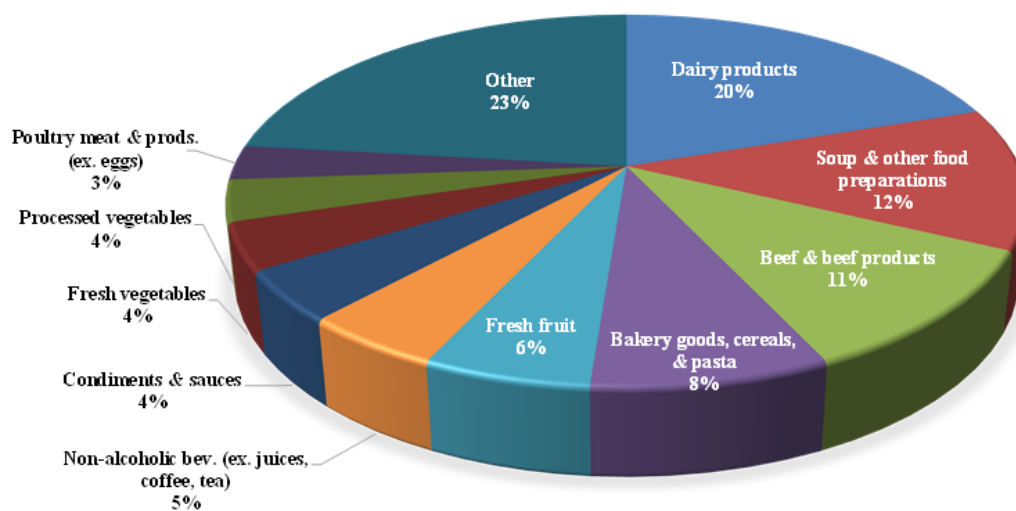
\$3.4 million less than the previous year. Carbonated drinks, coffee extracts, and water/mineral water are at the top of the list, accounting for 51% of total beverages imported in 2023.

According to Trade Data Monitor, in 2023, the United States exported about \$860 million of agricultural products to El Salvador, of which \$364 million were consumer-oriented.

**Table 4**

TOP 10 U.S. CONSUMER ORIENTED EXPORTS TO EL SALVADOR		
2023		
CATEGORY	US\$ VALUE	CHANGE 2023-2022
Soup & other food preparations	\$ 56,138,757	16.15%
Pork & pork products	\$ 52,790,036	16.57%
Dairy products	\$ 47,868,617	3.03%
Poultry meat & prods. (ex. eggs)	\$ 30,505,477	19.08%
Processed vegetables	\$ 30,481,737	-1.82%
Condiments & sauces	\$ 29,136,706	19.40%
Bakery goods, cereals, & pasta	\$ 21,646,671	-2.59%
Non-alcoholic bev. (ex. juices, coffee, tea)	\$ 15,903,534	-1.11%
Chocolate & cocoa products	\$ 12,732,193	3.37%
Fresh fruit	\$ 11,940,743	-6.29%

**2023 EL SALVADOR TOP 10 CONSUMER-ORIENTED FOOD IMPORTS FROM WORLD**



Source: Trade Data Monitor



**Table 5**

<b>EL SALVADOR AGRICULTURAL FOOD IMPORTS FROM WORLD- 2019-2023</b>					
<b>(In US\$ Millions)</b>					
<b>Category</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
Consumer Oriented	\$ 1,441	\$ 1,550	\$ 1,783	\$ 2,009	\$ 2,035
Intermediate	\$ 400	\$ 439	\$ 566	\$ 715	\$ 641
Bulk	\$ 391	\$ 399	\$ 444	\$ 641	\$ 584
Agricultural Related Products	\$ 93	\$ 91	\$ 112	\$ 138	\$ 131
<b>Agricultural and Related Total</b>	<b>\$ 2,325</b>	<b>\$ 2,478</b>	<b>\$ 2,905</b>	<b>\$ 3,502</b>	<b>\$ 3,391</b>

Source: Trade Data Monitor.

- **Best High Value, Consumer Oriented product prospects:**

Below is the top 10 list of the best consumer-oriented product prospects that have shown a constant increase in the value of global imports to El Salvador for the past three years:

**Table 6**

<b>Best 10 Consumer Oriented Product Prospects (US\$ Millions)</b>			
<b>Category</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
Soup & Other Food Preparations	\$ 208	\$ 237	\$ 252
Beef & Beef Products	\$ 190	\$ 208	\$ 221
Bakery Goods, Cereals, & Pasta	\$ 142	\$ 160	\$ 167
Fresh Fruit	\$ 115	\$ 112	\$ 116
Condiments & Sauces	\$ 71	\$ 80	\$ 89
Processed Vegetables	\$ 55	\$ 69	\$ 73
Poultry Meat & Prods. (ex. eggs)	\$ 54	\$ 57	\$ 61
Pork & Pork Products	\$ 51	\$ 53	\$ 61
Distilled Spirits	\$ 38	\$ 43	\$ 44
Chocolate & Cocoa Products	\$ 27	\$ 29	\$ 31

Source: Trade Data Monitor

## Section VI: Key Contacts and Further Information

<b>Agency:</b>	<b>Ministerio de Salud (Ministry of Health)</b>
Division:	Departamento de Saneamiento Ambiental (Food Safety Division)
Contact:	Mr. Fredy Funes
Address:	Alameda Roosevelt, Edificio Laboratorio Central Dr. Max Bloch, San Salvador, El Salvador
Phone:	(503) 2205-1614
Email:	<a href="mailto:fredy.funes@salud.gob.sv">fredy.funes@salud.gob.sv</a>
Web:	<a href="http://www.salud.gob.sv">www.salud.gob.sv</a>

<b>Agency:</b>	<b>Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería (Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock)</b>
Division:	Dirección General de Ganadería- DGG (Livestock General Direction Office)
Contact:	Dr. Marlon Reyes, Director
Address:	Final 1ª. Avenida Norte, 13 Calle Oriente y Av. Manuel Gallardo Santa Tecla, La Libertad, El Salvador
Phone:	(503) 2210-4355
Email:	<a href="mailto:marlon.reyes@mag.gob.sv">marlon.reyes@mag.gob.sv</a>
Web:	<a href="http://www.mag.gob.sv">www.mag.gob.sv</a>

### El Salvador Agricultural Affairs Office

**Address:** U.S. Embassy San Salvador  
Blvd. Santa Elena, Antiguo Cuscatlán  
La Libertad, El Salvador

**Phone:** +503 2501-2999, ext. 3414

**Email:** [AgSanSalvador@usda.gov](mailto:AgSanSalvador@usda.gov)

For additional information on exporting to El Salvador, please visit the Foreign Agricultural Service homepage [www.fas.usda.gov](http://www.fas.usda.gov)

### **Appendix I**

Please see this [BICO](#) report that shows U.S. agricultural exports to El Salvador for the last five years.

### **Attachments:**

No Attachments