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Report Highlights:

El Salvador's food and beverage sector is a vital economic pillar that is experiencing significant growth, largely driven by heavy reliance on imports. In 2025, the country recorded global imports totaling \$3.7 billion, with the United States as the the leading supplier, providing \$992.7 million in agricultural products. Recent industry data indicated that food manufacturing experienced year-on-year growth of 4.35 percent in the third quarter of 2025, primarily driven by processed foods, including oils, dairy products, milling, and bakery items. Additionally, manufacturers are adapting to consumer preferences by focusing on healthier, more innovative offerings, such as baked rather than fried snacks, and by exploring adventurous flavor profiles.

Executive Summary

El Salvador, the smallest country in Central America, has an estimated population of 6.4 million. The United States is its main trading partner, creating opportunities. In 2025, El Salvador imported \$4.7 billion in goods from the United States, representing a 26 percent market share. At the same time, it exported \$2.1 billion in goods to the United States, or 31 percent of its total exports.

Consumer-Oriented Agricultural Imports

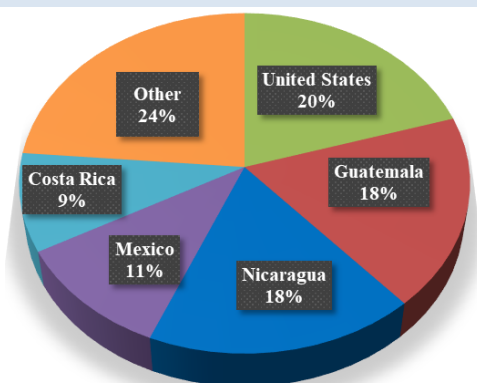


Chart 1: 2025 Top Exporting Countries to El Salvador
Source: Trade Data Monitor, LLC

Food Retail Industry

The two leading supermarket chains in El Salvador are Walmart, which operates 102 stores across various formats, and Super Selectos, with 122 locations nationwide. Most consumers prefer supermarkets to open-air markets due to the more convenient and comfortable shopping experience they offer.

Food Processing Industry

In 2025, El Salvador imported \$692 million in agricultural intermediate products, a 9% increase compared to 2024. The growth in the snack industry and beverage production demonstrates a resilient market, encouraging U.S. companies to explore innovative ingredient opportunities in the food and beverage manufacturing sector.

Food Service Industry

According to Euromonitor, sales in El Salvador's hotel and catering sector reached \$2.66 billion in 2025. With increased tourism and the opening of new hotels and restaurants, this category is expected to keep expanding.

Quick Facts CY 2025

Imports of Consumer-Oriented Products: (US\$ million): US\$2.4 billion

List of Top 10 Growth Ag. Products in El Salvador:

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| 1) Corn | 2) Meat of bovine boneless, fresh or chilled |
| 3) Palm oil | 4) Cheese, processed, not grated or powdered |
| 5) Meat of bovine, boneless, frozen | 6) Edible mixtures or preps. of animal or vegetable fats |
| 7) Durum wheat, other than seed | 8) Wheat and meslin |
| 9) Prepared or preserved chicken meat, meat offal or blood | 10) Milk and cream, concentrated, not sweetened. |

Food Industry in Channels

Retail Food Industry	\$7.9 billion
Food Service-HRI	\$814 million
Food Processing	\$219 million
Food and Agriculture Exports	\$1.1 billion

Top Retailers

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1) Super Selectos | 2) Walmart |
| 3) Pricesmart | 4) Maxi Despensa |
| 5) Despensa Familiar | 6) Despensa de Don Juan |

GDP/ Population

Population (millions): 6.4
GDP (billions USD): \$37.98 (current prices, 2026)
GDP per capita (USD): \$5,930 (current prices, 2026)

Source: Euromonitor, Trade Data Monitor, LLC, World Bank, IMF

Strengths	Weaknesses
The food service industry is growing as new hotels and restaurants open. Consumers are trying to save time and are often willing to spend a little more on products that offer quick meal solutions.	The market is highly price sensitive. Despite a drop in inflation, external issues such as soaring freight prices have driven price increases in end products, prompting many Salvadorans to look for less expensive equivalents.
Opportunities	Threats
Private labels are rapidly growing in supermarkets, creating an opportunity for U.S. companies to supply a diverse range of products and/or ingredients.	Strong competition from neighboring countries and those with which Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) have been signed results in lower export prices for agricultural products and ingredients.

SECTION I: MARKET OVERVIEW

El Salvador relies heavily on imports of food ingredients and a wide variety of consumer-oriented products. Local manufacturers depend on imported raw material and intermediate ingredients. The U.S. is the primary supplier, providing items like soybean oil, wheat, and specialized additives. In 2025, U.S. agricultural exports to El Salvador reached \$992.7 million, an increase of approximately 12 percent compared to 2024. This growth is also evident in the food manufacturing industry, which has expanded steadily as many small- and medium-sized agro-industrial companies add value to their products and begin exporting.

According to the most recent data from the Central Reserve Bank, El Salvador’s manufacturing industry recorded year-on-year growth of 4.35 percent in the third quarter of 2025, the highest rate in the past four years. This performance shows clear signs of recovery, particularly in the processed foods industry, with increased activity in oils, dairy products, and milling and bakery products. These sectors are considered strategic not only for their industrial significance but also for their direct link to the agricultural sector. Snacks and non-alcoholic beverages are the main products manufactured in El Salvador for both domestic consumption and export.

According to the [RANKING® of Industrial Exporters 2025](#), a report published by the Salvadoran Industrialists Association (ASI, by its Spanish acronym), the food and beverage sectors together account for 38 percent of industrial production in El Salvador. The report also shows that snacks represented 30 percent of total food exports in 2024, while carbonated beverages accounted for 62 percent of total beverage exports. The ASI evaluates the performance of exporting companies and identifies top exporters across industrial categories. In the food category for 2024, the leading exporter was the snack manufacturer “Diana”, which exports to Central America and the United States. In the beverage category, “Livsmart” Americas remained the top exporter—holding this position for the past 15 years—shipping beverages manufactured in El Salvador to more than 35 countries.



Photo from the RANKING® 2025 report.

The shift in consumer preferences towards health and nutrition is significantly influencing food and beverage manufacturers. As consumers become more health-conscious, companies are adapting by reformulating their products to meet these new demands. For instance, snack manufacturers are moving away from traditional practices that relied on artificial colors and frying oils. Instead, they are opting

for healthier alternatives, such as:

- **Baked Chips:** Replacing fried snacks with baked options reduces fat content and overall calorie counts.
- **Natural Ingredients:** Incorporating ingredients such as cassava, potatoes, and plantains yields a more wholesome product that appeals to health-focused consumers.
- **Reduced Additives:** Cutting back on artificial colors and condiments helps create products that are perceived as healthier and more natural.

This trend is part of a broader movement within the food industry to prioritize transparency and quality, reflecting consumers' growing demand for nutritious, responsibly sourced products. Manufacturers that successfully adapt to these changes are likely to gain a competitive edge in the marketplace.

According to Euromonitor’s report on “Cooking Ingredients and Meals in El Salvador”, it is expected that there will be a greater demand for foods that offer added functional benefits, such as improved general health, extra protein, mental wellbeing, and energy levels. Young generations of Salvadorans, especially Millennials and Generation Z from urban areas, will also show growing interest in experimenting with innovative or extreme flavors. This behavior will benefit the greater dynamism of products such as chili sauces, which will become increasingly popular. As consumers seek more adventurous flavors, ingredients with ethnic and global flavors are expected to gain traction. This includes ingredients inspired by cuisines from around the world, such as Japanese, Mexican, Indian, and Middle Eastern.

Advantages and Challenges

Table 1.

Advantages	Challenges
Salvadoran consumers perceive U.S. food products as having excellent quality and consistency.	There is strong competition in El Salvador from neighboring countries exporting meats, dairy products, vegetables, fruits, and staple grains such as corn, rice, and beans. This competition presents challenges for local producers and affects market dynamics.
As the tourism sector strengthens, new hotels and restaurants are being built across the country. This growth is advantageous for the food service industry, which will continue to require a steady supply of ingredients and consumer-ready products.	The market in El Salvador is highly price sensitive. Although inflation has decreased, external factors like rising freight costs have led to price increases on final products. As a result, many Salvadorans are seeking less expensive alternatives.
The growing consumers demand for healthier and functional food options presents significant opportunities for U.S. innovative food products.	The Salvadoran economy is marked by low growth, and manufacturers’ reluctance to make significant investments.
The baking sector in El Salvador is experiencing growth, driven by the opening of new coffee shops across the country. Additionally, major supermarkets are enhancing their offerings by establishing their own in-store bakeries	Despite trade facilitation efforts, El Salvador faces high turnover of customs agents, resulting in inconsistent procedures and delays in clearing.
The rapid growth of private labels in supermarkets presents an opportunity for U.S. companies to supply a diverse range of products and/or ingredients.	El Salvador’s limited port capacity (Acajutla and La Union) causes severe congestion, hindering the swift unloading of merchandise.

SECTION II. ROAD MAP FOR MARKET ENTRY

Entry Strategy:

To effectively enter the Salvadoran food-processing sector, U.S. exporters and suppliers should consider the following strategies:

1. **Local Partnerships:** Establishing a partnership with a local entity can provide valuable insights into consumer trends, regulatory requirements for product registration, and established business practices. This collaboration can facilitate smoother market entry and enhance the understanding of local preferences.
2. **Direct Connections with Buyers:** While partnerships are beneficial, maintaining direct communication with buyers and manufacturers is essential. Engaging with the research and development and production teams will enable U.S. exporters to introduce innovative products that meet local market needs.
3. **Participation in Trade Shows:** Attending trade shows, such as the Institute of Food Technologies (IFT) show and the International Dairy Deli and Bakery Show, offers opportunities to connect with Salvadoran buyers. These events attract key industry players and provide a platform for networking, showcasing products, and understanding market dynamics.
4. **Market Research:** Conduct thorough market research to identify trends, consumer preferences, and the competitive landscape in El Salvador. Understanding local tastes and demands will help tailor products effectively.

Import Procedure:

For a detailed outline of import procedures, please refer to the latest [FAIRS Country Report](#) and the [FAIRS Export Certificate Report for El Salvador](#).

Distribution Channels:

Salvadoran food manufacturers purchase their ingredients directly from either local or international suppliers, or in cases of vertical integrated companies they grow some of their ingredients.

U.S. ingredients are preferred given the wide array of options offered, greater quality and wholesomeness when compared to domestic and other international sources.

Successfully entering the Salvadoran market requires strong local representation and well-established personal connections. Local partners offer valuable advantages, including deep market insight, up-to-date knowledge of business practices and import regulations, access to key industry contacts, and expertise in market development strategies. Having online and printed catalogs, sending samples and being able to offer small volumes in the first orders, as well as good credit terms are all competitive factors for U.S. companies to enter the Salvadoran market.

Market Structure:

There are different channels to export food ingredients and products to El Salvador, which are shown in the chart below:

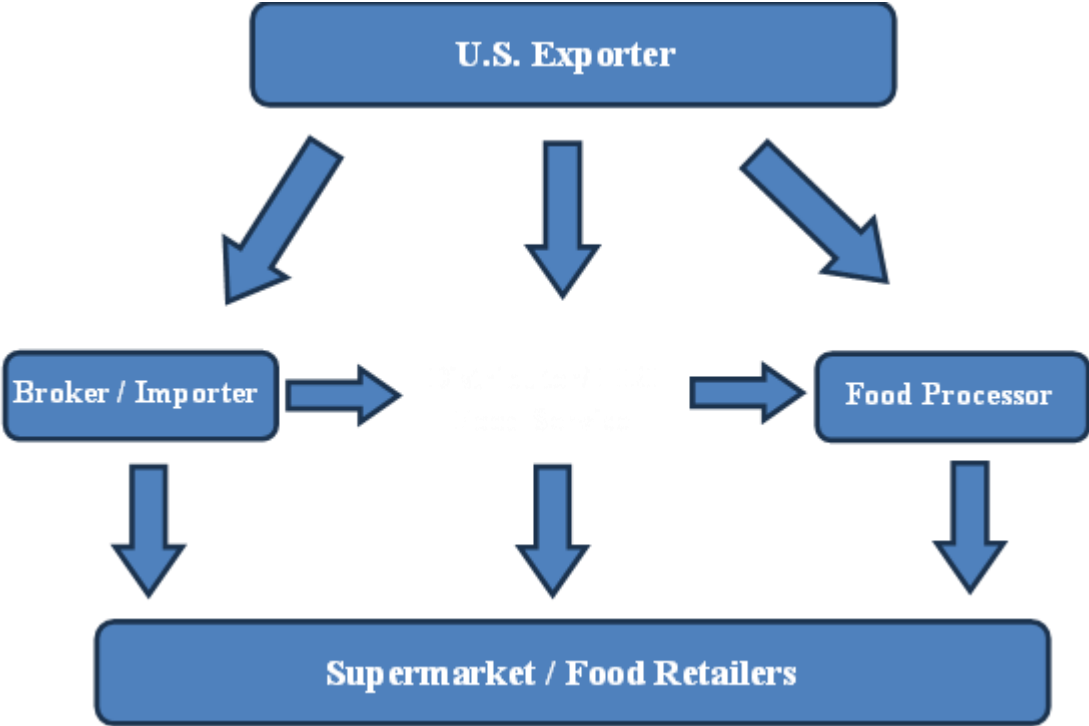
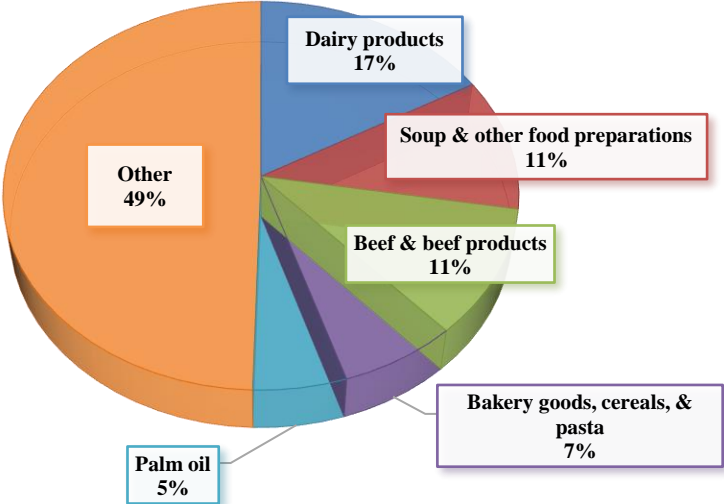


Chart 2. Market structure to export food ingredients/products to El Salvador

Share of Major Segments in the Food Processing Industry:



Source: Trade Data Monitor, LLC

Company Profiles:

As more Salvadoran food/beverage processing companies have grown their export product portfolio, there is a good directory managed by the El Salvador's Exporters Corporation (COEXPORT), who also provides services such as specialized training, personalized assistance and represent the sector at government meetings. The current directory can be found on this link: <https://coexport.com.sv/coexport-trade>

Sector Trends:

- Price remains a key factor when it comes to cooking ingredients among many demographics. Busy lifestyles have helped convenient value products, such as Ramen-style soups, become a good choice for many workers. These soups are a quick and inexpensive lunch for thousands of workers who cannot afford a regular cafeteria meal.
- Ready-to-eat or ready-to-cook meals are in growing demand, and food manufacturers are focusing on creating portfolios of these products, which involve importing ingredients, flavors, or sauces not available in the local market.
- Wellness continues to be an increasing priority for consumers with higher incomes. Such consumers often seek out high-protein products, although gut health is also becoming an important topic. Some higher income consumers are moving away from seed oil consumption and are seeking to avoid processed foods, increasingly looking at ingredient lists. Companies are responding to these trends by launching new products with claims focused on increased protein content and natural ingredients.
- Healthier snacking is trendy, and therefore traditional snack manufacturers have innovated by incorporating tree nuts, seeds and dried fruits into their snacks offer.
- Advertising products online will continue to become increasingly relevant for reaching consumers, as many are using online resources to gather product information, making it crucial for brands to maintain a strong online presence. Social media influence will continue to rise, and brands and retailers are expected to leverage influencer partnerships and retail e-commerce channels to tap into established audiences and gain credibility.

Influencers can authentically promote products, making them more appealing to potential customers.

- As the performance of the tourism sector has shown significant expansion in recent years, increasing from 2.5 million international visitors in 2019 to 4.1 million in 2025 and generating more than \$3.6 billion earnings, Salvadoran food service needs to meet the varied food demands from those foreign and domestic tourists.

Source: Euromonitor and FAS San Salvador

SECTION III. COMPETITION

While El Salvador's food industry is less developed than some of its regional counterparts, it leads the region in the production and export of snacks and carbonated beverages.

Salvadoran food manufacturers' reliance on imported ingredients presents both challenges and opportunities for U.S. exporters. The heavy reliance of Salvadoran manufacturers on imported ingredients highlights a significant market opportunity for exporters. As local producers seek high-quality inputs, they are likely to consider new suppliers that can meet their needs.

Central America, Mexico, and Chile represent strong competition for the U.S. in various ingredient categories. These regions may offer similar products at competitive prices, so U.S. exporters must emphasize their unique advantages. U.S. food ingredients benefit from stringent food safety regulations, which can be a compelling selling point for manufacturers prioritizing quality and safety. The reliability of U.S. products in terms of quality can help build trust among Salvadoran manufacturers, encouraging them to choose U.S. ingredients over competitors. The availability of technical support for product development can enhance collaboration with Salvadoran producers, allowing them to innovate and improve their offerings. This support can include assistance with product formulation, processing techniques, and compliance with local regulations. By leveraging these advantages, U.S. exporters can effectively position themselves in the Salvadoran market and build long-term partnerships with local manufacturers. Salvadoran food and beverage manufacturers use a mix of categories when importing ingredients for their products, going from raw materials (i.e., corn, rice, wheat, etc.), intermediate (palm oil, whey or other dairy intermediate, soybean meal, etc.), to consumer-oriented products (meats, dairy, fruit concentrate, etc.).

Table 2.

El Salvador Imports from the World			
Category	Total Value 2025	Total Value 2024	Change 2025/2024 (%)
Bulk	\$ 605,699,338	\$ 501,071,649	21%
Intermediate	\$ 691,664,447	\$ 632,601,871	9%
Consumer Oriented	\$ 2,421,415,115	\$ 2,209,914,185	10%

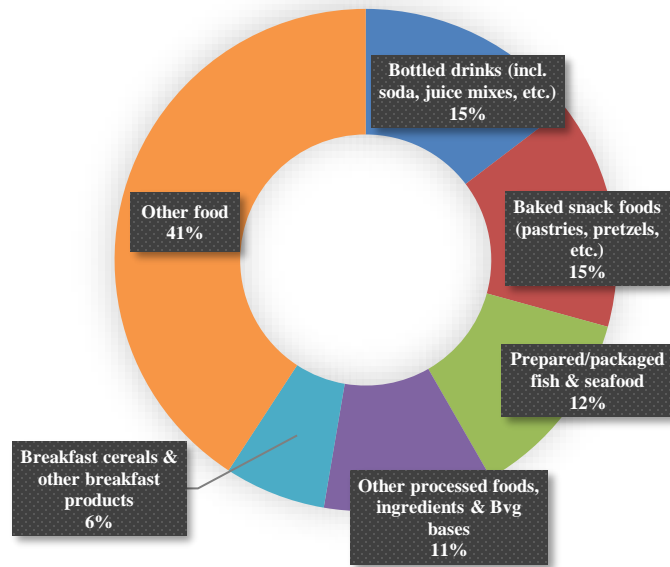
Table 3.

El Salvador Imports from the United States			
Category	Total Value 2025	Total Value 2024	Change 2025/2024 (%)
Bulk	\$ 333,846,430	\$ 291,183,985	15%
Intermediate	\$ 168,935,998	\$ 149,552,070	13%
Consumer Oriented	\$ 489,934,143	\$ 447,069,705	10%

Table 4.

Main Competitors to the U.S. for Top 5 Food Processing Segments 2025					
Product	Country	El Salvador's imports from the main Competitor in 2025 (\$ millions)	El Salvador's imports from the U.S. in 2025 (\$ millions)	Main Competitor's Market Share	U.S. Market Share
Dairy products	Nicaragua	\$188,118,124	\$74,851,938	41%	16%
Soup & other food preparations	Costa Rica	\$72,139,892	\$79,448,354	24%	26%
Beef & beef products	Nicaragua	\$219,381,884	\$11,269,967	75%	4%
Bakery goods, cereals, & pasta	Guatemala	\$76,201,132	\$22,122,453	41%	12%
Palm oil	Honduras	\$73,434,499	\$330,185	50%	0.23%

El Salvador Top 5 Export Food Products 2025



Source: Trade Data Monitor, LLC

SECTION IV. BEST PRODUCT PROSPECTS

Products present in Market with Good Sales Potential:	Specialty creamers for coffee, specialty beef cuts, deli meats with less fat/sodium/nitrites free, organic/vegetable drinks and similar dairy substitutes, protein added beverages, drinks for athletes.
Products Not present in Market with Good Sales Potential	Large and sweeter fresh strawberries targeted to the baking industry, unsalted nuts such as pistachios, pecans and other tree nuts for healthier snacking and a larger offer of plant-based ingredients, flours for the manufacturing of pizza bases or other baked products.
Products not present due to Significant Barriers	None.

Links to Top Food/Beverage Processing Companies:

Company	Product category	Website
Productos Alimenticios Diana, S.A. de C.V.	Snacks	https://www.productosdiana.com/
Nauterra El Salvador (Calvo products)	Tuna and other seafood products	https://nauterra.com/en/
Productos Alimenticios Bocadeli, S.A. de C.V.	Snacks	https://www.bocadeli.com/
Bimbo de El Salvador S.A. de C.V.	Baked products	https://www.grupobimbo.com/es/marcas/centroamerica/el-salvador
Livsmart	Non-Alcoholic beverages	https://cbc.co/
Ron Cihuatan	Alcoholic beverages	https://roncihuatan.com/
Cadejo Brewing Company	Alcoholic beverages	https://cervezacadejo.com/

SECTION V. KEY CONTACTS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

Agency:	Superintendencia de Regulacion Sanitaria (Superintendency of Sanitary Regulations)
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Web:	https://www.srs.gob.sv/
Agency:	Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería (Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock)
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Attachments:

No Attachments