

Required Report: Required - Public Distribution

Date: September 15, 2025

Report Number: ES2025-0009

Report Name: Retail Foods Annual

Country: El Salvador

Post: San Salvador

Report Category: Retail Foods

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Report Highlights:

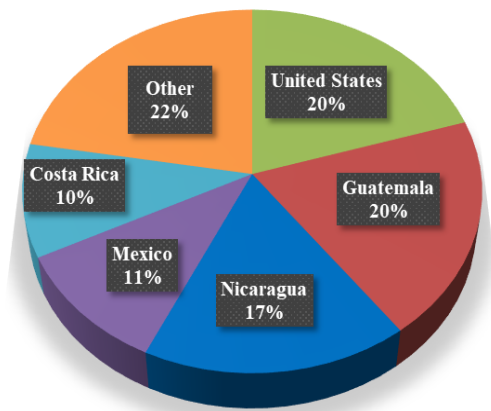
The retail sector in El Salvador, valued at approximately \$4.5 billion has undergone significant transformation in recent years, driven by economic trends, shifting consumer preferences, and the growing impact of technology. U.S. Consumer-Oriented products remain highly visible in Salvadoran retail outlets, with imports reaching \$447 million in 2024, a notable 23 percent increase compared to 2023. This upward trend is expected to continue as major supermarket chains, such as Super Selectos and Walmart, expand their footprint by opening new stores to meet the demands of a growing consumer base that prioritizes convenience and an enhanced shopping experience.

Executive Summary

El Salvador, the smallest country in Central America, has an estimated population of 6.6 million. The United States is its main trading partner. In 2024, El Salvador imported \$4.4 billion in goods from the United States, representing a 28 percent market share. At the same time, it exported \$2.1 billion in goods to the United States, 33 percent of its total exports.

Consumer-Oriented Agricultural

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 118 locations nationwide. Most consumers prefer supermarkets over open-air markets due to the more convenient and comfortable shopping experience they offer.

Food Processing Industry

In 2024, El Salvador imported \$633 million in agricultural intermediate products. Growth in the snack industry and the production of sodas and other carbonated beverages has helped the country maintain its leadership in the region, driving demand for innovative ingredients in the food and beverage manufacturing sector.

Food Service Industry

According to Euromonitor, sales in El Salvador's hotel and catering sector reached \$2.62 billion in 2024. With increased tourism and the opening of new hotels and restaurants, this category is expected to keep expanding.

Quick Facts CY 2024

Imports of Consumer-Oriented Products: (US\$ million): US\$2.2 billion

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

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1) Food preparations | 2) Corn |
| 3) Meat of bovine animals | 4) Soybean oilcake |
| 5) Cheese | 6) Palm oil |
| 7) Cotton | 8) Other non-alcoholic beverages |
| 5) Beef & products | 10) Bread, pastry, cakes, biscuits and similar baked products |
| 9) Sauces and preparations, mixed seasonings | |

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.: \$888 million

GDP/ Population

Population (millions): 6.6 (est. 2024)

GDP (billions USD): \$71.957 (2023 est.)

GDP per capita (USD): \$11,400 (2023 est.)

Source: The CIA Factbook/ Trade Data Monitor, LLC

Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats

Strengths	Weaknesses
Major retailers have expanded the number of stores and floor space during the last few years, with plans to continue this expansion.	The market is highly price-sensitive, and lower quality products are often more competitive due to pricing.
Opportunities	Threats
Major retail operations are expanding into non-traditional areas, such as coastal regions and smaller shopping centers outside major cities. This growth creates new opportunities to market and sell U.S. consumer-oriented food products.	Strong competition from neighboring countries exporting most agricultural products at lower prices.

SECTION I: MARKET SUMMARY

The retail sector in El Salvador, valued at approximately \$4.5 billion, has undergone significant transformation in recent years, driven by economic trends, shifting consumer preferences, and the growing impact of technology. Currently, it is shaped by a mix of modern retail formats, going from chain supermarkets to mom-pop stores. Primary factors include remittance-fueled consumption, digital transformation, and urbanization, while challenges such as economic inequality and inadequate port infrastructure persist.

In 2025, the consumption habits of Salvadoran households are undergoing deep transformations. Inflation has moderated compared to previous years, closing at a projected 3.3 percent according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), but consumers do not perceive it that way. Monthly expenses continue to rise, while incomes are not growing at the same pace. However, the Salvadoran consumer has not stopped buying but now does so more strategically. They seek promotions, convenient formats, reliable brands, and quality. Additionally, they value their time more, prefer accessible channels, and quickly adapt to market realities.

Major supermarket chains, Super Selectos and Walmart, are expanding their presence through new stores and different store formats, catering to a growing consumer base that values convenience and a comfortable shopping experience. With increasing smartphone penetration and a younger, tech-savvy demographic averaging 29 years old, there's a significant rise in the popularity of online grocery delivery services, driven by demand for convenience and speed. Imported foods/beverages products play a vital role in the Salvadoran retail sector, as total global imports of Consumer-Oriented products totaled \$2.2 billion in 2024, out of which \$447 million came from the United States.

Advantages and Challenges for U.S. Food Products Suppliers

Advantages	Challenges
Major retailers expanded stores and floor space in the last few years with plans to continue.	The market is highly price-sensitive, and lower quality products are often more competitive.
Major retail operations are expanding into non-traditional areas, such as coastal regions and smaller shopping centers outside major cities. This growth creates opportunities to market and sell U.S. consumer-oriented food products.	Market leaders are investing in construction of modern shopping centers in which supermarkets are the anchor points. This usually requires higher investment in marketing for in-store promotions to promote U.S. brands.
Information and technology have become strong tools for food marketing/selling. Retail options have increased with the accelerated growth of e-commerce.	Importers often purchase in small quantities to test the market, but U.S. companies are generally reluctant to export in such limited volumes.
As El Salvador becomes a more service-based economy, increasing numbers of office workers become potential consumers for high quality U.S. food products.	Overall, the Salvadoran economy remains very susceptible to the world economy, especially the United States, where negative events can disrupt remittances flow, tourism and investment.

Retail Sales by Channel

El Salvador
Retail Market by Channel 2024 (USD Million and %)

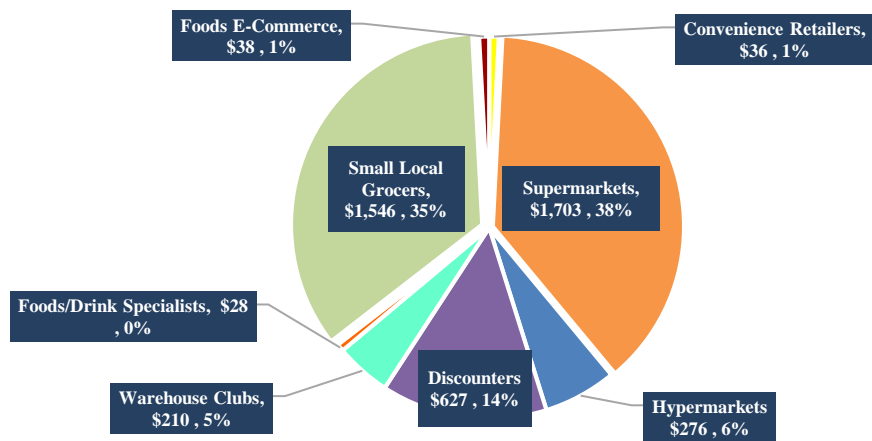
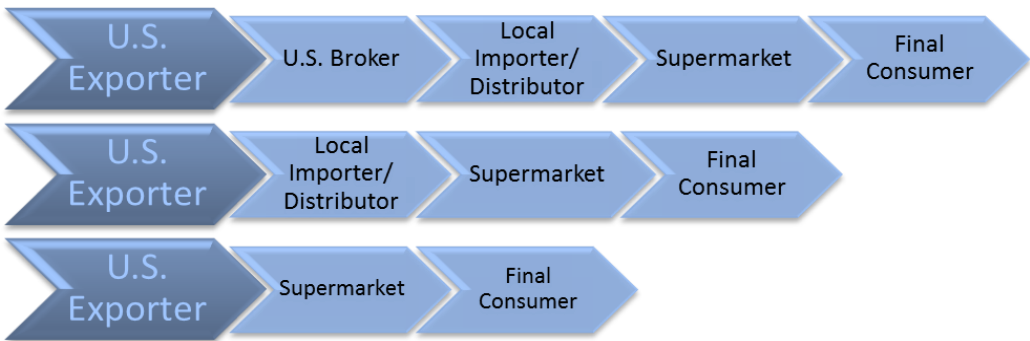


Chart 1: Retail Market by Channel 2024
Source: Euromonitor LLC

SECTION II. ROAD MAP FOR MARKET ENTRY

Entry Strategy

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.



U.S. exporters are encouraged to engage with Salvadoran buyers participating in U.S. trade shows or cooperator-led trade missions. These individuals are often seasoned professionals with strong potential to expand their portfolios of U.S. products. Our FAS office in San Salvador keeps a contacts list of importers, distributors, manufacturers and associations that look to buy U.S. food/beverages products. Having online and printed catalogs, sending samples and being able to offer small volumes in the first orders are all competitive factors for U.S. companies to enter the Salvadoran market.

Being able to provide credit to Salvadoran companies has become a need as per comments FAS staff has received from importers. This is related to the current logistics issues at ports in Guatemala and El Salvador, which include severe port and border congestion in Santo Tomas de Castilla port, while Acajutla port in El Salvador faces delays due to repairs, a crane outage, and limited trucker availability.

Market Structure

The retail landscape in El Salvador is dominated by major supermarket chains Super Selectos and Walmart with its different store formats. During the pandemic they revamped their online stores to offer a more shopper-friendly experience. An interesting fact to mention is that these online food shopping services have become channels for remittance payments. Rather than sending money home from overseas, some Salvadorans are purchasing food for their relatives through the supermarket online stores. This new channel also offers an opportunity for retailers to launch new products, special promotions and/or reward clients for brand loyalty.

Additionally, there are online supermarket companies, such as [KIP](#) and [Superea](#), which emerged during the pandemic and have become good alternatives for Salvadorans, as they offer some added value services when compared to traditional supermarkets, such as 30-minute delivery guarantee or selling added value foods, such as pre-cut vegetables, portioned fruit mixes for smoothies, specialty marinated meats, ready-to-cook meals, etc.

Neighborhood stores (often referred to as “mom-and-pop” shops) or small local grocers as per chart 1, are the second largest market share in the retail sector. These types of stores are vital to El Salvador’s economy and daily life, with approximately one-quarter of the population depending on them for essential goods. According to the Ministry of Economy, there are an estimated 70,000 such stores across the country, collectively generating around \$4.7 million in daily sales (source: [Diario El Mundo](#), Spanish only). These stores primarily serve lower-income consumers, who tend to favor small or individually packaged items. In addition to being key retail outlets for major distributors, neighborhood stores act as community hubs, fostering social interactions and providing access to basic food staples. The most sought-after products include soft drinks, snacks, juices, beer, pastries, instant coffee, cookies, and bottled water.

The “dollar store” model is gaining popularity among Salvadoran consumers. For example, Dollarcity, a Salvadoran origin retail brand that opened their first store in 2009, has become a very popular brand among Salvadoran consumers due to its wide portfolio of groceries, household, office, pet, personal care, and seasonal products, at reasonable prices ranging from \$1 to a maximum of \$4. According to their latest corporate report, published on April 3, 2025, as of December 31, 2024, Dollarcity had 632 stores across the four markets where it operates, 77 of which are located in El Salvador (Source: [Diario El Mundo](#), Spanish only).

E-commerce is growing rapidly in El Salvador. Data from the global statistics site Statista indicates that this new way of purchasing goods and services could reach \$1.25 billion in El Salvador by the end of 2025, with annual growth rates of between 8 percent and 10 percent

through 2029 (Source: [El Diario de Hoy](#), Spanish only). Traditional supermarket chains and new players have taken advantage of this consumer behavior evolution that boomed with the Covid-19 pandemic.

Convenience stores at gas stations are now offering more than light refreshments and ready-to-eat products. In some cases, food offerings include homemade style meals and specialty coffee drinks available throughout the day, making these stores a good opportunity for higher quality food products and/or ingredients from the United States.

Open-air, or wet markets have traditionally been the most popular places to find fresh and less expensive grocery items like fruits, vegetables, red meat, poultry, eggs, pork, and fish. In this category Salvadoran consumers have a new option which are the Agromercados or agricultural markets, which are sale points established by the government through the Ministry of Agriculture, where local producers can sell fresh products and staple foods (fruits, vegetables, beans, rice, etc.) directly to consumers, eliminating intermediaries and thus offering lower prices. There are 55 agricultural markets nationwide.

Transportation costs are key for importers, therefore the preferred method of shipping is from Miami to Guatemalan ports mainly, although given the current port issues, the alternate routes may be through Panama or Honduras.

Company Profiles and Top Host Country Retailers



Super Selectos is a Salvadoran-owned retailer, currently with 118 stores nationwide. According to their latest store opening, Grupo Calleja (owner of Super Selectos) informed that for 2025 they are projecting to invest \$50 million approximately, which includes the renovation of some stores and the building of five stores to reach a total of 122 by the end of 2025. Super Selectos' new store layouts have been redesigned to lure consumers in and provide a more comfortable shopping experience by featuring innovative services, such as the Cocina Express, which is an area offering more than 70 options of hot or cold foods, ready to take away or enjoy on-site. They also include a coffee shop, bakery, and the use of energy-efficient technologies that allows 30 percent energy saving. The Super Selectos online store was revamped during the pandemic, and it's been gaining acceptance among Salvadoran shoppers, especially those living in large cities such as the San Salvador metropolitan area, who prefer to request delivery service to save time and avoid traffic.

<https://www.superselectos.com>



Walmart Mexico y Centroamerica is the largest retailer in the Central American region with over 900 stores. In El Salvador, as of July 3, 2025, it accounts with 102 stores under different formats: Walmart Super Centers (6), Despensa de Don Juan (17), Maxi Despensa (16) and Despensa Familiar (63). On August 28, 2025, they held a [groundbreaking ceremony](#) at the future site of their Walmart Super Center, which will be their number 103 store and will be located in Santa Tecla, an important city of the San Salvador Metropolitan area. At the ceremony, it was announced that Walmart will invest a total of \$264 million in the next five years in El Salvador. Such investment will focus in

the opening of new stores, the remodeling of current ones, sustainability projects and the improvement of their processing plants and distribution centers. Walmart's main competitive advantage is their large offering of non-food products such as apparel, electronics and housewares at affordable prices, functioning as a "one-stop shop" for busy people.

<https://www.walmart.com.sv>



PriceSmart El Salvador, S. A. de C. V.: with headquarters in San Diego, California, Pricesmart has 4 stores in El Salvador, covering the entire country as they have two stores located in the San Salvador Metropolitan area, one in San Miguel (Eastern region) and one in Santa Ana (Western region). Like membership warehouse clubs in the United States, it carries a mixture of groceries (especially large sized items), apparel, electronics, household goods, and automotive parts. It is one of the preferred food retailers for large families and the HRI sector (hotels, restaurants and institutions). <https://www.pricesmart.com/es-sv>

Import Procedures

The Government of El Salvador (GOES) now requires all importers to be registered with the Superintendency for Sanitary Regulations (SRS), a newly established authority that replaced the Ministry of Health (MINSAL) in overseeing food and beverage registration as of August 2024. Importers must register each product and provide product size information to ensure it is suitable for human consumption. Once approved, product registrations are valid for five years. All registration requests must be submitted through SRS's online system, [SISAM](#) (in Spanish and accessed with credentials only), which is the only authorized platform for food and beverage import permit applications. This digital process has significantly reduced processing time, with permits typically issued in under three minutes.

Most products are subject to laboratory testing by SRS, both during initial registration and routine inspections. However, in April 2025, SRS revised its regulations for low-risk products (categories B and C). These products now require only a sanitary export certificate from the official regulatory body in the country of origin, eliminating the need for quality control lab analysis for registration or subsequent modifications.

To further streamline the process, in May 2025, SRS authorized the use of accredited third-party laboratories for quality control testing of high-risk (category A) products, previously restricted to MINSAL's laboratory. On May 5, 2025, El Salvador published the ["Law on the Protection of Plant Health, Animal Health, and the Safety of Unprocessed Foods of Plant or Animal Origin"](#) in the Official Gazette (in Spanish). This law clarifies that the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock is responsible for overseeing the safety of unprocessed plant and animal products, while SRS is tasked with regulating and monitoring all processed and semi-processed foods and beverages for human consumption.

For more detailed information, please see our [Food and Agricultural Imports Regulations and Standards \(FAIRS\) GAIN](#) report and our [FAIRS Export Certificate Report](#) for complete guidance on import requirements.

Distribution Channels

Salvadoran supermarkets have a wide range of distribution suppliers, from farmer produce centers to large warehousing operations. There are large importers that have also grown their distribution operation and therefore are able to provide an efficient delivery service to the retail sector.

There are specialized logistic companies, such as [RANSA](#), that offer just-in-time delivery services, thus increasing efficiency in inventory management for retailers. As mentioned previously, a younger, tech-savvy consumer has contributed to the growth of online grocery delivery services, some examples are Pedidos Ya, Uber Eats and the already described online supermarkets platforms, as well as the 100 percent online supermarkets KIP and Superea.

Share of Major Segments in the Retail Industry

As chart 1 shows, supermarkets have the largest market share in El Salvador's retail sector (38 percent). Supermarkets are the preferred shopping place for the growing middle class, due to the comfortable shopping environment and the offer of a large portfolio of grocery-imported foods, fresh produce (although almost all is imported and there is a limited offer), and special promotions. Walmart's store formats such as Maxi Despensa and Despensa Familiar target lower-income families offering a limited amount of brands for groceries and other items, private label mainly, making these outlets a good showcasing opportunity for new to market mass consumption products.

Open-air markets or "mercados" are the main choice for food purchases for lower-income families, whom are looking to purchase a larger variety of fruits and vegetables, locally produced and imported, dairy products, and other staple foods at lower prices. Currently, La Tiendona in San Salvador is a key hub for fresh produce and the place where owners of "mom-pop stores" or small independent supermarkets go to purchase larger volumes of fruits and vegetables, which they can sell at their communities by the unit. Locally produced seasonal fruits and vegetables are sought after at the open-air markets, due to their freshness and lower price. However, there are imported fruits and vegetables available at a lower price than the supermarkets, such as apples, pears, grapes, carrots, onions, cauliflower, zucchini and broccoli.

Sector Trends

- **Becoming a one-stop shop to satisfy the busy lifestyle of consumers:** many supermarket stores are now trying to have within their facility other services available for consumers, such as cafeterias, bill payments (electricity, water, cellphone service, etc.), remittance payment, pharmacy, cellphone store, specialized pet shops and ATM's. The availability of any of those services makes the difference for a consumer to choose a specific supermarket store, which also includes avoiding a heavy traffic route and running most errands at the same place.
- **Sustainable focus:** As mentioned earlier, almost all new supermarket stores being built have an environmentally friendly design, targeting electricity saving. However, more retailers are changing to reduce their environmental footprint by changing to provide biodegradable bags to their customers (i.e. Super Selectos), or selling those bags at a lower cost, such as Dollarcity that in early May 2025 announced they would start selling their bags at \$0.05.

Most large retailers sell and promote reusable bags and have electronics recycling campaigns to identify better with their customers.

- **Procure healthier foods/beverages:** retailers are now looking for more options to meet the demands of their health-conscious and/or having any allergy or intolerance to certain ingredient customers. Some retailers are buying more products made with higher natural ingredients content, organic, fat free/low fat, gluten free, high antioxidant/vitamin content, unsweetened or reduced calories (including beverages). Following the healthy eating trend, many people are joining running/cycling clubs and are looking for foods and beverages that help them prepare better for competitions.

SECTION III. COMPETITION

El Salvador is a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and signatory to [10 free trade agreements](#) (in Spanish).

El Salvador is a global net importer, and in 2024 United States continued to be its main trading partner with 28 percent market share of global imports, or \$4.4 billion; while El Salvador exported \$2.1 billion in goods to the United States, 33 percent of its total exports.

The Central American countries, Mexico, and Chile are the main trade competitors for U.S. consumer-oriented products, often offering lower prices given the proximity in the case of neighboring countries or lower production costs in the case of Mexico and Chile. Although the Salvadoran food industry is less developed than other Central American countries, it is currently the regional leader in the production and export of snacks, juices and carbonated beverages. Salvadoran food manufacturers heavily rely on the import of ingredients.

Product	Country	El Salvador Imports from Competitor in 2024 (\$ millions)	El Salvador Imports from the U.S. in 2024 (\$ millions)
Beef & beef products	Nicaragua	182	10
Dairy products	Nicaragua	175	59
Bakery goods, cereals, & pasta	Guatemala	74	22
Fresh vegetables	Guatemala	71	2
Non-alcoholic bev. (ex. juices, coffee, tea)	Guatemala	48	25
Fresh fruit	Mexico	25	18
Dog and cat food	Guatemala	18	7
Chewing gum and candy	Mexico	12	3
Distilled spirits	Guatemala	11	2
Processed fruits	Costa Rica	8	3

Source: Trade Data Monitor, LLC

SECTION IV. BEST PRODUCT PROSPECTS CATEGORIES

Salvadoran consumers are generally open to new food brands, particularly specialty, health-oriented and functional products (i.e. sports beverages for runners). However, product education, especially around health benefits, and cooking demonstrations with tastings remain key to successful market entry. The influence of American culture is notable, given the large Salvadoran diaspora in the United States.

Top Consumer-Oriented Products Imported from the World	Soup & other food preparations, Food preparations, Beef & beef products, Bakery goods, cereals, & pasta, Meat of bovine animals, boneless, fresh or chilled, Fresh fruit, Condiments & sauces, Cheese, processed, not grated or powdered, Processed vegetables, Sauces and preparations therefor, nesoi; mixed condiments and mixed seasonings
Top Consumer-Oriented Products Imported from the United States	Soup & other food preparations, Pork & pork products, Dairy products, Poultry meat & prods. (sausages, ham, etc), Condiments & sauces, Processed vegetables, Non-alcoholic beverages, bakery goods, cereals, & pasta, Fresh fruit, Chocolate & cocoa products
Products present in Market with Good Sales Potential	Energy boosters: shakes, juices, energy bars, natural juices, both regular and reduced sugar content (targeting children), Dairy substitutes: vegetable “milks” (almond, soy and coconut, in both unflavored and flavored varieties), Lactose-free/gluten-free/sugar-free beverages, Specialty-U.S. origin seafood: lobster, salmon, king crab, etc.
Products not present in Market due to Significant Barriers	None

SECTION V. KEY CONTACTS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

Agency:	Superintendencia de Regulacion Sanitaria (Superintendency of Sanitary Regulations)
Contact:	Ing. Josué Daniel López Torres
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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