

**Voluntary Report** – Voluntary - Public Distribution

**Date:** April 22, 2026

**Report Number:** CH2026-0052

## **Report Name:** Harbin City Report

**Country:** China - People's Republic of

**Post:** Shenyang ATO

**Report Category:** Agricultural Situation, Beverages, Dairy and Products, Exporter Guide, Food Processing Ingredients, Food Service - Hotel Restaurant Institutional, Retail Foods, Competitor, Export Promotion Programs, Honey, Market Development Reports, Market Promotion/Competition, Product Brief, Promotion Opportunities, Sales Mission Evaluation, Snack Foods, Trade Show Announcement, Trade Show Closing, Trade Show Evaluation, Wine

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### **Report Highlights:**

Harbin, the capital of northeastern China's Heilongjiang province, is well known as China's "ice city;" home to the world-renowned ice and snow sculpture park. It serves as a political, economic, and cultural hub with a unique blend of Chinese and Russian influences, featuring historic architecture, diverse cuisine, and a population of nearly 10 million. The city's tourism boom in recent years has significantly boosted the demand for imported food. Strong potential for American agricultural products includes beef, seafood, dairy, wine, craft beer, frozen potato products, condiments, as well as ingredients for craft beer brewing, especially those destined for food processing as Harbin is home to China's largest red meat processor, largest baby formula manufacturer, and oldest brewery.

## City Overview

Harbin, the capital of Heilongjiang Province, is the northernmost as well as the easternmost among all China’s capital cities. It was once the most populace city in northeast China, which includes provinces of Heilongjiang, Jilin, Liaoning, and the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region. Harbin is extremely famous for its winter tourism and recreations as it’s heralded as China’s Ice City.



Heilongjiang in China Map

As China’s most important gateway in Sina-Russian trade, Harbin is a thriving economic hub in northeast China, offering opportunities for U.S. agricultural exports. With rapidly growing middle class, the city demonstrates strong demand for high-quality imported food products, particularly in sectors like retail, food processing, and the hotel and restaurant industry. Harbin’s vibrant culinary scene, especially its renowned Russian style western food, is increasingly incorporating premium U.S. ingredients such as beef, seafood, and frozen potato

products.

Harbin used to be a small town and rapidly developed into an international city since the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER) started by Russians in late 19<sup>th</sup> century. A sharp influx of foreigners, mostly Russians, after the completion of the CER in 1902, profoundly influenced the city’s development on many fronts. The Russian influence on the architecture earned Harbin nicknames of “Moscow in the east”, and the "Little Paris of the Far East." Harbin’s cuisine, similarly, also features strong Russian influence, such as Russian style western food, and specialty food, like smoked red sausage, *da lie ba* (large sourdough bread), and *kvass* (beverage using bread as fermentation material).

<b>Table 1: Harbin City at a Glance 2025 (USD calculated at 10/01/25 rate<sup>1</sup>)</b>	
City	Harbin
Population	9.86 million
Land Area	53,068 km <sup>2</sup>
Gross Domestic Product	\$88.4 billion
GDP per capita (2024)	\$8,752
Per capita disposable income (Urban, 2024)	\$6,888
Growth in per capita disposable income (Urban, 2024)	4.4%
Total Retail Sales of Consumer Goods	\$80.3 billion
Tourism Revenue	\$40.3 billion
Foreign Direct Investment	N/A
Total Imports	\$3.2 billion
Total Exports	\$3.7 billion
<b>Source: Heilongjiang Statistics Yearbook 2025</b>	

Pillar industries in Harbin include equipment manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, petrochemicals, aerospace/electronics, agricultural products/food processing, and tourism.

<sup>1</sup> The exchange rate used in this report is 1 USD = 7.12 RMB.

## ***Tourism Boom***

Harbin is one of China's top tourist destinations for both domestic and foreign travelers. Attractions such as Harbin Ice-Snow World, the Sun Island International Snow Sculpture Art Expo, Central Avenue, St. Sophia Cathedral, and the Siberian Tiger Park, are among the most popular tourist destinations. Notably, Harbin Ice-Snow World has been popular in recent years. It welcomed over 3 million visitors during its 65 days of operations in early 2026, hitting a new record.

As China's Ice City, Harbin has also hosted numerous major international winter games in the past two decades, such as the Asian Winter Games in 2025 and 1996, and the Winter Universiade in 2009.

Harbin is also an ideal place for summer travel, offering a welcome escape from hot, humid summers in other cities across China. Additionally, Harbin Beer Festival, usually held in late July, one of China's three major beer festivals (the other two in Dalian and Qingdao), offers another key attraction to tourists.

Thanks to the tourism boom, Harbin's airport has evolved into the second largest in northeast China in terms of passenger volume, only next to Shenyang. Harbin's airport handled 24.7 million passengers in 2025, a year-on-year increase of 3.6 percent over 2024. Its subway officially opened in 2013, the first one in a high-cold region of China, linking the city's two major railway stations, downtown areas, and key tourism spots.

The international and local hotels and restaurants provide various styles of food for tourists, as well as athletes and visitors. While the traditional northeastern dishes are popular, such as *guobaorou* (crispy sweet and sour pork), *disanxian* (stir-fried potatoes, eggplant, and peppers), and *demoli* stewed fish, the demand for imported food has also been gaining popularity as the tourism booms.

## **Market for Imported Food**

The imported food market includes meat, seafood, dairy, sweets, wine, and liquor. The Harbin snacks food market includes sweetened pastries and chocolate products and is dominated by proximate Russia. These Russian goods can be found throughout the area, including near tourist areas.

Like many cities in China, sales of other imported products are dominated by e-commerce channels, including Tmall, JD.com, and Douyin live-streaming. Offline, some imported items, like meat, dairy, fruits, wine, and liquor are available at high-end supermarkets, specialty stores, and convenience chains. Five-star hotels feature more imported cooking ingredients, such as beef, lamb, seafood, cheese, butter, beverages, as well as condiments.

## ***Hotels***

Harbin's hotel industry is very well developed, alongside the rapid growth of the city. There are approximately 15 five-star hotels in Harbin, including international brands Ritz Carlton, Aoluguya X, Shangri-La, Hilton, Crowne Plaza, Indigo, JW Marriot, Sofitel, Sheraton, Kempinski, and several local

brands, like Wanda Visita, Huaqi, and Sun Island Garden. This is in addition to nearly 50 four-star hotels in Harbin.

Key imported and high-end items often found at these five-star hotels include premium steaks, imported seafood (lobster, scallops), and varied international wine lists, catering to international guests and high-end tourists.

### ***Restaurants***

Harbin has the most Russian style “western” food restaurants in China due to its proximity and the influence from the history mentioned above.

FAS China’s recent conversation with local restauranteurs and industry contacts indicated that the number of western food restaurants increased significantly in Harbin in the past three decades, from only a handful in 1990’s to over 300.

Imported food ingredients are widely utilized in western food restaurants in Harbin, including beef, lamb, seafood, cheese, and butter, to ensure authentic flavors and high-quality standards.

Portman, Lucia, Huamei, Modern, and Firestone are at the top of the most popular western restaurant list in Harbin.

### ***Retail***

Harbin’s retail sector is highly fragmented, with no single channel dominating the market. International retail chains, such as Walmart, Carrefour, and Metro used to operate in Harbin, as well as Heilongjiang province. However, as e-commerce quickly grabbed market share, all but Metro have left the city.

Meanwhile, a number of local branded supermarkets emerged, including the Haobaike Supermarkets in Yuanda shopping malls, BHG, Harxin, and Beauty, offering a variety of imported products (see Table 2). In response to competition from online platforms, these retailers have also launched online delivery services, targeting younger consumers as the primary audience. Safe, healthy, convenient, and cost-effective products are becoming increasingly popular among consumers.

**Table 2: Harbin Retailers of Imported Ag Products (As of December 2025)**

<b>Retailer</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>#Outlets</b>
Metro	German	1
BHG	Chinese	1
Haobaike (under Yuanda Shopping Mall)	Chinese	2
Harxin (under Central Red Group)	Chinese	12
Beauty	Chinese	25
Central Red Convenience Store Chain	Chinese	350

Harbin's convenience store market is dominated by Central Red, a local convenience chain established in 2001, operating about 350 stores in Harbin. Almost every neighborhood and street in Harbin features the presence of Central Red stores, as well as in high-traffic areas such as office buildings, commercial districts, railway and metro stations.

While China's HRI industry has faced a general consumption downgrade, Harbin has remained more resilient, thanks to its strong appeal to both domestic and international tourists.

### **Distribution Channels and Logistics**

As an inland city without a seaport, Harbin relies on road and rail transport to receive imported goods. U.S. agricultural products are usually shipped to Dalian, an ice-free port located in the southernmost of northeast China, as well as major ports outside northeast China, such as Tianjian and Shanghai. The goods are then transported inland to Harbin by truck or domestic rail, depending on the product category and cold chain requirements.

### **Food Processing**

Food processing is a major industrial sector in Harbin, leveraging its location in one of China's primary agricultural regions to produce substantial amount of grain, soy, and dairy. The city is a hub for processing agricultural goods, meat products, frozen foods, and beverages, with a distinct blend of local Northeastern Chinese and Russian influences. The well-known processed food includes lamb/beef rolls, meat kebabs, smoked red sausages, big rye bread, Madiier popsicles, and Kvass. Harbin is home to China's largest red meat processor, largest baby formula producer, and the earliest beer brewery.

*Grand Farm Group (GFG)*  **大庄园**

Established in 1982 and headquartered in Harbin, GFG is China's largest red meat processor. It has four processing plants in China, with the largest one in Harbin covering 200,000 square meters. GFG specializes in slaughtering cattle, sheep, and goats, and processing beef and lamb. It has its own farms but also imports beef from South America and lamb from New Zealand. With ATO Shenyang's involvement, GFG started importing U.S. beef several years ago but stopped due to the high tariffs since March 2025. However, GFG is still a large potential buyer for U.S. beef.

*Feihe Dairy* 

Set up in 1962 and headquartered in Harbin, Feihe (meaning flying cranes in Chinese) Dairy is China's largest infant formula producer. It has 13 dairy farms of its own with over 100,000 dairy cows. Feihe Dairy used to be key buyer for U.S. dairy genetics.



*Harbin Beer*

Founded in Harbin by Russians in 1900, Harbin Beer is China’s earliest beer brand with a history of over 125 years. It was acquired by Anheuser-Busch (AB) in 2004, the then U.S. largest brewing company (AB merged with Interbrew and AmBev in 2008). Harbin beer is currently a top-four brewery in China and accounts for over 60 percent of the market share in Harbin. It is a key user of U.S. hops and a potential user for U.S. rice.

**Table 3: SWOT Analysis: U.S. Agricultural Products Exports to Harbin**

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Longtime tradition of acceptance of international (i.e. Russian-style) western food consumption is a good fit for imported ingredients, especially at high-end restaurants and hotels</li> <li>✓ Affluent consumers associate U.S. products with safety, nutrition, and international quality</li> <li>✓ Existing ATO and cooperator promotions build brand awareness and trade relationships</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Price sensitivity in Harbin’s mid- and low-tier restaurants limits usage of higher-cost U.S. products</li> <li>✓ Higher transportation cost weakens the local imported food distributors’ competitiveness relative to direct importers in first-tier cities.</li> <li>✓ Consumption</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Strong tourism provides more business opportunities to feature U.S. ingredients in local specialties</li> <li>✓ Tradition of western food consumption create demand for imported cooking materials, including from the United States.</li> <li>✓ Sister state relationship between Wisconsin and Heilongjiang is well supported by the local government, increasing awareness of Wisconsin products (e.g., dairy, ginseng, and cranberries)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Intense price competition from other countries and domestic suppliers</li> <li>✓ U.S. products often confined to niche, premium channels—vulnerable to economic slowdown</li> <li>✓ Unstable relationship between the United States and China reduces importers/distributors willingness to carry U.S. products</li> </ul>

## **Emerging Sector for U.S. Food Products**

Harbin's economy is heavily dependent on tourism. Generally speaking, tourists are willing to pay a premium for better quality products. Imported food, reputable for higher quality, reliability, and food safety, has seen increase in demand in Harbin in recent years. U.S. food products are usually considered high quality with high food safety and are gaining increasingly popularity - including beef, seafood, dairy, wine, craft beer, frozen potato products, and condiments.

U.S. brewing ingredients - particularly hops - have great potential for Harbin's craft beer brewing for their superior quality, diverse varieties, and reliable supply. U.S. hops have become indispensable to many breweries in Harbin. Meanwhile, juice concentrate is also becoming increasingly popular in craft beer brewing, targeting young woman consumers. For more details, see the USDA report [US Brewing Ingredients - Opportunities in Chinas Booming Craft Beer Sector | CH2025-0099](#)

## **Key Agriculture-related Trade Shows and Events in Harbin**

- ***Northeast China Livestock Expo***  
Usually held in late April every year, featuring a wide range of agricultural products produced in Heilongjiang, as well as the great northeast region. Dairy is a major part of the show since Inner Mongolia and Heilongjiang are China's top dairy producers.
- ***Heilongjiang International Green Food Industry Expo***  
Usually held in November every year, focusing on organic, eco-friendly agricultural products from Heilongjiang, including soy-for- food products and high-quality rice. Heilongjiang Soybean Association participates in this show every year.
- ***Harbin Seed Industry Expo***  
Usually held in early November every year, showcasing seeds for various varieties of agricultural products, as well as fertilizer, herbicide, and latest technology for bio seed breeding and gene editing.
- ***Harbin Beer Festival***  
One of China's three top beer festivals, an annual event usually held in July, featuring dozens of beer brands, live performance and various kinds of food, especially barbecue, that pairs well with beer.
- ***Harbin Western Food Culture Festival***  
Usually held on the city's Central Street in later July or early August, celebrating the Harbin's unique history by showcasing Russian and European-style cuisine alongside Chinese specialties. Events typically include food competitions, parades, and exhibitions featuring local red sausages, bread, and pastries.

**Please refer to the following GAIN report for further information on exporting products to China.**

**[Exporter Guide Annual | CH2025-0133](#)**

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**Attachments:**

No Attachments.