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Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Global Agricultural Information Network

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# **Report Name:** New Market and New Opportunities for US Food Exports in Laos

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**Report Highlights:**

Laos is a small but fast-growing market for U.S. food and agricultural products. U.S. agricultural exports reached a record $6.2 million in 2025. Rising tourism and a stabilizing economy are increasing demand for premium imports into population hubs like Vientiane and Luang Prabang. According to local contacts, frozen U.S. beef and cheese have the strongest prospects in upscale hotels and restaurants, while cafés and bakeries create year-round opportunities for U.S. products and bakery ingredients. In retail, U.S. distilled spirits, snacks, tree nuts, and infant formula benefit from consumer trust in U.S. food safety. Laos is a promising market for U.S. exporters already shipping to Thailand or elsewhere in Southeast Asia and those looking to grow in the region.

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**Executive Summary**

U.S. agricultural and related product direct exports to the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos), including U.S. food assistance, reached a record $6.2 million in 2025. These figures count only part of U.S. sales. Many high-value U.S. food products reach Lao hotel kitchens and supermarket shelves through Thailand and from other southeast Asian nations which means that exports are not recorded in the data. The economy is stabilizing, tourist arrivals reached nearly 4.6 million in 2025, and some U.S. products may enter at zero-percent Most Favored Nation (MFN) customs duty. U.S. exporters who target the right buyers have real openings.

Laos is a small but growing market for U.S. consumer-oriented agricultural products. As the economy stabilized in 2025–2026 and tourism recovered, demand rose for high-value imported food and beverages in modern retail and in the hotel, restaurant, and institutional (HRI) sector. Most of this demand is in Vientiane, the capital, and Luang Prabang, the country's main cultural tourism destination. Secondary markets are developing along major transport corridors, including Vang Vieng and Pakse (see map in figure 1, below).

Laos is recovering from several years of economic instability. A sharp drop in the value of the Lao kip (LAK) currency pushed inflation above 40 percent in 2023. This cut consumer purchasing power and raised the landed cost of imported goods. The government responded with strict fiscal measures, and the Bank of the Lao PDR kept policy interest rates high. These steps stabilized the kip in 2025–2026, brought headline inflation down to 7–10 percent, and rebuilt foreign exchange reserves to $2.8 billion. Even so, imported products remain expensive for most consumers.

International tourist arrivals continued to rise in 2026. Most of the growth comes from overland travelers from Thailand, China, and Vietnam. Arrivals of higher-spending tourists from North America and Western Europe remain weaker. As a result, demand for premium Western-style products is now concentrated mainly in upscale hotels and restaurants that serve international guests.

Several structural factors limit direct trade between the United States and Laos:

- Laos has no local cash-and-carry wholesale clubs.
- The commercial cold chain is underdeveloped, which makes it hard to supply chilled products such as beef, cheese, and other perishable products.
- Import registration requirements are complex, which adds time and cost for new market entrants.

Thailand serves as the main commercial and logistics gateway to Laos. It handles an estimated 60–70 percent of packaged consumer food imports. Post recommends that new or smaller U.S. exporters consider partnering with established Thailand-based distributors who already serve Laos. Exporters with larger volumes can ship by sea through Thai ports under bonded, duty-suspended transit, and air freight can work for small volumes of high-value products.

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## A. Country Snapshot 2026

Laos is a small, landlocked market that is recovering from the 2022–2024 currency crisis. The kip has stabilized, inflation has eased, and tourist arrivals continue to rise. Most consumers still make purchase decisions on price. However, demand for premium imported food comes mainly from upscale hotels, restaurants, and supermarkets in Vientiane and Luang Prabang. Table 1 summarizes key indicators as of October 2026. Table 2 lists the main advantages and challenges for U.S. exports.

**Table 1. Laos: Snapshot, October 2026**

| Indicator | Value |
|---|---|
| Population | About 7.8 million |
| Nominal GDP (2026 est.) | About $19 billion |
| GDP per capita | $2,400 (about $11,000 PPP) |
| Real GDP growth | About 4 percent |
| Inflation (2026) | 7–10 percent |
| Foreign exchange reserves (late 2025) | About $2.8 billion |
| International tourist arrivals (2025) | 4,580,709 |
| U.S. agricultural exports to Laos (2025) | $6.17 million |
| Share of packaged food imports via Thailand | 60–70 percent (estimated) |
| Best prospects | Beef, cheese, snack foods, tree nuts, infant formula, distilled spirits, wine |

**Table 2. Laos: Advantages and Challenges for U.S. Exports**

| Advantages | Challenges |
|---|---|
| ✓ Lao consumers trust the safety of U.S. food products | ☒ Most consumers are price-sensitive, and imported goods remain expensive |
| ✓ Tourism is growing, and upscale hotels follow corporate standards that favor certified imports | ☒ High-spending Western tourists make up a shrinking share of arrivals |
| ✓ Cafés and bakeries create year-round demand for U.S. dairy and bakery ingredients | ☒ Reliable cold chain is mainly in Vientiane |
| ✓ Experienced Thailand-based distributors already serve Laos | ☒ Non-bonded products pay duties in Thailand and Laos |
| ✓ U.S. beef fits Asian-style hotel menus (hot pot, Korean barbecue) | ☒ Food and drug registration is complex and takes months |
| ✓ Zero-percent MFN customs duty on several U.S. spirits and wines | ☒ Excise taxes of 90–110 percent apply to spirits and wine based on ABV |
| ✓ U.S. exports grew 20.2 percent a year from 2016 to 2025 | ☒ Competitors have duty-free regional access (Thailand) and low-cost rail access (China) |

**Economy and Population**
Laos has about 7.8 million people. The World Bank classifies it as a lower-middle-income economy, and the United Nations lists it as a Least Developed Country (LDC). In 2026, nominal GDP is estimated at about $19 billion. GDP per capita averages $2,400 (about $11,000 on a purchasing-power-parity basis), and real economic growth is about 4 percent a year. The government's 2026–2030 national socioeconomic development plan targets average annual GDP growth of 6 percent and inflation below 5 percent. Commercial activity and disposable income are concentrated in Vientiane Capital (about 1 million residents). The capital accounts for most modern retail sales, international dining spending, and imported food consumption.

**Regional Trade Integration**
Laos is closely tied to the border economies of its neighbors. It is a party to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA) and has been a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) since 2013. Most of its food supply comes from within the region. An estimated 60–70 percent of packaged consumer products and processed foods sold in modern Lao retail outlets come from Thailand or pass through it.

Trade with China has also grown quickly since the Laos–China Railway reached full operation. The railway has changed trade flows along northern transport corridors and has sharply increased supplies of temperate fresh produce from China in Lao cities. U.S. fresh fruit and vegetables therefore face strong price competition from Chinese and Thai suppliers.

**Figure 1. Laos: Select Trade Routes**




**Digital Commerce**
Lao consumers have largely skipped traditional e-commerce and shop mainly through smartphones and mobile broadband. Social media platforms such as Facebook and TikTok, and WhatsApp messaging

groups, are the main digital storefronts, ordering channels, and word-of-mouth marketing tools for modern grocery retailers and restaurants. Few retailers run shopping websites, because consumers usually find products through images and social media.

**Exchange Rate and Inflation**

Laos experienced severe macroeconomic turbulence from 2022 to 2024. During this period, the Lao kip lost more than half its value against the U.S. dollar, and year-on-year inflation peaked at 41 percent in 2023. Conditions steadily stabilized throughout 2025 and 2026. The Bank of the Lao PDR tightened monetary policy by raising its benchmark policy rate to 10 percent, monitoring foreign currency remittances more closely, and rebuilding foreign exchange reserves to approximately $2.8 billion by late 2025. These measures brought consumer price inflation down to roughly 7–10 percent in 2026.

The long-term effects of the currency's decline remain significant. The domestic cost of living is now an estimated 50–80 percent higher than before the pandemic. Foodservice operators and modern retailers rely on imported inputs and fuel, so their operating margins remain tight. As a result, mass-market retailers increasingly source lower-cost products from within the region. Premium imported foods, including U.S. products, are sold mainly through retail channels that serve high-income consumers.



***Key Takeaway for U.S. Exporters:*** Laos has stabilized, but price still drives most purchases. The best opportunities for U.S. products are with high-income consumers and premium HRI buyers in Vientiane and Luang Prabang. Social media is the main promotional channel.

## B. Consumer Profile and Spending Behavior

**Urban Middle Class**

Laos has a very young population, and an urban middle class is growing in Vientiane. It includes private-sector managers, staff of international and bilateral organizations, civil servants, and cross-border traders. These households know international consumer brands, fast-food chains, and Western packaged foods better than they used to, partly because they travel often to commercial centers in northeastern Thailand.

Most Lao consumers, however, remain conservative in their purchasing habits. They are loyal to familiar brands and usually prefer the original recipes and packaging of everyday staples over premium, reformulated, or organic versions. Retailers that tried to move consumers toward higher-priced organic or eco-friendly versions of popular condiments had little success. Price drives most household grocery purchases. As a result, imported premium foods sell mainly to high-income professionals, foreign diplomats, expatriates, and mixed-nationality households.

**Health, Wellness, and Dining Out**

Young educated urban consumers are taking more interest in health and wellness. Wellness trends in Laos usually follow trends in Thailand, often about a year later. More gyms, running clubs, and marathons in Vientiane and Luang Prabang have increased interest in functional beverages, fortified dairy products, high-protein snacks, and vitamins. Communal dining and drinking remain central to social life. Lao consumers eat out often, and family milestones, business entertaining, and holidays drive

spending at upscale hotel restaurants and foreign restaurants. This creates steady demand for imported beef, fine wines, and spirits.



Photo 1: Butchery section in Vientiane supermarket

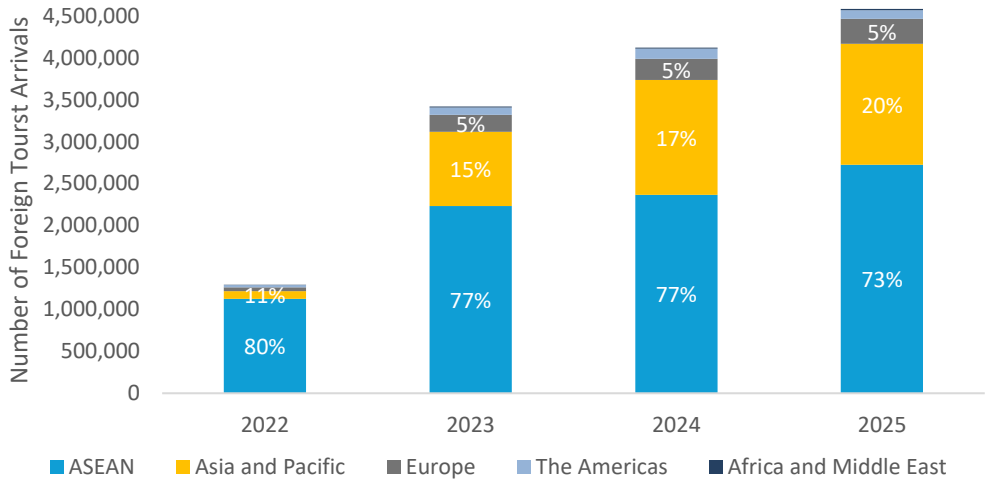

Photo 2: Wine section in Vientiane minimart

***Key Takeaway for U.S. Exporters:*** Lao shoppers are loyal to familiar brands. Social dining supports demand for beef, wine, and spirits, and growing interest in wellness supports demand for functional and fortified products.

## C. Tourism

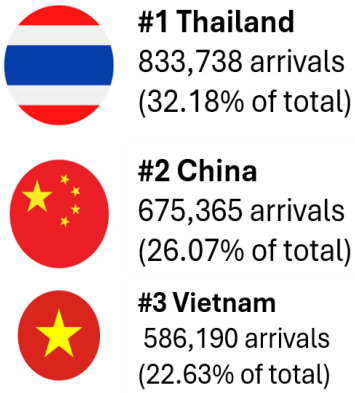
Tourism is the main driver of demand for imported food and beverage products. International arrivals rose from about 4.13 million in 2024 to 4.58 million in 2025. The 11 percent increase exceeded government targets. Growth continued into 2026. Arrivals reached 2.6 million in the first half of 2026, up 10 percent from the same period in 2025. The Lao Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism's 2026–2030 tourism strategy targets more than 43 million visitors over the five-year period, including 22 million foreign arrivals and $13 billion in tourism revenue.

**Figure 2. Laos: Tourism Arrivals by Region 2022-2025**




Source: Lao Tourism Development Department (TDD)

**Figure 3. Laos: Top Countries of Tourist Arrivals (Jan-June 2026)**




Source: TDD

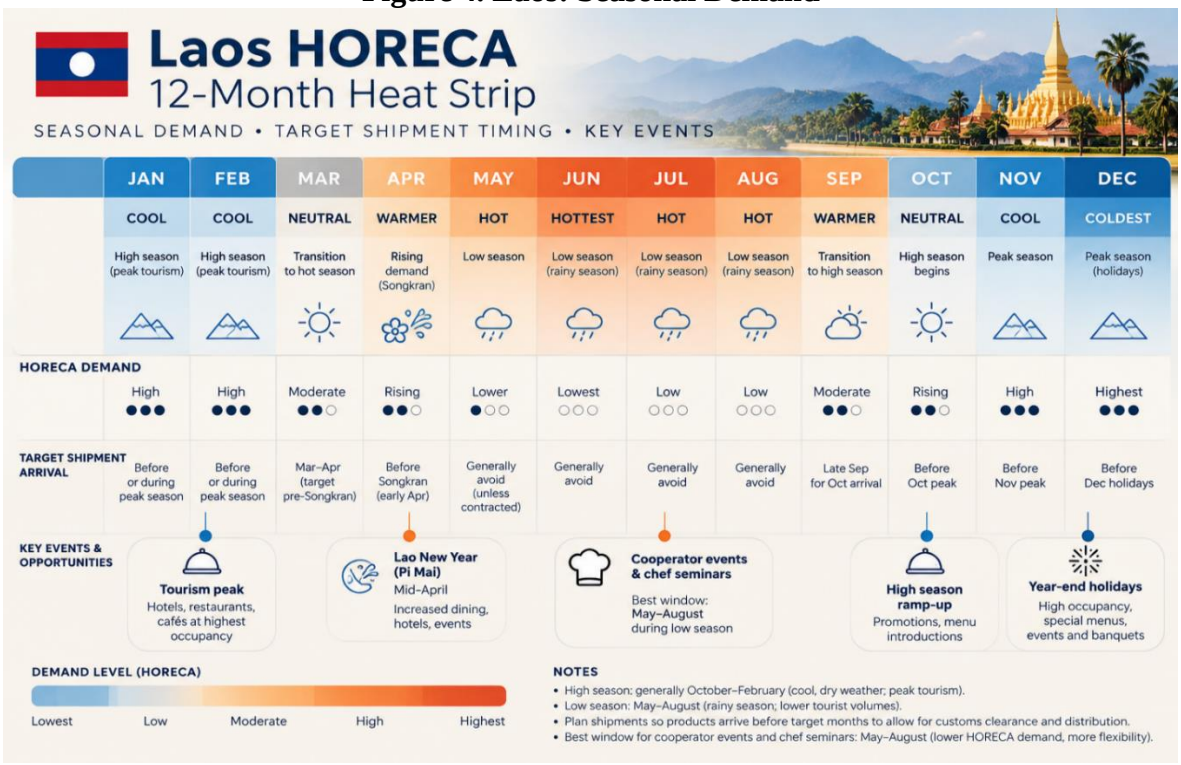
**Visitor Mix**

The mix of visitors has changed significantly. Regional travelers now account for most arrivals. In 2025, Thailand was the top source market with 1.48 million visitors, followed by China with 1.16 million and Vietnam with 1.13 million. The Laos-China Railway and visa-free travel arrangements have brought many more Chinese tour groups. Arrivals of higher-spending, long-haul cultural tourists from the United States and Western Europe have grown much more slowly, so their share of total arrivals has fallen. Chinese, Vietnamese, and Thai travelers have different food preferences and spend less per meal on Western cuisine.

As a result, the HRI market for imported Western food products has split into two segments:

1. Upscale hotels and restaurants that serve long-haul or high-income Asian and Western guests continue to buy premium imported products.
2. Most other hospitality businesses are shifting toward lower-cost regional products that suit Asian visitors.

**Figure 4. Laos: Seasonal Demand**




**Seasonality**

Hospitality demand rises and falls sharply with the seasons. Business peaks in the dry season, from October through February, and is highest in December, when luxury hotels often reach full occupancy. The second and third quarters are a long low season, and hotels and restaurants reduce their stocks of perishable imported ingredients.

**Luang Prabang and Heritage Sites**

Luang Prabang, the former royal capital and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has been hit hardest by these shifts. Rail access has increased total arrivals. However, traffic congestion and crowding in the historic district have discouraged some high-spending Western leisure travelers. According to industry contacts, luxury boutique hotels and high-end European restaurants served fewer meals in 2026 than in past years, and their guests paid closer attention to prices. These businesses are now buying premium imported products more cautiously.



***Key Takeaway for U.S. Exporters:*** Demand peaks from October through February and drops from April through September. Shipments that arrive before October are best placed for the peak season. Upscale properties that serve long-haul and high-income Western guests remain the core market for premium U.S. products.

## D. Hotel and Restaurant Landscape

### Hotels

The Lao accommodation sector is divided between international-standard luxury hotels at the top and budget domestic guesthouses at the bottom. Nearly all luxury and upper-upscale properties are in Vientiane and Luang Prabang. International hotel chains follow corporate food and beverage standards that require high-quality certified meat and seafood, imported dairy products, and international wines. They are among the largest HRI buyers of U.S. products,

Examples of top-tier hotels:

- **Luang Prabang, luxury:** Rosewood Luang Prabang and Amantaka (Aman Resorts)
- **Luang Prabang, upper-upscale:** Sofitel Luang Prabang and AVANI+ Luang Prabang (Minor Hotels)
- **Vientiane, business and diplomatic hotels:** Crowne Plaza Vientiane (IHG) and Landmark Mekong Riverside Hotel

Below this top tier are mid-scale boutique properties, such as The Grand Luang Prabang (Meliá) and Onson Hotel & Café, and hundreds of unbranded independent hotels. These mid-scale hotels serve mainly regional business travelers, Thai road-trip tourists, and domestic visitors. With tight margins, they buy almost all their food from local wet markets and low-cost distributors of Thai packaged goods. Apart from basic cooking oils, processed cheese slices, and canned ingredients, they buy few high-cost Western imports.

### Restaurants

Vientiane has a varied and growing restaurant sector. It includes French bistros, Italian restaurants, Japanese sushi bars, and high-end Korean barbecue restaurants that serve the city's large South Korean expatriate community. In Luang Prabang, well-known fine-dining restaurants such as Manda de Laos, L'Elephant, and Gaspard lead the market. Average spending at these restaurants is $60–80 per person. They need a steady supply of certified imported beef, fresh or frozen salmon, artisanal cheeses, and fine wines to maintain their reputation.

### Regional Markets

Foodservice is also growing in regional towns outside the two main cities.

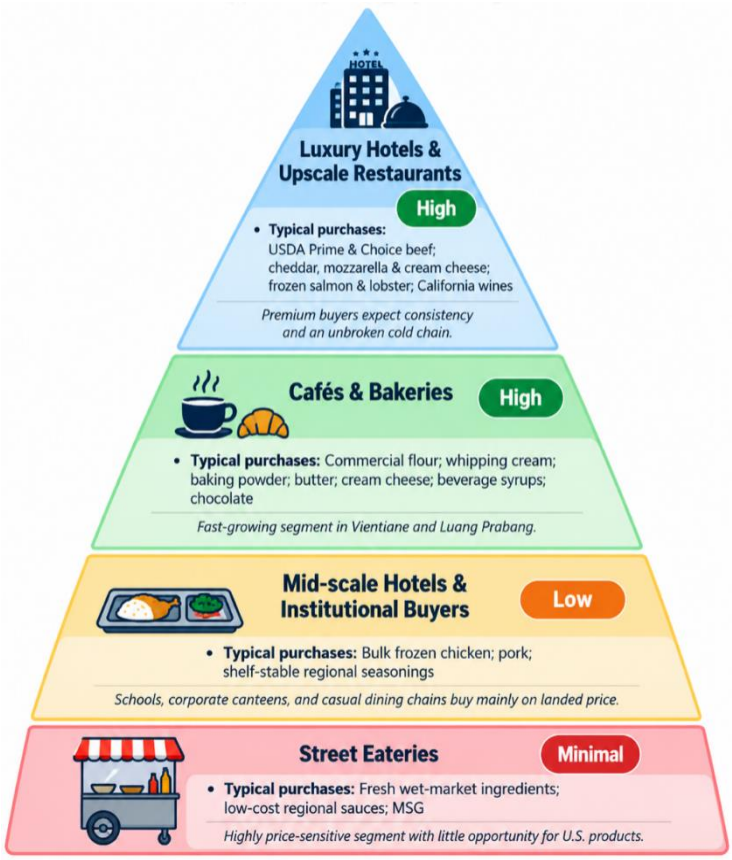
- **Vang Vieng:** The town sits on the Laos-China Railway between Vientiane and Luang Prabang. It has changed from a budget backpacker stop into an easy-to-reach nature and adventure resort. Families and young professionals now support modern cafés, pizza restaurants, and casual dining outlets.
- **Pakse and wider Champasak Province:** The area around the Vat Phou UNESCO World Heritage Site supports boutique riverside resorts and eco-lodges. These businesses source food mainly across the border from Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand.

***Key Takeaway for U.S. Exporters:*** International hotels and fine-dining restaurants in Vientiane and Luang Prabang are the main HRI buyers of U.S. products, because their corporate standards and menus require certified imports. Mid-scale and independent hotels buy few Western products.

## E. Foodservice Market

The foodservice sector has split into clear tiers, and U.S. products compete in only a few of them. A small group of international hotels, foreign-owned steakhouses, and upscale restaurants accounts for most demand for U.S. beef, dairy, seafood, and wine. Cafés and specialty bakeries are among the fastest-growing and buy imported dairy and bakery ingredients year-round. Institutional buyers and street eateries serve most meals eaten outside the home, but they buy mainly on price and source from local or regional suppliers.

**Figure 5. Laos: Opportunity Rating for U.S. Products by HRI Segment**




### HRI Segments

Premium buyers are at the top of the market. International hotel restaurants, foreign-owned steakhouses, and upscale standalone restaurants buy USDA Prime and Choice beef; cheddar, mozzarella, and cream cheese; frozen salmon and lobster; and California wines. They expect consistent portion sizes and an unbroken cold chain. Mid-market institutional buyers, such as school cafeterias, corporate canteens, and casual dining chains, choose suppliers mainly on landed price and buy mostly bulk frozen chicken, pork, and shelf-stable regional seasonings. At the base of the market, street vendors, open-air stalls, and traditional noodle shops serve most of the meals Lao consumers eat outside the home. These informal businesses buy fresh ingredients

every day from wet markets and use low-cost regional sauces and monosodium glutamate (MSG). These businesses are highly price-sensitive, so this segment offers little opportunity for U.S. products.

**Cafés and Bakeries**

Laos has a healthy café and coffee culture. Cafés and specialty bakeries are among the fastest-growing parts of the foodservice sector. Youth culture and heavy exposure to Thai and South Korean social media have led to many new modern cafés in Vientiane and Luang Prabang. These businesses create steady, year-round demand for imported bakery ingredients, including commercial flour mixes, whipping cream, baking powder, butter, and cream cheese. The growth of specialty espresso drinks has also increased demand for imported flavoring syrups, chocolate sauces, and premium plant-based milks such as almond and oat milk. This segment offers good opportunities for U.S. suppliers of dairy products, bakery ingredients, and specialty beverages.




Photo 3: U.S. baking ingredients at a retail market in Vientiane

**Menu Adaptation**

Executive chefs across the hospitality sector are also changing their menus to match the new mix of tourists. According to industry contacts, Chinese and South Korean travelers make up 70–80 percent of registered guests at international Vientiane hotels. To serve these guests, hotel kitchens are adding premium Western ingredients to Asian-inspired and fusion dishes. For example, hotels now use highly marbled U.S. beef in high-end hot pot, Korean barbecue sets, and stir-fry dishes. Many Korean restaurants also now serve cheese appetizers. This trend gives U.S. beef and cheese exporters a way to reach Asian guests who may not order a Western-style steak.



Photo 4: Western bakery at an international hotel and premium supermarket in Laos

***Key Takeaway for U.S. Exporters:*** Premium hotels and restaurants, along with the fast-growing café and bakery segment, offer the best foodservice opportunities. Institutional buyers and street eateries buy on price and offer little opportunity.

## F. Retail and Modern Trade

### Premium and Modern Supermarkets

Modern grocery retail is concentrated in Vientiane Capital. A few premium supermarkets there serve foreign residents, diplomats, and high-income Lao families.

ViewMall is the city's leading upscale supermarket. It began as a joint venture with Thailand's Rimping Supermarket. Rimping withdrew in November 2025 and handed full control to the Lao-owned ViewMall Co., Ltd. ViewMall now imports more produce from China and buys most of its packaged groceries through GO Wholesale, part of Thailand's Central Food Retail Group. GO Wholesale also supplies ViewMall's "Choice" private-label line. ViewMall remains a main outlet for U.S. beef, premium cheeses, California wines, and U.S. snack brands.

Other key outlets:

- **Parkson Supermarket (Vientiane):** an upscale store in the basement of Parkson Mall. It attracts high-income shoppers, young consumers, and expatriates who buy branded confectionery, infant formula, and gourmet foods.
- **Siavone Minimart (Vientiane):** an independent store on Sokpaluang Road with a loyal following among expatriates and diplomats. It stocks Western baking products, U.S. barbecue sauces, pancake mixes, syrups, and California wines.
- **Signature Market (Luang Prabang):** a gourmet grocer that repackages imported cheeses and sells imported nuts, canned beans, and condiments.
- **D&T Supermarket (Luang Prabang):** packaged goods for families.

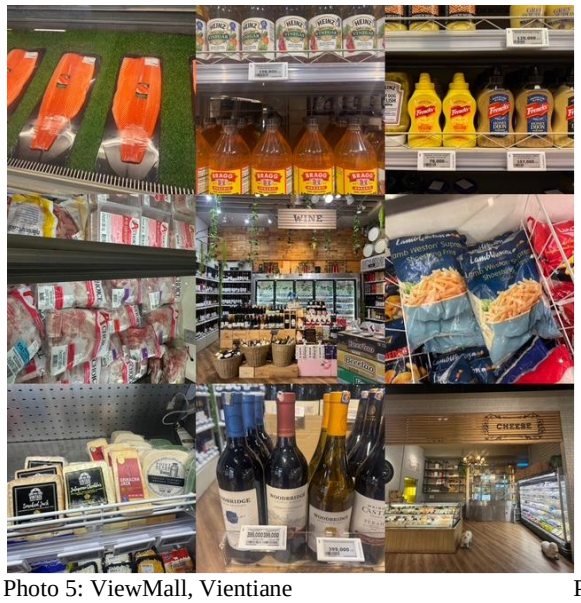


Photo 5: ViewMall, Vientiane

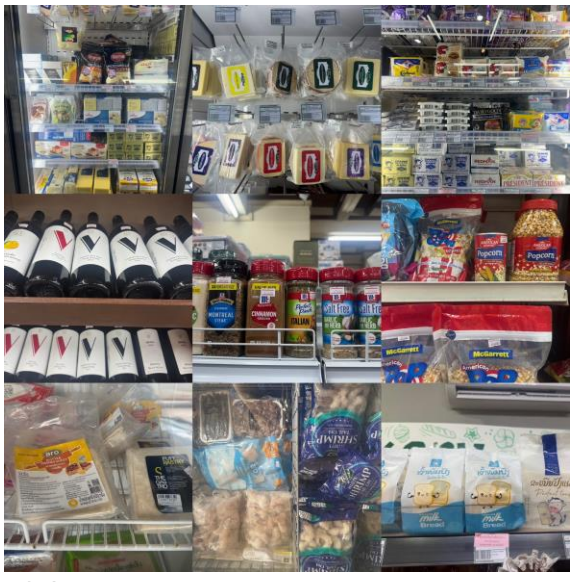

Photo 6: Siavone Minimart, Vientiane



Photo 7: Parkson Supermarket, Vientiane

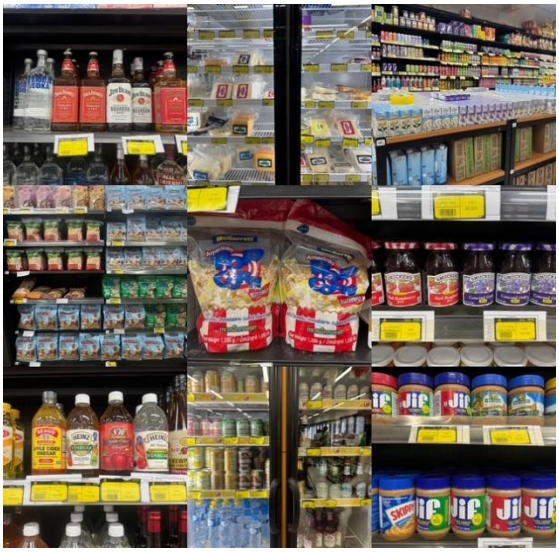


Photo 8: D&T Supermarket, Luang Prabang

**Hypermarkets and Convenience Stores**

Foreign-invested chains are modernizing Lao retail quickly:

- **Big C Laos**, backed by its Thai parent company, has moved beyond its Mini Big C convenience stores and opened a flagship hypermarket next to the ITECC complex in Vientiane. It sells high volumes at competitive prices to middle-class families and small restaurant owners, including family-sized snacks, breakfast cereals, and commercial baking ingredients.
- **Kok Kok Mart** now has more than 20 stores. The Kolao Group operates the chain after acquiring the local Jmart stores. Through a partnership with South Korea's E-Mart, the stores include "Unique Fresh Market" sections and larger "Mom & Baby" sections. These sections create direct openings for U.S. infant formula, fortified milk, and frozen meat and poultry.

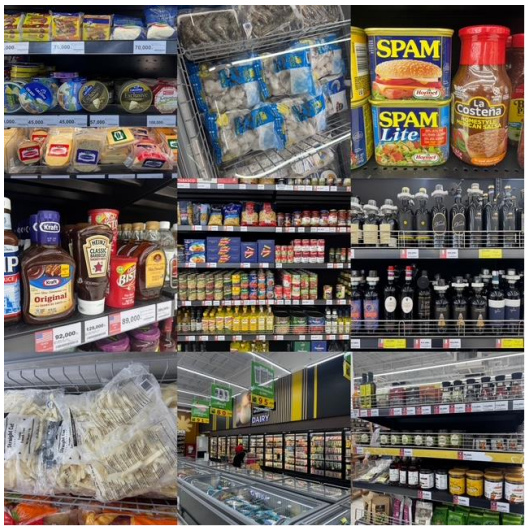



Photo 9: Big C Laos, ITECC Mall, Vientiane




Photo 10: Kok Kok Mart, Vientiane

**Wet Markets**

Traditional open-air wet markets account for an estimated 70–80 percent of national retail sales of fresh meat, poultry, fish, and local vegetables. They offer lower-income households daily freshness, low

prices, and credit that supermarkets are unable to match. Supermarkets do not compete with wet markets on daily staples and fresh foods. Instead, they lead in registered packaged goods, imported dairy, imported confectionery, and lifestyle foods.



***Key Takeaway for U.S. Exporters:*** Premium Vientiane supermarkets such as ViewMall, Parkson, and Siavone are core retail outlets for U.S. products. Expanding chains such as Big C and Kok Kok Mart offer volume opportunities for products such as infant formula, snacks, and frozen meat.

## G. Supply Chain, Tariffs, and Import Logistics

### Thailand as the Regional Gateway

Laos is landlocked, imports most of its processed food, and has no large cash-and-carry chains. No direct shipping routes connect it with the United States. On the standard route, goods enter through Bangkok Port or Laem Chabang Port, are consolidated into mixed-pallet truckloads, and cross the Thai–Lao Friendship Bridge into Vientiane. Air freight into Vientiane's Wattay International Airport (VTE) is too costly for most products and is used mainly for live seafood and other high-value cargo.

Established distributors that handle cross-border logistics include:

- Jagota Brothers Co., Ltd. (meat and dairy)
- Foodiva Co., Ltd. (bakery and HRI)
- Deluxe Food Group (fine foods)
- KAP Import-Export Co., Ltd. (packaged goods for modern retail)

### Cold Chain Limits

Cold chain capacity is a major constraint across the country. Nearly all reliable, refrigerated warehouses and refrigerated trucks operate in Vientiane Capital. Some providers in Vientiane offer temperature-controlled warehousing and logistics for perishable foods. For example, Vientiane Cold offers services ranging from storage to integrated third-party logistics (3PL), including trucking from Thailand. U.S. exporters shipping frozen or chilled products are encouraged to confirm with distributors how products will be stored and transported after they cross the border.

Outside the capital, cold chain options drop off sharply. Shipments to provincial centers such as Luang Prabang usually travel on multi-stop routes in trucks that keep products cold with insulation alone, without continuous refrigeration. This puts fresh and chilled imports at a serious disadvantage. Outside Vientiane, shelf-stable goods and frozen meat and poultry are the most practical formats.

### Tariffs and Duties

Laos uses the ASEAN Harmonized Tariff Nomenclature (AHTN 2022) and applies import duties according to product classification and country of origin. Under the U.S.–Laos Bilateral Trade Agreement and Laos’s WTO commitments, qualifying U.S.-origin goods are eligible for MFN treatment. The Lao Trade Portal currently shows zero-percent MFN customs duties for several alcoholic beverage categories, including still wine in containers of 2 liters or less, brandy, rum, whiskey, and vodka, compared with normal tariff rates of 30–40 percent.

Despite these published MFN rates, imported alcoholic beverages remain subject to substantial consumption (excise) taxes and the standard 10-percent value-added tax (VAT). Under the October 2023 excise tax ordinance, beer containing 0.5–5 percent alcohol is subject to a 60-percent excise tax, while beer exceeding 5 percent is subject to 70 percent. Non-beer alcoholic beverages containing 10–23 percent alcohol are subject to a 90-percent excise tax, increasing to 110 percent for beverages exceeding 23 percent alcohol.

Many specialty food importers source products through wholesalers in Thailand rather than importing directly. Where products have already entered Thai domestic commerce, costs associated with Thai customs clearance, distribution, and handling are often reflected in resale prices. Direct imports or duty-suspended transit arrangements reduce these intermediate costs.

**Table 3. Laos: Select Import Tariffs on Alcoholic Beverages**

| Beverage | Lao HS code | Normal duty | Published MFN Duty |
|---|---|---|---|
| Wine, in containers 2 liters or less | 2204211400 | 30% | 0% |
| Brandy | 2208205000 | 30% | 0% |
| Rum | 2208400000 | 40% | 0% |
| Whiskey, retail containers | 2208309000 | 40% | 0% |
| Vodka | 2208600000 | 40% | 0% |

Source: Lao Trade Portal, published tariff schedule effective January 1, 2025. MFN rates are relevant to qualifying U.S.-origin goods. Figures exclude excise tax, VAT, and other fees.

For U.S. exporters, the principal market-access considerations therefore extend beyond customs duties to excise taxation, import permits, regulatory compliance, distribution costs, and the relatively small market for premium imported products.

**Import Regulations**

Two agencies regulate food imports:

1) The Ministry of Health's Food and Drug Department (FDD) and
2) The Ministry of Industry and Commerce's Department of Import and Export (DIMEX)

Since mid-2025, Laos has fully enforced national regulations that require FDD registration for all food products sold in modern retail. Labels must include Lao-language text and the official registration number, printed directly on the package. Lao authorities do not allow adhesive stickers on high-risk product categories. Registration can take several months, and trade contacts describe the review timeline as unpredictable. U.S. exporters should plan for these delays, work with importers experienced in FDD procedures, and ensure they comply fully with U.S. anti-corruption laws, including the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act.

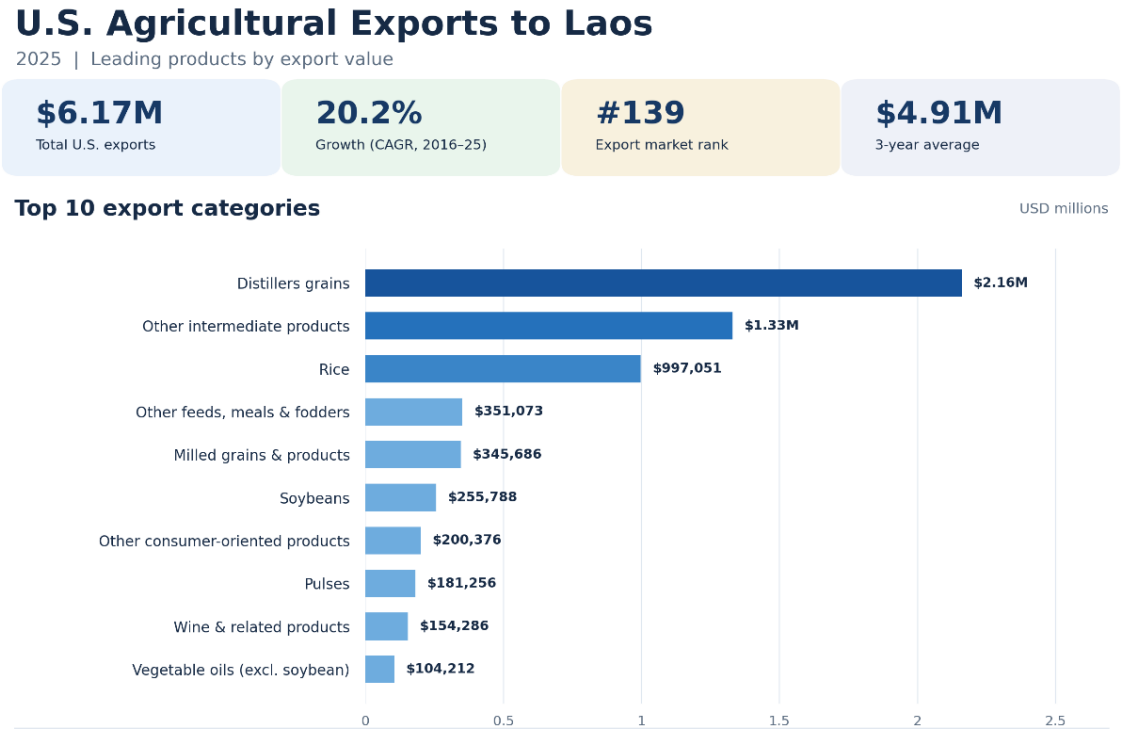


***Key Takeaway for U.S. Exporters:*** Air freight can work for small shipments of high-value goods. For most other shipments, Thailand-based distributors that use bonded transit keep Thai and Lao import duties from stacking. Products need FDD registration and Lao-language labels before they can be sold in modern retail. Outside Vientiane, frozen and shelf-stable products are the most practical formats.

## H. Best Prospects for U.S. Products

U.S. agricultural exports to Laos are small but growing quickly. According to FAS Global Agricultural Trade System (GATS) data, U.S. agricultural exports to Laos reached $6.17 million in 2025. That figure is up from $5.26 million in 2024 and above the three-year average of $4.91 million for 2023-2025. Laos ranked as the 139th-largest market for U.S. agricultural exports in 2025, and exports have grown at a compound annual growth rate of 20.2 percent since 2016.

**Figure 6. Laos: U.S. Agricultural Exports (2025)**



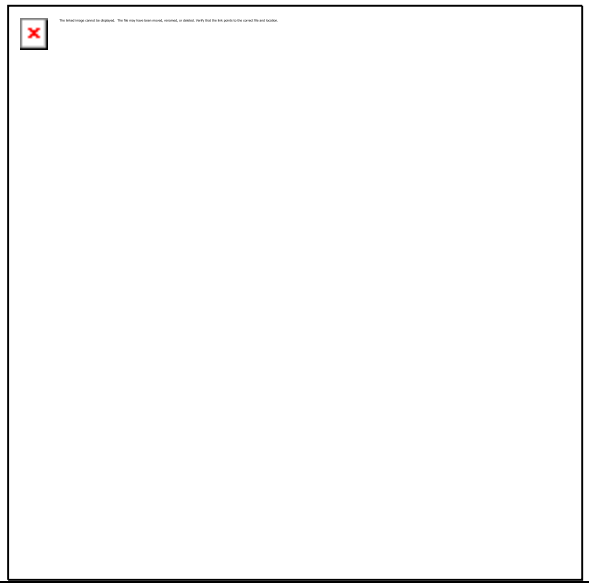

Source: FAS Global Agricultural Trade System

Bulk and intermediate products such as distillers grains and rice account for most of these exports, but the strongest growth opportunities are in consumer-oriented products, many of which reach Laos through Thailand and do not appear in the official data. U.S. food products have their best prospects where buyers value quality and consistency more than price.

In foodservice, frozen U.S. beef and cheese lead. Upscale hotels value U.S. beef for its consistent marbling and portion yields, and bakeries and Korean-style restaurants are buying more cheese. Upscale hotels and restaurants also buy U.S. wines to meet high-end customer expectations. In modern retail, U.S. distilled spirits, packaged snacks, tree nuts, and infant formula have strong potential, helped by Lao consumers' trust in the safety of U.S. food. U.S. wine has potential in retail but faces high excise taxes and stiff competition. Regional and international suppliers benefit from established price points, duty-free ASEAN access, and low-cost rail links to China.

**Figure 7. Laos: Top U.S. Prospects and Competition**





***Key Takeaway for U.S. Exporters:*** Frozen beef and cheese have the strongest prospects in upscale HRI. Wine has potential in upscale HRI and premium retail, although high excise taxes limit sales. At retail, distilled spirits, snacks, tree nuts, and infant formula benefit from the U.S. reputation for food safety. U.S. products compete on quality and consistency rather than price. Official trade data understate U.S. sales because many products reach Laos through Thailand.

## I. Market Entry Strategy

### Work Through Thailand-Based Distributors

Because few Lao buyers can take a full 20- or 40-foot container of a single high-value product, an established Thailand-based distributor that already ships to Vientiane is often the easiest route into the market for new or smaller exporters. Exporters with larger buyers or consolidated loads can ship by sea through Thai ports, with goods moving on to Laos under bonded transit. Air freight to Vientiane can work for small volumes of high-value products.

Distributors such as Jagota Brothers and Foodiva run central cold storage facilities in Bangkok, handle Thai customs and transit procedures, and consolidate frozen meat, dairy, and dry goods into mixed pallets. They then send the pallets to Laos by bonded truck. Bonded transit keeps goods bound for Laos from incurring Thai import duties on top of Lao duties and VAT, which would otherwise raise shelf prices. Post recommends that exporters of frozen and chilled products confirm that their Thai distributor can keep products at the right temperature all the way from the Bangkok warehouse, across the border, and through storage and final delivery in Laos.

### Marketing, Cooperator Promotions, and Chef Outreach

Consumer promotions in Laos work best with visual content on social media, primarily Facebook and TikTok. Industry contacts say campaigns with well-known local food bloggers and social media influencers give the best return on promotional spending, especially when combined with in-store sampling at leading Vientiane supermarkets. In Luang Prabang and other markets outside Vientiane, industry contacts say direct relationships with hotel and restaurant chefs and local WhatsApp trade groups work best.

Post encourages U.S. agricultural trade associations (cooperators) to hold culinary seminars, meat-cutting demonstrations, and chef pairing events. Good candidates include the U.S. Meat Export Federation, the California Milk Advisory Board, the Wine Institute, and the USA Poultry & Egg Export Council, which could run seasonal turkey promotions. These events work best just before or during the peak tourism season, which runs from October through February.



***Key Takeaway for U.S. Exporters:*** For most new or smaller exporters, a Thailand-based distributor that already serves Vientiane is the easiest route into the market. Air freight can work for small volumes of high-value products. Bonded transit and an unbroken cold chain through final delivery are essential for frozen and chilled goods. Industry contacts report the best return from social media campaigns and chef outreach timed ahead of the October–February peak season.

## J. Post Contact Information

Contact the OAA Bangkok for additional questions and follow-up.

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**Attachments:**

No Attachments.