

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

Date: March 19, 2026

Report Number: SY2026-0001

Report Name: Evolving Sanctions Landscape and Banking Hurdles in Syria and What It Means For US Agricultural Trade

Country: Syria

Post: Cairo

Report Category: Agricultural Situation, Trade Policy Monitoring

Prepared By: Adam Klein

Approved By: Christopher Riker

Report Highlights:

Effective July 1, 2025, the United States officially terminated the Syria Sanctions Program. As a result, the transfer, export, or sale of most basic civilian-use U.S.-origin goods to or within Syria is permitted without a license. In addition, the export of most food to Syria continues to be permitted without a license, as was the case before the lifting of sanctions. Targeted sanctions remain on individuals and entities linked to former President Bashar al-Assad and his network, human rights violators, captagon traffickers, and other destabilizing actors. U.S. exporters should consult the Office of Foreign Assets Control’s online (OFAC) Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List (“SDN List”) and otherwise conduct due diligence related to all applicable sanctions before pursuing business with Syrian entities.

On June 30, 2025 the United States terminated the Syria sanctions program.¹ This decision marked a strategic shift in U.S. policy aimed at supporting Syria’s path to stability, peace, and reconstruction. Despite the removal of the Syria sanctions program on July 1, 2025, sanctions remain in effect for “individuals and entities related to Bashar al-Assad and his cronies – as well as human rights abusers, captagon traffickers, persons linked to Syria’s past proliferation activities, ISIS and Al-Qaida affiliates, and Iran and its terrorist proxies.”² Exporters are strongly encouraged to review [OFAC’s SDN List](#) and otherwise conduct due diligence related to all applicable sanctions <https://sanctionssearch.ofac.treas.gov/> when reaching out to, evaluating, or considering business opportunities with potential Syrian partners.

Tri-Seal Advisory

The U.S. government has issued a [tri-seal advisory](#) from the Departments of State, Treasury, and Commerce, outlining permissible and prohibited activities under the new framework. The advisory encourages U.S. businesses and banks to contribute to Syria’s stability, while denying resources to harmful actors.

Caesar Act

On December 18, 2025, the President signed legislation that repealed the Caesar Act, which was a significant barrier to foreign investment in Syria and the country’s financial connectivity.

Financial Pathways

Financial pathways for direct payment from Syria are currently limited due to the effects of longstanding sanctions and international isolation. U.S. exporters and other international businesses who face challenges in processing payments to or from Syria, may reach out to the Syria Regional Platform or FAS/Cairo (AgCairo@usda.gov) with questions. The U.S. Department of the Treasury is working closely with the new Syrian Government and U.S. and international financial institutions to ensure that Syria implements anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing reforms that will support reconnection with the global financial system. Exporters are encouraged to consult with their financial institutions before engaging in large-scale transactions involving Syrian entities to ensure compliance and to understand the practical challenges of receiving payment from Syria.

Opportunities for U.S. Agriculture

Although the recent easing of sanctions allows for expanded opportunities for U.S. agricultural exports to Syria, years of conflict, drought, and economic decline have left Syrian purchasing power severely constrained. Approximately 9.1 million Syrians (of a total population of 24.7 million people³) remain food insecure due to domestic unrest, currency shortages, and diminished domestic agricultural yields.⁴ FAS/Cairo’s recent conversations with Syrian contacts highlight significant shifts and ongoing challenges in Syria’s agricultural sector. For example, Syria was once a net exporter of wheat, but now imports an estimated 1–2 million metric tons of wheat annually—primarily from the Black Sea region—due to conflict-related damage to agricultural infrastructure, economic collapse, and one of the worst droughts in Syria’s history that has caused a historically low domestic wheat harvest of just 900,000 to

¹ See, e.g., <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/DCPD-202500725/pdf/DCPD-202500725.pdf>

² See <https://www.state.gov/releases/ending-the-syria-sanctions-program-for-the-benefit-of-the-syrian-people/>

³ See <https://www.census.gov/popclock/world/sy>

⁴ See <https://www.fao.org/giews/countrybrief/country.jsp?lang=ar&code=SYR>

1.1 million metric tons.⁵ Similarly, according to an industry source, Syrian cotton production has sharply declined, with planted area falling from 250,000 hectares in 2012 to just 24,000 hectares in 2025, due to high production costs and insecurity around ginning mills. Poultry production has sharply declined too, attributed to persistent feed shortages. Industry sources have informed FAS/Cairo that a few years ago Syria was producing approximately 1 million metric tons of chicken meat but currently is only producing 150-200 thousand metric tons.

Despite this, the demand for imported animal feed—including barley, soybean meal, and corn—remains moderate, with imports meeting an estimated 50–70 percent of national needs, according to an industry source. Syria is actively seeking to import barley to help meet the feed requirements of its sheep and lamb producers. Feed imports are primarily managed through government tenders, which reportedly require in-person representation to participate; however, industry sources note that tender procedures are evolving. The private sector remains active in imports, with rice, soybeans, and dairy products identified as key areas of interest for sourcing from the United States. Syria remains heavily dependent on imports of staple foods such as wheat and rice. According to an industry source, Syria consumes approximately 200,000 metric tons of rice annually—a staple in Syrian cuisine—with consumers showing a strong preference for medium grain rice. Basmati rice is also noted as popular among Syrian consumers. With the easing of import restrictions, there is speculation that Syrian firms and businesspeople may return to reopen factories, textile mills, and crushing facilities that were previously closed or abandoned. Meanwhile, the private sector remains active in producing cash crops, such as olives and olive oil, to name a few.

FAS/Cairo, which supports U.S. agricultural exports to the region, is in the early stages of reestablishing relationships with the Syrian government, relevant trade authorities, and reputable importers. It is currently assessing Syria’s agricultural needs, input requirements, and the balance between government-managed and private sector trade. Initial conversations with Syrian contacts suggest potential opportunities for U.S. exports such as corn, soybeans, rice, wheat, soybean meal, other feeds and fodders, seeds, and dairy products—agricultural products that performed well when U.S. agricultural exports to Syria peaked at \$485 million fifteen years ago. While this is not a market that will turn around overnight for U.S. exporters and expectations should be managed, the current situation presents opportunities worth exploring for those interested in gaining a foothold in a potential new market. Exporters interested in exploring these opportunities in Syria are encouraged to contact FAS/Cairo at AgCairo@usda.gov for the latest guidance and support.

Attachments:

No Attachments.

⁵ See <https://www.fao.org/syria/news/details/the-syrian-arab-republic--farmers-struggle-amid-worst-agricultural-crisis-in-decades/en>