

Product Focus

Blueberries - HS Code 08104050



Blueberries are perennial flowering plants with blue to blue-black skin that is covered by a waxy bloom, giving the fruit a light blue appearance. The flesh is creamy-white to green in color and juicy. For fresh market, the fruit should be fully blue and firm. Blueberries are non-climacteric fruit but should be harvested near to full ripe as flavour does not improve after harvest.

The plants are usually erect, prostrate shrubs that can vary in size from 10cm to 4m in height.

Blueberry bushes normally bear fruit in the middle of the growing season and fruiting times are determined by local conditions such as altitude and latitude. Blueberries are sold fresh or processed as individually quick-frozen fruit, purée, juice, or dried or infused berries, which in turn may be used in a variety of consumer goods, such as jam and jelly amongst others.

VARIETY

Buyers in the end market often do not have preferences for specific blueberry varieties. The main reason for this is to optimise productivity and to extend supply seasons. However, choosing the right variety is important to obtain the best product for your client in terms of flavour, firmness, colour and shelf life.

Large blueberries with sweet taste are most likely to fetch higher prices currently. In the future, as the market for blueberries further matures and end clients become more knowledgeable, specific variety preferences may also develop.

OPPORTUNITIES

The global import of blueberries increased by 47% in the period 2014 to 2018 from US\$ 1,8 billion to US\$3.4 billion. The table below highlights major importers regionally and internationally;

International Markets		Regional Markets	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA • UK • Netherlands • Germany • Canada • Spain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China • Hong Kong • France • Belgium • Switzerland • Norway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Africa • Ghana • Namibia • Algeria • Angola • Seychelles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mauritius • Botswana • Gabon • Kenya

MARKET ANALYSIS

According to Trademap statistics, COMESA's exports of blueberries to the world increased over the past five years. COMESA's exports increased by 89% from US\$88 thousand in 2014 to US\$838 thousand in 2018. The major export markets for COMESA include United Kingdom, South Africa, Norway, Germany, Malaysia, Switzerland, Ireland, Singapore, France and Canada, among others.

EXPORT POTENTIAL

In the past years COMESA countries who have been producing and exporting blueberries include:

Country		Potential & Existing Export Markets
1.	Zimbabwe	United Kingdom, South Africa, Norway, Germany, Ireland, Iceland, Singapore, Switzerland, Malaysia, France
2.	Egypt	Malaysia, Estonia, Germany, United Kingdom, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kenya, Qatar.
3.	Tunisia	Libya, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, France, Netherlands.
4.	Uganda	Rwanda, Kenya, Netherlands, India, Canada, Norway, United Kingdom, Austria, Belarus, Kenya, Netherlands, Oman
5.	Kenya	United Kingdom, France, Germany, Peru, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Lebanon, Netherlands, Poland, Uganda

PRICE

General wholesale prices for 12 x 125 g packages (1.5 kg) can be €6 to €7 euros on the low side, up to €11 to €15 euros in a good market. If you work with an importing company or trader, expect to pay them around 8% commission plus handling costs.

Retail prices are usually between €12 and €24 per kilo. Small packages with premium blueberries are the most expensive. Organic blueberries are sometimes sold for more than €24/kg. Be aware that retail prices have no relation with trade prices.

PACKAGING



Blueberries are mainly packaged in quantities of 1 - 3 kg in chip baskets and trays of wood, paperboard or plastic. To prevent the fruit from drying out, 200 - 250g punnets are wrapped in polyethylene film.

The package shall protect against risks such as;

- contamination, leakage and dehydration.
- rough handling during loading and unloading;
- compression from the overhead weight of other containers;
- impact and vibration during transportation;
- high humidity during precooling, transit, and storage

Produce is shipped in refrigerated air containers or on-air cargo pallets. Temperature-controlled storage facilities at airports are needed to ensure produce quality.

QUALITY

Blueberries must at least be:

- intact;
- sound – produce must be from rotting or deterioration likely to make it unfit for consumption;
- clean, practically free of any visible foreign matter;
- practically free from pests;
- practically free from damage caused by pests;
- fresh in appearance;
- free of abnormal external moisture;
- free of any foreign smell and taste, including bitter taste in case of bilberries;
- able to withstand transport and handling.

Blueberries must be practically free of agglomerated berries. Blueberries must be practically covered with bloom, according to the varietal characteristics.

Most customers for example in Europe almost exclusively require Class I blueberries as a minimum. Blueberries in this class must be of good quality and within the following permissible tolerances:

- very slight leakage of juice;
- very slight bruising;
- a tolerance of 10% is allowed for fruit that meets Class II standards.

In no case may the defects affect the fruit flesh, the general appearance of the produce, the quality, the keeping quality and the presentation in the package.

LABELLING

Labels should include provide the following information:

- the name under which the product is sold;
 - the product’s commercial identification: class, size (code), number of units, net weight;
 - the name and address of the producer;
 - the place/country of origin;
 - traceability code (for example Global Location Number);
 - Officially recognised code mark such as a Global Gap Number (GGN) (recommendable).
- In addition, any certification logo or retailer logo (in the case of private-label products) should be displayed on the label.

INDICATIVE BLUEBERRY SUPPLY CALENDAR TO EUROPE

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Mexico (Jalisco, Baja California)	■		■	■						■	■	■
Marocco		■	■	■	■	■						
Spain, USA (south)			■	■	■	■						
France					■	■	■	■				
Portugal					■	■	■	■				
Netherlands					■	■	■	■	■			
Germany, Poland						■	■	■	■			
Canada, USA (north)							■	■	■	■		
Peru	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Argentina/Uruguay									■	■	■	■
South Africa									■	■	■	■
Chile	■	■	■	■	■					■	■	■

VOLUNTARY STANDARDS

Exporters are urged to comply with food quality and safety standards such as Global GAP, Fair Trade and Sustainable Agriculture Network:

- GLOBAL G.A.P. Crops (Global Good Agricultural Practice):** the standard is primarily designed to reassure consumers about how food is produced on the farm by minimising detrimental environmental impacts of farming operations, reducing the use of chemical inputs and ensuring a responsible approach to worker health and safety as well as animal welfare.
- HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points),** Requirements for the hygiene of food is laid down and states the general hygiene procedures for food at all stages of the production process from primary production to the world consumer (“*from-farm-to-fork approach*”).
- Fair Trade International:** an independent, non-governmental, not-for-profit organization that promotes sustainable development and poverty alleviation and sets the Fairtrade standards. One organization (FLO-CERT) is responsible for auditing and certification of compliance against the Fairtrade standards.

- d) **Sustainable Agriculture Network - Rainforest Alliance:** network of conservation groups committed to community-based conservation initiatives and research. The certification program for SAN standards is operated by Rainforest Alliance.
- e) **BRC (British Retail Consortium) - BRCGS' Standards** guarantee the standardisation of quality, safety and operational criteria and ensure that manufacturers fulfil their legal obligations and provide protection for the end consumer. Certification to BRCGS' Standards is now often a fundamental requirement of leading retailers, manufacturers and food service organisations.
- f) **IFS (International Food Standard)** - The IFS comprise eight different food and non-food standards, covering the processes along the supply chain. However, IFS does not specify what these processes must look like but merely provides a risk-based assessment of them. The different standards are now used by manufacturers and retailers worldwide to meet new requirements for quality, transparency and efficiency resulting from globalisation.

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