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**Country:** Panama

**Post:** Panama City

**Report Category:** Retail Foods

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**Report Highlights:**

This report provides information to U.S. exporters of agricultural and related products on how to do business with the retail food sector in Panama. Despite the many global challenges, the retail industry is facing, including supply issues, increasing prices, consumer behavior is shaping the shopping experience. Panamanian retailers are fighting inflation and price increase by maintaining a focus on all operating costs, scaling automation across the organization to utilize their assets better and find new sources of business improvement.

# Market Fact Sheet: Panama

## Executive Summary

Panama's economy continues to strengthen in 2022. It was ranked as the second fastest growing economy in Latin America and the Caribbean, and its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate was around 15% in 2021. Panama's economy is based predominately on services (83 percent). Agriculture accounts for just a small portion (2.3 percent).

## Imports of Consumer-Oriented Products

Panama is the 24th largest market for U.S. consumer-oriented product exports and U.S. exports were valued at \$525.5 million in 2021. The United States has the largest market share followed by Brazil and Argentina. The customs clearance process in Panama is relatively fast and trouble-free. U.S. products are considered high quality and are well-accepted overall.

## Food Processing Industry

Panama's roughly 150 food processing companies include dairy, meat and poultry, fishery products, fruits, beverages and spirits, bakery, snacks, and pet food, among others.

## Food Retail Industry

High growth categories include snacks, processed meats, seafood, sauces, and condiments, processed fruits, and vegetables, and dairy products. Competition is based primarily on price and convenience.

## Quick Facts CY 2022

The U.S. – Panama Trade Promotion Agreement (TPA) entered into force on October 31, 2012, nearly 56 percent of U.S. agricultural exports became duty-free upon entry-into-force, with most of the remaining tariffs phased out over 15 years <https://www.fas.usda.gov/data/panama-fairs-country-report-4>

The TPA provides duty-free access to 110 Panamanian products that are exported to the United States market

### List of Top 10 Agriculture Products in Panama

- |                     |               |
|---------------------|---------------|
| 1) Specialty coffee | 6) Sugar cane |
| 2) Papaya           | 7) Cacao      |
| 3) Pineapple        | 8) Fish       |
| 4) Melons           | 9) Palm Heart |
| 5) Banana           | 10) Squash    |

Strengths	Weaknesses
Strong demand for consumer-oriented product	Recent governmental protectionist policies
Opportunities	Threats
Importers frequently search for new-to-market products to compete	Strong competition from other trade partners

### Top 10 Host Country Retailers

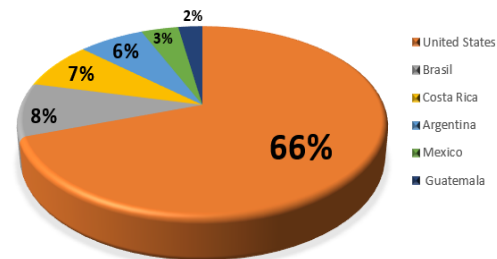
- |                |                    |
|----------------|--------------------|
| 1) Price Smart | 6) El Machetazo    |
| 2) Super 99    | 7) Sysco           |
| 3) El Rey      | 8) Felipe Motta    |
| 4) Super Xtra  | 9) Foodie Market   |
| 5) Riba Smith  | 10) Organica Store |

### GDP/Population

GDP: \$65 Billion (+15% over 2020)  
Population 4.395 million

Sources: APA Panama's Food Agency, FAS Panama's FAIRS Report

TOP FOOD & BEVERAGES EXPORTERS TO PANAMA



% Based on volume of foods exports

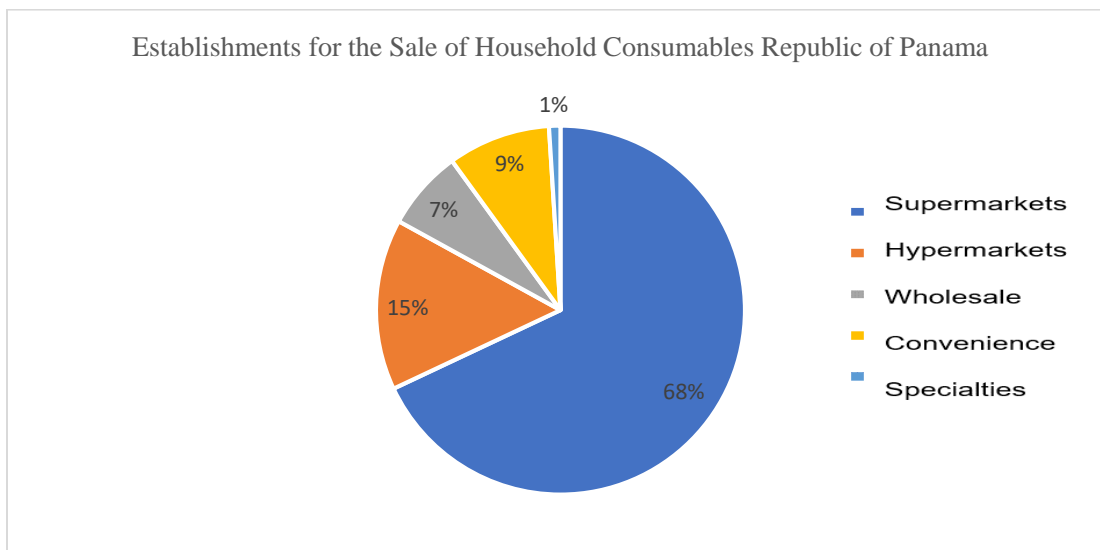
Source: [APA Panamanian Food Agency](#)

## SECTION I. MARKET SUMMARY

Supermarkets, hypermarkets, and independent food stores dominate the grocery sector in Panama. Supermarket chains are opening new stores in populated areas across the country and offering online grocery shopping and delivery services. There are more store brands in these chains and the brands allow retailers to offer customers more choice. High-end and specialty retail outlets continue to grow. Independent grocery and convenience stores are also opening stores in local neighborhoods. There are approximately 11,000 independent grocery and convenience stores in Panama. There are also mini-convenience stores that are conventionally sized stores with expanded foodservice as well as hyper-convenience stores with an extensive variety of product offerings and in-store seating for foodservice. Pharmacies have leveraged their small size, convenient locations, and proximity to consumers to offer more consumer-oriented products such as canned and dry food, snacks, dairy, ethnic specialties, wine, beer, and pet food.

**E-Commerce in Panama:** New e-commerce ecosystems have emerged as a more significant part of where and how consumers shop. Retailers have invested in new platforms to keep competing in the business, looking for an alternative that facilitates the shopping process of online browsing and new product discovery. Retail strategies such as subscription models, paid memberships, apps for mobile payments, word of mouth for product reviews, and social media influencers facilitate the promotion of new brands entering the market.

### Establishments for the Sale of Household Consumables.



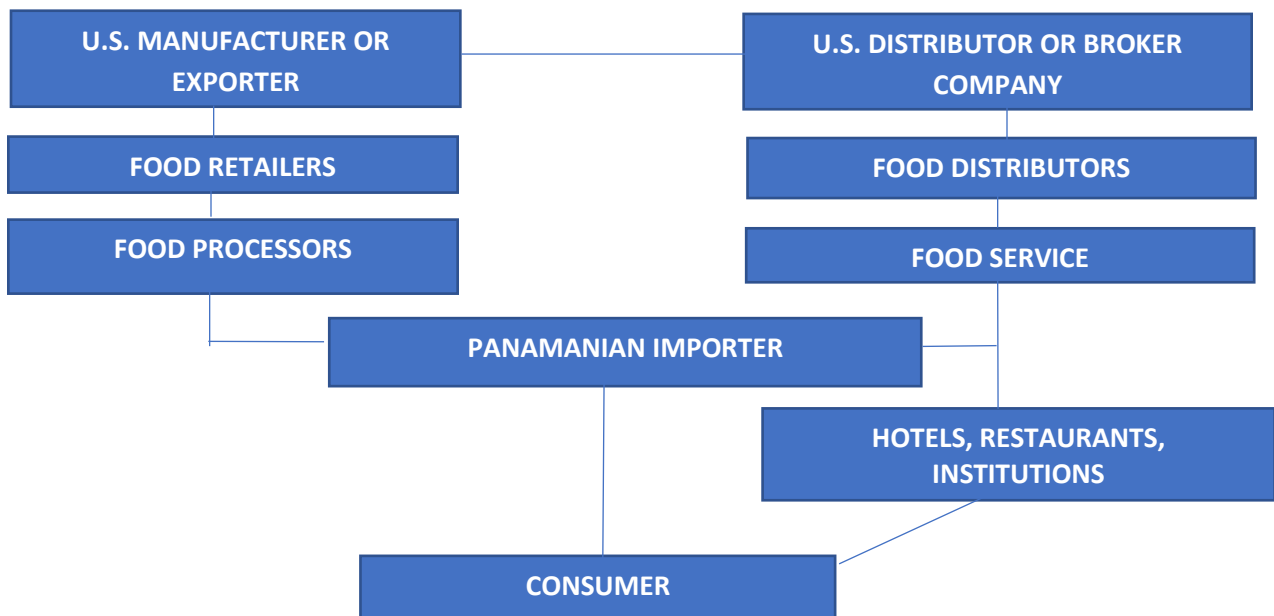
Source: Retail Center Panama CEREP [www.retailpanama.com](http://www.retailpanama.com)

**Table 2. Advantages & Challenges**

ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES FACING U.S. PRODUCTS IN THE RETAIL SECTOR IN PANAMA	
ADVANTAGES	CHALLENGES
Shipping from the United States to Panama has improved since the Panama Canal expansion.	Growth in competition from Chinese food and beverage imports.
Local retailers and distributors usually negotiate exclusive contracts with U.S. exporters.	U.S. exporters prefer to work with larger markets that generate higher volumes.
Robust e-commerce and delivery service platforms nationwide among top retailers for consumer-oriented products.	45% of the population willing to make purchase online.
Local importers frequently search for new-to-market products to compete. Big and small chains attend U.S. food trade shows to keep up with market trends and update their portfolios of food products.	Recent governmental protectionist policies make importing food, beverages, and agricultural products more burdensome.
Many tourists visit Panama and there is a large U.S. expatriate community.	Strong competition in the following sectors: snacks and processed food (China and Central America), fruits (Chile, Mexico, and Peru), grains and oils (Argentina, Canada and Brazil), meat (Canada), dairy products (Costa Rica, Argentina, New Zealand and Australia).

**SECTION II. ROAD MAP FOR MARKET ENTRY**

**Table 2. Panama: Market Structure**



## Entry Strategy

Panama has an open economy and relatively few market access issues. U.S. products are viewed as high-quality and are well accepted. The customs clearance process in Panama is relatively fast and trouble-free for U.S. exporters that comply with local requirements. As a result of the U.S.-Panama Trade Promotion Agreement in 2012, most import duties were reduced or will be phased out to be duty-free in a few years. See [Eyes on Panama video](#).

**Table 3. Panama's Top Retailers**

WHOLESALEERS	NUMBER OF STORES	WEBSITE
PriceSmart, Inc.	8	<a href="http://www.pricemart.com">www.pricemart.com</a>
Sysco	3	<a href="http://syscopanama.com/pty/">http://syscopanama.com/pty/</a>
RETAILERS		
Super 99	47	<a href="http://www.super99.com">www.super99.com</a>
El Rey	31	<a href="http://www.gruporey.com.pa">www.gruporey.com.pa</a>
Riba Smith	8	<a href="http://www.ribasmith.com">www.ribasmith.com</a>
El Machetazo	11	<a href="http://www.elmachtetazo.com">www.elmachtetazo.com</a>
Super Xtra	30	<a href="http://www.superextra.com">www.superextra.com</a>
Jumbo Market	3	<a href="http://www.jumbomarket.com.pa">www.jumbomarket.com.pa</a>
SPECIALTY STORES		
Orgánica Store	5	<a href="http://www.organicastore.com">www.organicastore.com</a>
Felipe Motta	12	<a href="http://www.felipemotta.com">www.felipemotta.com</a>
Deli Gourmet	8	<a href="http://www.granddeligourmet.net">www.granddeligourmet.net</a>
Super Kosher	1	<a href="http://www.skosher.com">www.skosher.com</a>
La Casa del Jamón	1	<a href="http://www.hnosgago.com">www.hnosgago.com</a>
Entremas (Tzanetatos)	3	<a href="http://www.tzanetatos.com">www.tzanetatos.com</a>
Pretelt Meats	4	<a href="http://www.preteltmeats.com">www.preteltmeats.com</a>
Foodie Specialty Supermarket	2	<a href="http://www.foodiepa.com">www.foodiepa.com</a>
ZAZ Food Store	8	<a href="http://www.zaz.com.pa">www.zaz.com.pa</a>
Va y Ven/ Terpel	10+	<a href="http://www.terpelpanama.com">www.terpelpanama.com</a>
Quick Shops/ Terpel	28	<a href="http://www.terpelpanama.com">www.terpelpanama.com</a>
WET MARKETS		
Sea Food Public Market	1	
San Felipe Neri Public Market	1	<a href="https://mupa.gob.pa/mercados/">https://mupa.gob.pa/mercados/</a>
Central Agricultural Market (Abastos)	1	
Mi Tienda (IMA)	221	<a href="http://ima.gob.pa/app/vermapa1.php">http://ima.gob.pa/app/vermapa1.php</a>
Cold chain National Markets S.A.	4	<a href="http://www.cadenadefrio.com.pa">http://www.cadenadefrio.com.pa</a>

FAS Panama’s [Sabor USA](#) plays an important role in the promotion of U.S. consumer-oriented products in Panama. With a complete digital platform, Sabor USA works with over 40 U.S. trade associations targeting the end consumer and a growing list of U.S. brands and Panamanian importers, distributors, and retailers. The platform develops creative content under #UnidosPorLosSabores (United by flavor), typically utilizing local talent from the culinary and food influencers fields to connect and promote U.S. brands.

### SECTION III. COMPETITION

The United States faces stiff competition from other agriculture exporting countries. In addition to the United States, Panama has free trade agreements with Canada, the European Union, Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Chile, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, Singapore, Israel, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

#### Top competitors include:

- Central American countries and China (snack and processed food products)
- Chile, Mexico, and Peru (fruits and vegetables)
- Argentina, Canada, Brazil, and Guyana (grain and oilseeds)
- Canada (meat products)
- Costa Rica, Argentina, New Zealand, and Australia (dairy products)

**Table 4. High Demand Agricultural Products and Main Suppliers to Panama**

PANAMA'S IMPORTED AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS IN HIGH DEMAND AND MAIN SUPPLIERS			
PRODUCT CATEGORY	MAJOR SUPPLY SOURCES	STRENGTHS	ADVANTAGES & DISADVANTAGES OF LOCAL SUPPLIERS
Corn	U.S. and Argentina	Competitive Price	Insufficient local production
Rice	U.S., Guyana, and Brazil	Competitive Price	Insufficient local production
Pork & Potatoes	U.S. and Canada	Competitive Price	Insufficient local production
Onions	U.S., Spain, and Chile	Competitive Price	Low local seasonal production
Fresh Fruits (apples, pears, grapes)	U.S. and Chile	Different growing season- not real competition	Not produced locally
Snacks	U.S., Costa Rica, Colombia, Guatemala, México and China	Competitive Price--U.S. product is preferred	Limited local production

## SECTION IV. BEST PRODUCT PROSPECTS

### Consumer Preferences with Good Sales Potential for The Market

Panamanians are consuming more convenience foods and more functional food that offers health benefits beyond their nutritional value. These trends have improved prospects for U.S. food exports and created import demand in the following categories at specialty stores and at the most popular retail outlets:

**Table 5. Top Prospects for U.S. Consumer Products for Specialty Stores**

Health and Wellness	Spices	Beverages	Botanical Ingredients	Snacks
Low Fat	Turmeric	Matcha GreenTea	Ginger	Oat Proteins
Low Sodium	Rosemary	Kambucha	Lemongrass	Tortilla Chips
Gluten Free	Paprika	Infused drinks	Hibiscus	Corn Chips
Sugar Free	Chilli	Drink Mashups	Ginsen	Popcorn
Plant Based	Ginger	Milk Alternatives		Frozen treats

**\*Drink Mashups:** From cold-brew coffee with maple water to iced tea, hard seltzers.

**\*Dairy free plant based:** Almond and soy milk dominates this segment, but oat milk is growing fast.

**\*Functional beverages:** Consider important for everyday life. The ready to mix or brew form, beverages powders, liquid drink enhancers, dry coffee/tea.

**Table 6. Top Prospects for U.S. Consumer-Oriented Exports to Panama**

TOP CONSUMER-ORIENTED PRODUCT PROSPECTS FOR PANAMA	
PRODUCTS	DESCRIPTION
Alcoholic beverage	Liquor, beer and wine
Bakery Ingredients	Baking mixes, dried fruits & nuts, fillings, chocolate, whey, yeast, food coloring, etc.
Beef	Fresh, chilled, frozen of high quality (USDA Prime and Choice)
Condiments	Mayonnaise, salad dressings, sauces (BBQ, marinating, soy) mustard, spices, etc.
Cooking ingredients	Vinegar, cider, vegetable oil (corn, sunflower, soybean, canola, olive, tomato paste and puree, etc.)
Dairy Products	Milk, cheese, butter, whipping cream, yogurt, ice cream
Delicatessen	Processed meat and poultry
Frozen Foods	Vegetables, fruits, ready to eat meals, ice cream
Fruits	Fresh, frozen, canned, dried
Mixed drinks, blends	Dried, powder
Non-alcoholic beverage	Juices, coffee, tea, soft drinks, and energy drinks
Pork	Fresh, chilled, frozen
Potatoes	Fresh, Frozen, Pre-cooked, dehydrated
Poultry	Frozen chicken, turkey
Prepared food	Ready to eat single meals (Breakfast, lunch or dinner + snacks)
Preserved fruit, jam, spread	Preserved fruit, jam, spread

Processed food	Products such as cereals, canned foods, value added rice, noodle, dairy products etc.
Seafood	Fresh, chilled, frozen salmon, crab, scallop, oysters, octopus
Snacks	Cookies, salty snacks, crackers, nuts
Soup, Soup bases, broth	Canned, dried/powder
Vegetables	Fresh, frozen, canned, preserved
Wine & Beer	Spirits, cider, craft beer

## SECTION V. KEY CONTACTS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

U.S. EMBASSY IN PANAMA	
U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)	Agpanamacity@fas.usda.gov
Foreign Agricultural Service	<a href="https://pa.usembassy.gov/agricultural-affairs-office/">https://pa.usembassy.gov/agricultural-affairs-office/</a>
Telephone:	(507) 317-5297/ (507) 317-5801
Economic Section, U.S. Department of State	PNM-ECU@state.gov
Telephone:	(507) 317 5000
U.S. Commercial Service	<a href="http://www.buyusa.gov/panama/en/">www.buyusa.gov/panama/en/</a>
Telephone:	(507) 317-5000

For further information, please see GAIN reports from FAS Panama, such as the Exporter Guide, and the Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards report. Both are available here at [GAIN FAS USDA](#).

### Attachments:

No Attachments