

Required Report: Required - Public Distribution

Date: June 30, 2025

Report Number: IN2025-0036

Report Name: Exporter Guide Annual

Country: India

Post: New Delhi

Report Category: Exporter Guide

Prepared By: Shivani Pandey and Priyal Thakur

Approved By: Joanna Brown, Agricultural Attaché

Report Highlights:

India presents both significant opportunities and notable challenges for U.S. food and beverage exports. As the world's fastest-growing major economy and currently the fifth largest globally, India is projected to rise to third place by 2028. With nearly 65 percent of its population under the age of 35 and a rapidly growing work force, consumer demand is shifting toward diverse, high-quality, and health-conscious food and beverage options. This demand is further propelled by increasing affluence, rapid digitalization, and the growth of organized retail across emerging urban centers. However, U.S. exporters face several hurdles, including high tariffs, inconsistent and complex regulatory frameworks, and strong competition from both domestic and international suppliers. This report will provide details about the market and highlight opportunities and challenges for U.S. exporters.

Executive Summary: India is a lower middle-income country and in 2024, India’s GDP reached \$3.9 trillion, positioning the country as the 5th largest economy in the world and the largest, most influential economy in South Asia. India is a major producer of food and agricultural products and a leading player in the global marketplace.

Consumer-Oriented Agricultural Imports

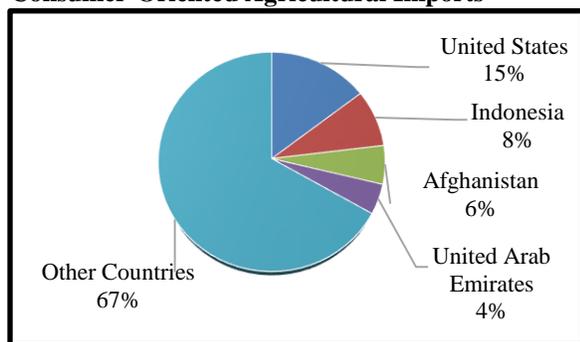


Chart 1: Top Exporting Countries to India

Food Retail Industry: India’s retail sector contributes around 10 percent to the national GDP, with food and grocery making up the largest segment—accounting for nearly 65 percent of total retail sales.

Food Processing Industry: India’s food processing sector is being driven largely by rising demand for snacking options across major urban areas in cities classified as tier I, II and III.¹ This sector offers a unique opportunity to U.S. exporters for introducing their wide range of processed, raw, fresh, and packaged food items and other ingredients.

Food Service Industry: India’s food service sector contributes nearly two percent to the national GDP. This sector is driven by the strong presence of global quick service restaurant (QSR) brands such as Domino’s, Pizza Hut, KFC, McDonald’s, Subway and others. There’s also a strong institutional sector driven by the wedding industry and a growing tourism and hospitality sector in India.

¹ [Decoding Indian Cities Classifications in Tier I, II, III, IV](#)

Quick Facts CY 2024

India’s Imports of Consumer-Oriented Products: \$8.4 billion

List of Top 10 Growth Products in Host Country

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1) Pulses | 2) Tree nuts |
| 3) Cotton | 4) Sugar and sweeteners |
| 5) Spices | 6) Fresh fruits |
| 7) Chocolates | 8) Processed fruits |
| 9) Distilled spirits | 10) Ethanol |

Food Industry by Channels (U.S. billion)

Retail Food Industry	\$618 billion
Food Service-HRI	\$ 176 billion
Food Processing	\$367 billion
Food and Agriculture Exports	\$54 billion

Top 10 Host Country Retailers

<u>Reliance retail</u>	<u>D-Mart</u>
<u>Spencer</u>	<u>More Supermarket</u>
<u>Ratnadeep</u>	<u>Lulu Hyper Market</u>
<u>Spar</u>	<u>Modern Bazaar</u>
<u>Natures Basket</u>	<u>Food Stories</u>

GDP/Population

Population: 1.44 billion
 GDP: 3.19 trillion
 GDP per capita: \$2,710

Source: IMF

Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>The United States is regarded as a reliable supplier with scalable production capacity.</p> <p>U.S. food products are perceived as safe, premium, and high quality.</p>	<p>Difficulty in complying with India’s labeling requirements and less competitive due to higher price points. Shorter shelf life of perishable U.S. products.</p>
Opportunities	Threats
<p>Recent reductions in tariffs on select U.S. food products.</p> <p>Increasing buying power and expansion of grocery sector in e-commerce.</p>	<p>Tariff and non-tariff trade barriers.</p> <p>Inconsistent regulatory environment.</p> <p>Intense local/global competition.</p>

Section I: Market Overview

India is currently the most populous country in the world, with a population exceeding 1.4 billion, accounting for approximately 18 percent of the global population. As the world's fifth-largest economy, India continues to demonstrate robust economic growth with an estimated GDP growth rate of 6.2 percent in 2025. In addition to India's growing GDP, other macroeconomic factors like consumer spending and urbanization are informing the overall business climate. A significant insight from India's [2023-2024 Household Consumption Expenditure Survey](#) reveals that beverages, refreshments, and processed foods account for the largest share of expenditures in the food baskets of both rural and urban households. Additionally, in March, India's food inflation experienced a notable decrease, reaching 2.69 percent, the lowest rate since November 2021.² The consumer market is projected to grow by 46 percent by 2030, positioning it as the second largest in the world. Specifically, consumer spending is expected to climb to \$4.3 trillion by 2030, up from \$2.4 trillion in 2024.³ To add to these positive trends, India's unemployment rate slightly dropped to 4.9 percent in 2024, down from 5 percent in 2023.⁴

In addition to the aforementioned factors, the overall business environment in India is on the rise, bolstered by government initiatives such as swift infrastructure investments that have fostered growth in manufacturing and supply chain development. Recent reforms also include projects aimed at digitalization and expanded financial credit options. Additionally, the government's [Production Linked Incentive Scheme](#) is stimulating production in targeted sectors like food processing, providing output-based incentives that promote scalability. This presents a promising opportunity for U.S. exporters of tree nuts, processed fruits, and various other ingredients.

Table 1: Advantages and Challenges for U.S. Exporters

ADVANTAGES	CHALLENGES
The U.S. is considered a reliable supplier with scalable production capabilities.	U.S. exporters often struggle to meet Indian importers' specific requirements.
The U.S. offers a wide range of high-quality food and agricultural products.	High tariffs and non-tariff barriers.
India is seeing more international tourism and business travel that values U.S. products	Strong competition from both local and international suppliers.
A rise in India's global cuisine restaurants and international foreign dining franchises in India offers opportunities for U.S. goods.	Limited readiness of the U.S. exporters to handle small, consolidated orders.
India's expanding middle class with a preference for globally diverse and healthier food products favors U.S. products.	Stringent regulations on biotech foods and certain additives.

² [PIB press release](#)

³ [Mint press article](#)

⁴ [Unemployment rate declines marginally](#)

India's changing consumer preferences toward organic, vegan, and health-conscious products also favor U.S. products.	Geographical proximity-based competition offering lower freight costs
--	---

Section II: Exporter Business Tips

India offers significant opportunities for U.S. food exporters, driven by its expanding middle class, rapid urbanization, and growing preference for healthier and premium food options. However, succeeding in this market requires an understanding of local customs, consumer behavior, and business practices.

Market Research:

- India is a diverse market and a one-size-fits-all approach will not be effective. Exporters need to have a tailored approach that is customized by region and demographic.
- Direct exposure by visiting the market is essential in understanding consumer behavior, target demographics, and regional differences.
- Due diligence is necessary in identifying and selecting a partner which can be an importer, distributor, or retailer. Once you find a reliable partner, they will guide you and provide support in navigating the vast market. This is especially useful for smaller companies without a large marketing presence. Additionally, the U.S. exporter can reach out to Post for support. Refer to section VI for contact details.
- Consider partnering with FAS and State and Regional Trade Groups (SRTGs) such as: Food Export-Midwest, Food Export-Northeast, Southern U.S. Trade Association (SUSTA) and Western U.S. Agricultural Trade Association (WUSATA). USDA also offers various export support programs like the Quality Samples Program (QSP), Market Access Program (MAP) and Emerging Markets Program (EMP). Please refer to [FAS programs](#) for detailed information.
- Building trust and relationships is important within the market, which comes from long-term commitment. Indian business culture values personal interaction and reliability over time.
- For intellectual property (IP) sensitive products, take proactive steps to secure rights, as enforcement mechanisms in India are still evolving and the legal support on these matters is limited and time consuming.

Local Business Customs and Trends:

- Respect for seniority is key as hierarchy matters in Indian businesses. Address the most senior person first in meetings.
- Although personal connections, trust, and face-to-face meetings carry more weight than formal agreements, they are of utmost importance to safeguard the deal.
- Expect detailed discussions and multiple negotiation rounds. Patience is essential.
- Giving small gifts is acceptable, especially during festivals.
- The following regional food preferences should be considered in your engagements:

Region	Key Preferences
North India	Wheat-based diet, strong dairy consumption, and fresh and dried fruits consumption.
South India	Rice, coconut-based products, seafood, spicy dishes, and dried fruit consumption.
West India	Mix of vegetarian/non-vegetarian foods, street food, and fruits.
East India	Rice, fish-based dishes, and a love for sweets.

General Consumer Tastes and Trends:

- Demand has surged for foods that are multifunctional and support overall health (e.g. mental, gut, and immunity).
- While price remains a factor, more consumers are now seeking better value. Offer a range of products with varying price points and use promotions to attract budget-sensitive shoppers.
- Indian consumers are increasingly open to international cuisines and fusion foods. Products that blend global ingredients with local tastes are well-received.
- A growing number of consumers are choosing products that are gluten free, vegan, or provide meat substitutes. Conscious consumption of sustainably sourced products is on the rise, especially among urban youth.
- [Direct to consumer \(D2C\)](#)⁵ is growing in India so working with a local manufacturing unit to produce local/regional food products with added U.S. ingredients will be beneficial.

Section III: Import Food Standards, Regulations, and Procedures

U.S. exporters planning to enter the Indian market must understand the regulatory framework and documentations required. The following details outline the stages and stakeholders involved in this process. U.S. exporters should ensure that all licenses and related documents are processed before shipping goods. Please refer to the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI's) latest guide, the [2019 Edition of the Manual for Food Imports](#) for details on requirements to export food products to India.

Customs Clearance: Navigating the customs clearance process requires adherence to detailed regulations and protocols set by the [Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs](#) (CBIC). U.S. exporters must ensure all required documents are correctly prepared and submitted to avoid delays and additional costs. Key steps in the customs clearance process include:

- I. Pre-arrival documentation: ensure all necessary documents are prepared, including the bill of lading, commercial invoice, packing list, certificate of origin, and health certificates.
- II. Submission to authorities: submit documents to the Indian customs authorities for verification. It's crucial to follow all CBIC guidelines precisely.

⁵ [Direct to consumer](#)

- III. Inspection and compliance: customs officials may inspect the goods to ensure compliance with Indian standards and regulations.
- IV. Payment of duties and taxes: pay all applicable duties, tariffs, and taxes. Accurate calculation and timely payment can prevent delays. Please refer to the link for [India trade portal](#) for tariff information and SPS related requirement.

Documents Generally Required by the Country Authority for Imported Food:

In addition to major documents like an importer license issued by FSSAI, other documentation may include an import export code (IEC) from the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), bill of entry, commercial invoice, packing list, bill of lading, and certificate of origin. For more detailed information on required documents please refer to [Food Safety and Standards \(Import\) Regulations, 2017](#).

Country Language Labeling Requirements: India has specific labeling requirements for food products, which can be in English or Hindi. Labels must adhere to the FSSAI's (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2020. For detailed instruction on labeling guidelines, please refer to the latest [FAIRS Annual Country Report - New Delhi, India -IN2024-0061](#).

Tariffs and FTAs: India imposes various tariffs on imported food products. These rates can vary significantly based on the product category. U.S. exporters can review the CBIC portal for applicable tariffs and the Indian Customs Electronic Gateway ([ICEGATE](#)) that provides e-filing services to trade, cargo carriers, and other trading partners electronically. It also hosts a duty calculator that can be used to identify applicable basic customs duty on imported goods. U.S. exporters can also refer to the [Indian Trade Portal](#) which is a useful search engine for tariffs managed by the Ministry of Commerce.

Additionally, understanding the impact of trade deals including free trade agreements (FTAs) that India has with other countries can help in strategizing market entry. India has recently signed trade agreements with Australia - the [India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement \(INDAUS ECTA\)](#) and the United Kingdom - [India-United Kingdom](#) FTA. Details of India's trade agreements can be accessed on the [Ministry of Commerce & Industry](#) website.

Trademarks and Patents Market Research: Protecting intellectual property is crucial when entering the Indian market. Registering trademarks and patents with [India's Controller General of Patents, Designs, and Trademarks](#) ensures legal protection and aids in brand establishment. This step is essential to safeguard against potential infringements and to build a strong market presence. The trademarks are protected under the [trademarks Act \(1999\) and the Trademarks Rules \(2002\)](#). Foreign firms can register trademarks through a local agent by applying at the [Office of the Registrar of trademarks](#). The process can take three to five years to be officially accepted and notified. For more information, visit [Intellectual Property India](#).

Section IV: Market Sector Structure and Trends

India's rapidly growing food and beverage market presents opportunities for U.S. exporters, particularly across urban areas known as Tier-II and Tier-III cities. These once overlooked cities are now thriving hubs of economic activity, digital engagement, and consumer demand. Businesses historically focused on Tier-1 areas like Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai and Bengaluru are now recalibrating strategies to capture the untapped potential in these secondary markets. U.S. exporters are encouraged to engage with Indian partners importers, distributors, and retailers to realign the market entry and expansion plans accordingly. All three sectors mentioned below provide ample of opportunities to U.S. exporters for various products including tree nuts, fresh fruits, processed fruits, processed and packaged food products, alcoholic and nonalcoholic beverages and specialty food items.

Food Retail Sector: The Indian food and grocery retail sector, comprising of approximately 15 million *Kirana* (mom and pop) stores, remains predominantly unorganized. However, the modern retail segment is steadily growing, supported by organized players like [Reliance retail](#) (India's largest food retailer with over 2,700 stores), [D-Mart](#), [Natures Basket](#), [Modern Bazaar](#), [LeMarche](#), and [FoodStories](#). According to industry reports, the food and grocery sector was the top segment accounting for 65 percent of total retail value (\$952 billion), reaching approximately \$618 billion in 2024.^{6 7} Additionally, the online grocery market was valued at \$8.8 billion in 2024 and is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 44.9 percent from 2025 to 2030, fueled by demand for convenience, digital adoption, and instant delivery models.⁸

Food Service – Hotel, Restaurant & Institutional (HRI) Sector

India's HRI sector is witnessing robust growth, propelled by rising domestic and international travel and increasing urbanization. Currently, the total number of hotels registered in India include 371 five-star, 355 four-star, and 524 three-star hotels. Key players include the [Taj](#), [Oberoi](#), [ITC](#), [Marriot](#), [Hyatt](#), [Leela](#), [The Park](#), and [Lemon Tree](#). The number of international tourists visiting India reached 9.5 million in 2023, which is a 47 percent increase from 2022.⁹ U.S. restaurant chains like Domino's, KFC, McDonald's, and Subway dominate the Quick Service Restaurant (QSR) segment with menus adapted to Indian preferences and palates. According to recent reports India's hotel industry is valued at \$24 billion in 2024 and is estimated to reach \$31 billion by 2031 with an CAGR of 4.73 percent¹⁰. Similarly, India's food service sector (conventional foodservice, centralized foodservice, prepared foodservice, assembly-serve foodservice) was valued at \$49.8 billion in 2024, and it's estimated to reach \$116 billion by 2032 according to industry reports¹¹. Another major sector which is part of the food

⁶ [Statista- Food retail in India - statistics & facts](#)

⁷ [India Retail Market Size and Share](#)

⁸ [Grand view Research](#)

⁹ [Ministry of Tourism press release](#)

¹⁰ [2024: A booming year for the hospitality and tourism industry](#)

¹¹ [CMI report](#)

service sector is the Indian wedding industry, which was approximately valued at \$103 billion in 2024, and it is expected grow at 14 percent from 2025 to 2030¹².

Food Processing Sector

The food processing sector, which is dubbed as India’s “sunrise sector,” plays an important upcoming role and is central to economic development, employment generation, and foreign investment. With a seven-year average growth rate of 7.3 percent, employment contribution of approximately 12 percent, valued at \$367 billion in 2024, and a projected market size of \$735.5 billion by 2032, this sector can provide huge opportunity for U.S. food ingredients for further processing.¹³ For additional information, refer to the [Food Processing Ingredients Report 2025](#).

Best Consumer-Oriented Product Prospects

In 2023 and 2024, India removed retaliatory tariffs and reduced other tariffs on certain U.S. tree nuts and other horticultural products. Additionally, between January and April 2025, India imported \$459 million of U.S. tree nuts, marking a 27 percent increase from the same period last year. Earlier this year, the Indian government announced a tariff reduction on U.S. bourbon whiskey from 150 percent to 100 percent that could provide greater opportunities for U.S. exporters. For additional information, see [India Modifies Tariff on US Bourbon](#) GAIN report.

In addition to tree nuts and distilled spirits, the following products offer best product prospects:

Product	Post Analysis
Tree nuts	Demand is driven by traditional consumption habits and cuisines. For example, Indian households consume five almonds in the morning in North India as part of their regular diet. Also, there is rising health consciousness and demand for nutritious snacks which is fueling the imports of tree nuts in the HRI, retail and food processing sector.
Fresh fruit	Demand for high-quality, fresh fruits are swelling in India due to the growing buying power of Indian households, greater health consciousness, and more awareness through international travel.
Processed fruits	Due to their health benefits and versatility, processed fruits have seen huge growth in imports. Whether it’s the use of cranberries in a <i>chaat</i> (street snack) or dates used as supplement for sugar in bakery or figs, apricots, prunes, raisins etc. all are in high demand. The U.S. ranks at number five for processed fruits supplier to India with strong competition from the Middle East.
Distilled spirits	Demand for premium and imported quality whiskey and other spirits will continue to grow because of increasing brand awareness and availability of disposable income.
Processed products	Growing demand for high quality confectionary, condiment, sauces, chocolates, packaged and ready to eat food items.

¹² [Grand View Research report](#)

¹³ [Imarc group report](#)

Other Key Market Trends to Watch:

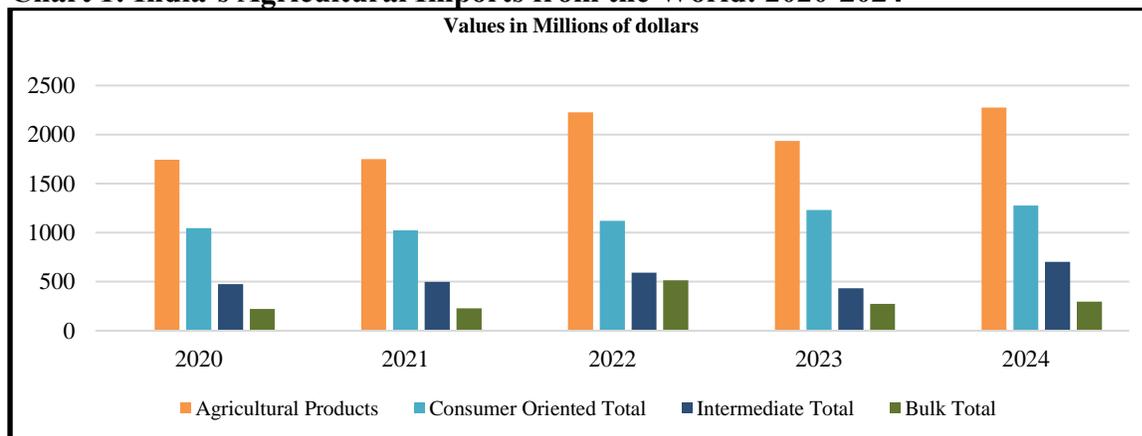
10-Minute Grocery Delivery (Quick Commerce): Services like [Blinkit](#), [Zepto](#), and [Swiggy Instamart](#) are redefining urban consumer habits by offering near-instant delivery of household essentials (e.g., tree nuts, packaged snacks). Quick Commerce’s presence is strongest in Tier-I and expanding to Tier-II and Tier-III cities.

Social Commerce & Digital Influence: India has over 270 million online shoppers. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are increasingly used for product discovery and purchases.¹⁴ More broadly, India’s internet users reached nearly 820 million in 2024 and supported the growth of social commerce estimated to be around \$7.2 billion. Relatedly, digital storytelling and influencer marketing are critical for successful product launches. India’s evolving consumer landscape shaped by digitization, economic expansion, and a diverse population makes it a high-potential yet complex market. With the large number of internet users and rising affluence, U.S. food and beverage exporters are well-positioned to succeed by adapting to regional tastes, leveraging e-commerce, aligning with reliable local partners and creating a long-term strategy for India.

Section V: Agricultural and Food Imports

In 2024, India imported \$42 billion worth of agricultural and related products. The U.S. ranked sixth among suppliers, with \$2.3 billion in exports to India. While this shows strong potential, competition remains high with other trading partners.

Chart 1: India’s Agricultural Imports from the World: 2020-2024



India’s top agricultural imports from the world:

- **Edible Oils:** India is one of the world’s largest importers of edible oils, bringing in \$16.9 billion in 2024. Palm, sunflower, and soybean oils are the main categories. Top suppliers are Indonesia, Malaysia, and Argentina. While the United States is not a top player here, there’s opportunities for U.S. soybean oil when prices are competitive.
- **Pulses:** India is the top global importer of pulses, especially when local harvests fall short. In

¹⁴ [Bain & company report](#)

2024, imports reached \$5 billion. Peas leads the category. Myanmar, Canada, and Australia dominate, but U.S. chickpeas, lentils, and dry peas have growth potential when tariffs permit.

- **Fruits and Tree Nuts:** This is a growing sector. Demand is rising for apples, kiwis, berries, almonds, walnuts, and pistachios. Health trends and premium gifting help drive imports.
- **Processed Foods and Beverages:** there's been rapid growth seen in packaged snacks, sauces, condiments, prepared meals, and drinks. Consumers seek global flavors and convenience. There's growing interest in U.S. products, especially among younger, urban shoppers via retail and e-commerce.

Chart 2: Top Ten India Imported Consumer-Oriented, Bulk, Intermediate and Other Agricultural Related Products

No.	Product	India imports from the world (\$ million)	Top exporter countries market share (percent)	U.S. market share (percent)
1.	Pulses	5137	Myanmar (23.5, Canada 20, Australia 11.9.	1.46
2.	Tree nuts	3353	Tanzania 9.7, Togo 6.7, Ghana 5.6.	32
3.	Forest products	2491	Indonesia 7.5, Vietnam 7.23, Malaysia 7.23 Australia 5.6	3.84
4.	Sugar and Sweeteners	1819	Brazil 97.8 UAE 0.53, Germany 0.27.	0.25
5.	Cotton	1001	Australia 24.72, Egypt 11.56, Brazil 8.08.	20.34
6.	Chocolate and Cocoa	689	Indonesia 64.9, Vietnam 9.66, Malaysia 4.91 Italy 4.06	0.29
7.	Processed fruits	624	Afghanistan 41.9, UAE 22.4, Iraq 12.6	2.4
8.	Other intermediate products	575	China 21.4, Australia 17.6, New Zealand 8.6	3.52
9.	Distilled spirits	573	UK 56.5, Singapore 13.6, UAE 9.03	2.44
10.	Ethanol	489	Brazil 7.17, UK 2.6, Germany 0.14.	89.5

Other noteworthy products include feed and fodders, dairy, seafood coffee, bakery goods cereals, pasta and non-alcoholic beverages.

Section VI: Key Contacts and Further Information

Government Data Sources

- [Ministry of Food Processing Industries](#)
- [Legal Metrology \(Weights and Measures\)](#)
- [The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India \(Food Regulations\)](#)
- [Ministry of Commerce and Industry \(Trade\)](#)

Ministry and Regulatory Agency Contacts for Food Import Policies

Government Regulatory Agency Contacts				
Overall Food Safety Food Safety and Standards Authority of India	Legal Metrology Department of Consumer Affairs Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution	Phytosanitary Issues Plant Protection and Quarantine Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare	Livestock and Products Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare	Foreign Trade Directorate General of Foreign Trade Ministry of Commerce and Industries

Trade Associations

[Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry](#)

[Confederation of Indian Industry](#)

U.S. exporters seeking Indian agri-food market insights may refer to [FAS India - Agricultural and Agribusiness Consultants in India](#).

Foreign Agricultural Service

Embassy of the United States of America Chanakyapuri, New Delhi - 110 021, India Phone: +91-11-2419-8000 Email: agnewdelhi@fas.usda.gov Web: U.S. Embassy, New Delhi Twitter: @USDAIndia IG: @tasteofamericain	U.S. Consulate General C-49, G-Block, Bandra Kurla Complex, Bandra E, Mumbai - 400 051 Phone: +91-22-2672-4000 Email: agmumbai@fas.usda.gov Web: U.S. Consulate General Mumbai
---	---

For additional information and sector reports please visit:

FAS Homepage FAS India - Exporter Guide FAS India - Retail Foods	FAS India – Food Processing Ingredients FAS India - Food Service-Hotel Restaurant Institutional
--	--

Appendix I: BICO report for the last five years, U.S. agricultural imports into India. (Value in millions of dollars)

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Product	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value
Agricultural Products	1,744	1,750	2,228	1,936	2,275
Consumer Oriented Total	1,046	1,023	1,120	1,232	1,277
Intermediate Total	475	499	593	432	702
Bulk Total	223	227	515	273	296
	1,744	1,750	2,228	1,936	2,275

Source: [General Agreement on Trade in Services \(GATS\)](#)

Attachments:

No Attachments