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**Report Highlights:**

Zhengzhou, the capital of Henan Province, is emerging as a strategic inland hub for U.S. agricultural and food exports. With a population of over 13 million, an expanding middle class, and GDP growth of 5.7 percent in 2024, the city is driving regional demand for premium, safe, and diverse imported food products. Anchored by a robust logistics network and major e-commerce hubs Zhengzhou supports efficient cold chain distribution for perishable U.S. goods such as meats, seafood, dairy, and tree nuts. Growth in the food retail, HRI, and food processing sectors, along with expanding supermarkets and international restaurants, presents strong opportunities for U.S. exporters. While challenges like tariffs and domestic competition persist, the city's modernization, demand for high-quality ingredients, and digital transformation make Zhengzhou a gateway for accessing China's central and western markets.

## City Overview

Zhengzhou is located in the north-central part of Henan Province, at the boundary between the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River. As the principal capital, the city covers a total area of 7,567 square kilometers. In 2024, Zhengzhou's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) reached \$204.1 billion, marking a 5.7 percent increase compared with the same period in 2023. By the end of 2024, the permanent resident population stood at 13.086 million, with an urbanization rate of 81 percent, an increase of one percentage point from the previous year. Zhengzhou has emerged as a leading city in China's central and western region.



Zhengzhou's economy has rapidly diversified beyond traditional manufacturing to include electronics, food processing, automotive components, and modern services. Consumption power is increasing as middle- and upper-middle-class populations grow, contributing to demand for premium goods and imported food products. As income and urbanization continue to grow, Zhengzhou is positioned as a growing inland market and regional distributor for U.S. agri-food exports.

<b>Table 1: Zhengzhou City at a Glance 2024</b> (USD calculated using 2024 average exchange rate of 1 USD = 7.12 CNY)	
Province	Henan
Population	13.08 million
Land Area	7,446 km <sup>2</sup>
Gross Domestic Product (GDP)	\$204.1 billion
GDP per capita	\$15,604
Per capita disposable income	\$6,459.8
Growth in per capita disposable income	5 %
Total Retail Sales of Consumer Goods	\$82.6 billion
Tourism Revenue	\$28.6 billion
Foreign Direct Investment	\$78.08 million
Total Imports	\$28.29 billion
Total Exports	\$49.87 billion
<i>Source: Zhengzhou Economic and Social Development Report 2024</i>	

With the expansion of food processing, catering, HRI and livestock industries, there is increasing demand for food ingredients, feed ingredients as well as meat products. Zhengzhou plays a central role in China's national logistics, transportation, and manufacturing network. Its infrastructure, including one of China's busiest rail freight hubs and Zhengzhou Xinzheng International Airport, supports the city's role as an inland gateway for trade and distribution.

## National Logistics and Transportation Hub

Located at the crossroads of China's north-south and east-west corridors, Zhengzhou serves as a national multimodal gateway, leveraging its strategic location and integrated transport infrastructure - railways, highways, metro, airport, and logistics zones - to serve as a central node in China's passenger and freight networks as well as a key distribution center for both domestic and international trade, especially for imported food and Agri-products. The city's transport network forms a “米”-shaped hub, radiating high-speed rail lines nation-wide.

## Zhengzhou High-Speed Rail Network

“米”字型高铁



Source: Baidu.com

Zhengzhou Xinzheng International Airport (CGO) is one of the country's top cargo airports with global freight routes connecting to North America and Europe. In 2024, Zhengzhou Xinzheng International Airport's annual cargo and mail throughput exceeded 825, 100 metric tons, ranking as the sixth busiest cargo airport in China, attracting several new international carriers, including Lufthansa Cargo and Jet Airways, and added 19 new domestic and international cargo routes. From January to September 2024, Zhengzhou Airport—designated as a supervised entry point for imported fruits—handled 1,776.54 metric tons of fruit, a 352 percent increase year-on-year, with a cargo value of 54.96 million yuan, up 163.2 percent.

The city is also home to the Zhengzhou International Land Port, a key node on the China-Europe Railway Express, offering streamlined customs procedures and frequent freight train services to major European cities. Strategically positioned at the intersection of national highways G4 and G30, Zhengzhou enables one-day trucking coverage across central China. In addition, the city hosts major logistics parks, including the Zhengzhou Airport Economy Zone (ZAEZ), which houses distribution centers for leading e-commerce and logistics firms such as JD.com and Cainiao.

Zhengzhou's logistics advantages support efficient cold chain distribution and make it a growing center for importing and distributing U.S. meat, dairy, seafood, fruit, packaged food, and beverages. Its bonded warehouses and cross-border e-commerce capacity allow it to serve a market of over 300 million people in surrounding regions.

## Market for Imported Products

Over the past five years, Zhengzhou's population and GDP have maintained steady growth, ranking 9<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> respectively in China. In 2024, per capita disposable income rose by 5.0 percent, reaching \$6,463. Total imports and exports amounted to \$78 billion, reflecting a 0.8 percent increase. Among the three food market sectors of retail, HRI, and processing, retail and HRI offer the best opportunities for U.S. product entry in Zhengzhou. High-end supermarkets and international restaurants are expanding, fueled by a growing urban population seeking quality and variety. Local consumers value safety, nutrition, and brand reputation, all of which benefit U.S. products. E-commerce and cross-border platforms also provide a fast track for product introduction and brand testing. Growth in the food processing and catering industries is increasing demand for U.S. food ingredients and processed products.

### Retail Sector

Zhengzhou's wholesale ecosystem anchors Central China's agricultural supply chains through three core strengths: advanced logistics networks, value-added processing innovations, and crisis-resilient operations. This integrated system reinforces the city's role as the region's agricultural distribution hub, supported by its flagship markets, the price-setting Zhengzhou Grain Wholesale Market, the high-volume Wanbang International Agricultural Products Hub, and the globally connected Zhongyuan Seasons Aquatic Logistics Port and Zhengzhou International Agricultural Products Trading Center.



Source: ATO Beijing  
Dennis "Better" Supermarket

The food retail sector in Zhengzhou is dynamic and rapidly evolving, shaped by government policy, supply chain innovation, changing consumer behavior, and digital transformation. The sector is shifting from a scale-driven model to one focused on quality, experience, and digital engagement. Future growth will depend on supply chain refinement and appealing to younger consumers through cultural and technological innovation.

Zhengzhou is home to more than 215 large supermarkets with floor space exceeding 2,000 square meters. Dennis Group is the city's largest retailer, operating hypermarkets in 16 locations, approximately 147 Dennis convenience stores, and four "Better" supermarkets specializing in imported products.

China Resources Vanguard operates five supermarkets, including four standard locations and one Olé premium store. Yonghui Superstores, another key player, had about 19 stores in Zhengzhou as of early July 2024. Yonghui is upgrading select outlets using the "Pangdonglai model," a boutique-style reform inspired by a popular local retailer. As of June 3, 2025, six Yonghui stores in Zhengzhou adopted this model, reflecting a shift toward quality and customer experience over expansion. As of July 20, 2025,

Sam’s Club, owned by Walmart, had acquired land and begun construction in Zhengdong New District, with plans to open in 2026.

Key Retail Chain	Store Type	Number of Outlets	Targeted Consumers
Dennis Group	Hypermarket/Supermarket/Convenience Store	16 hypermarket and 147 convenience stores	Mainstream shoppers
Yonghui Superstores	Supermarket/ Yonghui Superstores	15	Mainstream shoppers
HeMa Fresh	Supermarket	6	Upper-middle-income consumers
China Resources Vanguard	Supermarket	5	Affluent shoppers
Metro	Membership Store	1 store is open and 1 will be open in 2025	Middle-and high-income consumers
Sam’s Club	Membership Store	1 will be open in 2026	Middle-and high-income consumers

Competition in Zhengzhou’s food retail market is intensifying with the emergence of new formats. Traditional retailers face increasing pressure from specialized import distributors that offer globally sourced products at competitive prices. Community-based chains are gaining ground by focusing on fresh produce and personalized service, achieving strong monthly sales. Consumer preferences are shifting toward premium and organic imports, which now account for a growing share of food expenditures. The arrival of international players like Sam’s Club is expected to further transform the high-end segment. Meanwhile, digital tools such as e-commerce platforms and livestream sales continue to expand, positioning Zhengzhou as a center for food retail innovation and supply chain modernization.

### HRI Sector

The HRI sector in Zhengzhou is dynamic and growing, with rising demand for international cuisines and upscale dining. While fast food chains such as McDonald’s, KFC, and Pizza Hut dominate volume, fine dining is increasingly popular in luxury hotels and business districts. U.S. beef, seafood, wine, and cheese are commonly used in Western-style restaurants. Premium steakhouses and barbecue chains showcase opportunities to promote U.S. meats and sauces.

Zhengzhou currently operates over 10 international luxury hotels (four/five-star), concentrated in Zhengdong New Area and Jinshui District, including flagship properties like JW Marriott, InterContinental Zhengzhou, and the high-occupancy Yonghe Platinum International Hotel. Three new additions—notably the art-focused THE GRAND HOUSE in CBD and Atour S Hotel (opening August 2025)—will further elevate the market. At least 15 major projects are in development, headlined by Hyatt’s Andaz in the Zhengdong Vientiane City complex (2026 debut) and seven Zhengdong New Area hotels from brands like Ritz-Carlton and Conrad. This expansion is fueled by Zhengzhou’s convention economy—Phase II of the Zhongyuan International Expo Center (opening August 2025) already drives 100 percent occupancy at existing luxury hotels during major events. By 2026, Zhengzhou aims to

surpass 5,000 luxury rooms (up from 3,500 today). Key to this shift is filling the ultra-luxury gap, leveraging cultural tourism and capitalizing on Zhengzhou's logistics hub status to attract global travelers.

Zhengzhou's restaurant sector is experiencing transformative growth, driven by record-breaking conventions and technological integration. The 2025 Zhengzhou Hotpot Ingredients Expo exemplifies this momentum, occupying 128,000–130,000 m<sup>2</sup> across 16 halls at the Zhongyuan International Expo Center—equivalent to five conventional exhibition centers—and attracting over 4,000 brands and 70,000 visitors on its opening day.

Zhengzhou's fine dining scene is evolving but lacks globally recognized upscale establishments. While major international luxury hotels (e.g., JW Marriott, InterContinental) operate premium restaurants in Zhengdong New Area, the city has no Black Pearl-listed restaurants (China's premier fine dining guide). Zhengzhou's high-end restaurants increasingly rely on imported ingredients to meet rising quality expectations, driven by three key factors: (1) Local culinary traditions emphasize staples like noodles and stews, creating gaps for premium proteins (e.g., wagyu beef, Alaskan king crab) and specialty items (truffles, artisanal cheeses); (2) Growing middle-class consumers—particularly Gen Z (people born about 1995 – 2010) seek authentic global dining experiences, fueling demand for Japanese Wagyu, French foie gras, and Mediterranean olive oils; (3) Supply chain innovations leverage Zhengzhou's 72-hour visa-free transit policy for air imports and -40°C ultra-freeze cold chain technology to maintain freshness for perishables like Norwegian salmon.

### Food Processing Industry

Henan, at the heart of China's wheat-maize belt, is the nation's top wheat-producing province, contributing around 28 percent of total output. In Zhengzhou, the Municipal Agriculture Bureau promotes “grain to table” integration through support for cooperatives, value chain development, and deep processing.

Zhengzhou is a major center for wheat-based food processing in China, particularly in frozen products like dumplings, glutinous rice balls, and zongzi, contributing over 60 percent of the national market. It also plays an important role in the instant noodle industry, holding about 20 percent of the national market share. The city has a well-developed industrial ecosystem supported by strong flour production capacity, cold-chain logistics, research and development, and major food companies.

Leading enterprises include Sanquan Foods, China's first publicly listed frozen food company; Synear Foods, known for its modern production lines and research facilities; and Baixiang Food Group, a major producer of noodles and seasonings with over nine billion yuan in annual sales. Together, these companies reflect Zhengzhou's position as a national leader in wheat-based food production with growing international reach. A major focus is on pre-prepared meals, with companies like Sanquan, Synear, and Qianwei Yanchu aiming to reach ¥10 billion in output by 2025.

Zhengzhou is a major pork processing hub in China, combining large-scale production, advanced equipment, and strong R&D capacity. As China's first inland meat import port since 2013, Zhengzhou initially focused U.S. meat imports on pork through key partnerships like Smithfield. WH Group (Shuanghui Development), the country's largest meat processor, operates a \$123.4 million modern

facility producing American-style bacon, ham, and sausages. Shuanghui Group is one of the largest U.S. meat importer in China, with annual purchases totaling approximately 380,000 metric tons in 2024—most of which are offal products. Other major players include Zhengzhou Meat United Processing Factory which is a more traditional meat processor focusing on local supply, cold-chain storage, and frozen food, with less emphasis on global branding or large-scale automation like Zhengzhou Shuanghui. Topin Group (Zhongpin Group) is a major player in China's meat processing and distribution industry, offering vertically integrated production capabilities from farm to retail with pig processing capacity of 950,000 tons annually.

The city's robust cold-chain infrastructure—with bonded warehouses and smart tracking—supports efficient meat trade. While beef imports have grown, niche U.S. products like chicken paws remain in demand. Zhengzhou's food processing industry creates significant demand for U.S. food ingredients and meat products. Zhengzhou's special location also makes it easy to a center for distribution of those imported products.



**Shuanghui Food**  
Source: ATO Beijing

### Emerging Sectors

#### ***Craft Beer & Premium Alcohol***

Zhengzhou's younger consumers (25–35 years old) are driving demand for experiential and diverse alcohol options, fueling growth in craft beer microbreweries, specialty pubs, and premium wine/whiskey venues. U.S. exporters may find opportunities to supply hops and barley malt to local brewers, leveraging their reputation for quality, while bottled/canned craft beers (e.g., IPAs, sours) target retail and e-commerce channels. Hybrid spaces like "Beer Tank" blend social experiences with curated drinks, and upscale supermarkets (e.g., Dennis "Better") expand imported alcohol sections. Challenges include local competition from Henan breweries and tariffs (20–30 percent), requiring premium positioning and educational tastings to justify costs.

#### ***Seafood & Tree Nuts***

Health-conscious trends are boosting demand for U.S. high-protein seafood (salmon, lobster) and antioxidant-rich nuts (almonds, pistachios) in both retail and foodservice sectors. Retailers like Yonghui's renovated stores and Zhengou Railway Supermarkets offer price-advantaged entry points via freight logistics, while nuts serve corporate/festive gifting markets. U.S. suppliers should partner with import hubs (e.g., Bairong Market) for bulk distribution and leverage e-commerce for "superfood" bundles. Perishable seafood requires cold-chain solutions like Wanbang Logistics, and local alternatives (e.g., Chinese walnuts) necessitate emphasizing U.S. quality and food safety. Cross-sector synergies—such as event pairings at Zhengzhou Food Expos—and Sam's Club's 2026 entry will amplify opportunities.

**Table 2: SWOT Analysis: U.S. Agricultural Products Exports to Zhengzhou**

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. food products are widely perceived as premium, safe, and diverse.</li> <li>• Middle-class growth is contributing to increased interest in imported and health-conscious products.</li> <li>• A well-developed food processing industry creates strong demand for high-quality U.S. ingredients.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tariffs and ongoing U.S.-China trade tensions increase import costs.</li> <li>• Cold chain logistics remain limited in lower-tier cities surrounding Zhengzhou.</li> <li>• U.S. products are generally priced higher than domestic alternatives.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The rapid growth of e-commerce and community group-buying platforms expands market access.</li> <li>• Expanding retail chains and international restaurant brands offer new distribution channels.</li> <li>• The rise of central kitchens and the catering sector is driving demand for high-quality, safe U.S. food products.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consumer confidence in domestic brands is strengthening.</li> <li>• Uncertainty in U.S.-China policy relations poses risks to trade continuity.</li> <li>• Competition is intensifying from both international suppliers and local producers.</li> </ul>

Best Product Prospects for U.S. Products

Given Zhengzhou’s consumer preferences and distribution strengths, the following product categories present strong opportunities for U.S. exporters:

- **Meat:** Zhengzhou has a well-established meat processing industry, particularly in pork processing. Local companies have expressed interest in incorporating U.S. pork products into their operations. With nationwide distribution networks, these companies are well-positioned to support the widespread distribution of U.S. pork products across China.
- **Nuts and Dried Fruit:** Zhengzhou is home to large-scale wheat-based food processing facilities, which generate strong demand for imported nuts and dried fruits as key ingredients in their products. Leading companies such as Sanquan and Sinian have already incorporated U.S. ingredients into their processed food lines. Products like pistachios, cranberries, and dried blueberries are especially popular due to their versatile applications in fillings and baked goods.
- **Fruits:** Zhengzhou Airport is designated as an entry point for imported fruits, providing a convenient gateway for U.S. fruit products to access the local market. As the capital of China’s second most populous province and with rising household incomes, Zhengzhou is experiencing growing demand for U.S. fruits such as cherries, oranges, and apples. Serving as a regional

distribution hub, the city enables efficient distribution of U.S. fruits to surround provinces, supported by major wholesale markets like the Henan Wangbang International Agricultural Products Market.

- Dairy products: Zhengzhou's expanding bakery industry has driven growing demand for high-quality dairy products. Building partnerships with premium bakeries, specialty cafés, and food manufacturers offers strong potential to enhance market penetration and promote the use of U.S. dairy ingredients.

### **Main Trade Shows**

- **Zhengzhou International Agricultural Expo** – Covers food, beverage, and agribusiness.
- **China (Zhengzhou) International Food Expo** – Platform for showcasing imported and specialty foods.

### **Key Contacts and Further Information**

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**For more information, please contact ATO Beijing:**

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**Attachments:**

No Attachments.