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**Report Highlights:**

This report provides economic, market, and regulatory analysis for U.S. exporters looking to do business in Costa Rica, highlighting trends and offering a practical overview of the local market. For 2025, FAS San Jose expects Costa Rica to remain a promising market for U.S. agricultural products, which reached an export value of \$1 billion in 2024.

# Market Fact Sheet: COSTA RICA

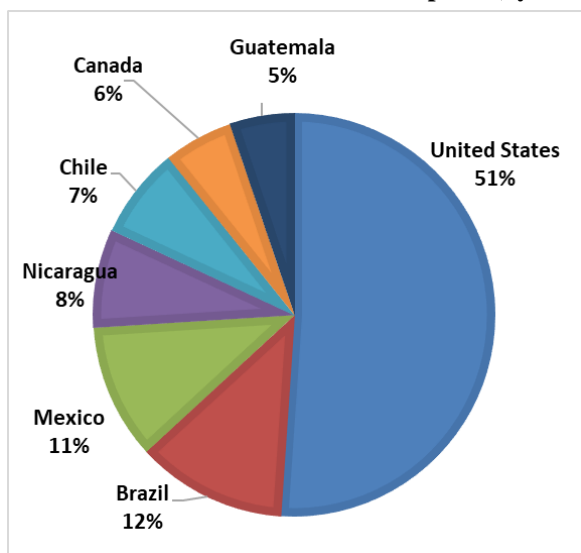
## Executive Summary

Costa Rica is a middle-income country and its Gross Domestic Product reach \$87 billion in 2023. The United States is Costa Rica's largest trading partner and largest foreign direct investor. Costa Rican consumers trust and enjoy U.S. food and beverage products, which have grown by 90 percent in export value since the 2009 entry into force of the Dominican Republic - Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR). Proximity to the United States is a major advantage for shipping times and for U.S. exporters' ability to develop and service customer relationships. Costa Rica ranked 23<sup>rd</sup> among U.S. agricultural export markets in 2023, with U.S. agricultural and related product exports to Costa Rica surpassing \$1 billion.

## Consumer-Oriented Product Imports

In 2023, nearly all U.S. agricultural products entered Costa Rica tariff free under CAFTA-DR, while sensitive categories (including dairy and rice) were subject to tariff rate quotas (TRQs). Strong prospects for U.S. consumer-oriented products – dairy, beef, pork, poultry, bakery goods, condiments, sauces, cereals and pasta – helped push U.S. consumer-oriented exports up 10 percent to a record high of \$458 million in 2023. U.S. poultry exports reached \$64 million in 2023, rising 49 percent year-on-year and outstripping pre-pandemic levels by 115 percent. Pork is another growing U.S. product that increased 29 percent to 44 million in 2023.

### 2023 Consumer-Oriented Product Imports (by value)



Source: Trade Data Monitor, LLC

## Food Processing Industry

Most Costa Rican food processors import ingredients directly from exporters. Processors have their own distribution

channels to wholesalers, distributors, and retailers, as well as hotels, restaurants, and institutional buyers nationwide. Distribution channels for local and imported products can differ and change frequently.

## Retail Sector

Costa Rica's retail sector consists of supermarkets, hypermarkets, mini-marts, warehouse stores, and approximately 22,000 mom-and-pop shops. Consumers are price sensitive, and the popularity of bulk formats continues to grow. Chinese grocery stores are increasing in number and in appeal to price-conscious consumers, especially outside the San José metropolitan area. E-commerce sales growth reflects deeper consumer trust in online channels.

### *Costa Rica Quick Facts 2024*

#### Imports of Agricultural products    \$1.032 billion

##### List of Top 10 Growth Products

- |                 |                                      |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1) Pulses       | 2) Distillers Grains                 |
| 3) Soybean Meal | 4) Poultry Meat                      |
| 5) Beer         | 6) Dairy Products                    |
| 7) Pork Meat    | 8) Processed Vegetables              |
| 9) Seafood      | 10) Bakery Goods, Cereals, and Pasta |

##### Top 10 Retailers

- |                        |                 |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| 1) Walmart - Pali      | 2) Automercado  |
| 3) Pequeño Mundo       | 4) Perimercados |
| 5) PriceSmart          | 6) Mega Super   |
| 7) Fresh Market        | 8) Super Compro |
| 9) Mayca Retail Stores | 10) Saretto     |

##### Population / GDP

Population	5.2 million
GDP (billions USD)	\$87
GDP (per capita)	\$14,733
Exchange rate	522 Colones : \$1 USD

Sources: Central Bank of Costa Rica and INEC

## Strengths / Weaknesses / Opportunities / Challenges

<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
U.S. products are well-known and perceived as high quality.	U.S. products are often undercut by regional competitors on price.
U.S. products largely enter duty free and quota free.	English language labeling and marketing materials.
<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Challenges</i>
Costa Rican consumers are becoming more sophisticated in their food preferences.	Buyers have stronger cultural ties to European and Central or South American suppliers.
Chefs are looking to introduce new trendy foods and are open to new concepts.	Costa Rica has many levels of bureaucracy that can slow the importation of food products.

Source: FAS/San José – [AgSanJose@usda.gov](mailto:AgSanJose@usda.gov)

## SECTION I. MARKET OVERVIEW

Costa Rica is considered an upper middle-income country, with a gross domestic product (GDP) of \$87 billion for 2023. Steady economic growth over the last 30 years has been driven by an outward-oriented strategy, based on foreign investment and trade liberalization. Costa Rica has a well-educated labor force, close geographic proximity to the United States, and attractive free trade zone incentives appealing to multinational corporations, especially in the age of ‘near-shoring.’ Despite its small size and population, Costa Rica is a global leader on climate and environment issues, producing more than 98 percent of its electricity from renewable sources.

The United States remains Costa Rica’s largest trade and investment partner; 40 percent of all imports are of U.S. origin. Costa Rica ratified the Dominican Republic - Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) with the United States in 2009, eliminating nearly all tariffs on agricultural imports over the last 14 years; remaining tariffs on rice and dairy products will be eliminated on January 1, 2025. U.S. agricultural exports to Costa Rica reached a record of \$1.05 billion in 2022, declining slightly to \$1.03 billion in 2023.

Costa Rica does not produce significant quantities of bulk commodities. Production of rice and black beans – which are dietary staples – is insufficient to meet demand and large volumes of those crops are imported. It relies upon imports to satisfy 100 percent of the consumption of wheat, yellow corn, and soybeans, which are crushed to support the chicken, pork, and dairy industries.

Costa Rica’s population of 5.2 million is spread across approximately 1.8 million households. More than 70 percent of Costa Rica’s population is concentrated in the central valley, where the capital San José is located. This area – known locally as the “GAM” or the Greater Metropolitan Area – represents a substantial concentration of population, wealth, and economic activity in Costa Rica. In 2023, almost 1.3 million U.S. citizens, representing 55 percent of all foreign travelers, visited Costa Rica. More than 120,000 U.S. citizens also call Costa Rica home year-round or for part of the year, adding to the sizable U.S. consumer demand.

**Table 1. Costa Rica Market Overview Summary**

Advantages	Disadvantages
U.S. geographic proximity provides logistical advantages for marketing and trade.	U.S. products from the Western United States and the upper Midwest face higher transportation costs relative to Central American suppliers.
U.S. exporters can supply different volumes according to local demand and are viewed as reliable suppliers.	Low-volume shipments of high-value products face additional costs since they must go through freight consolidators in Miami or other ports.
CAFTA-DR provides duty-free access for all products other than dairy and rice.	Time consuming product and facility registration processes deter exporters from entering the market. More information available in <a href="#">this report</a> .
CAFTA-DR provides duty-free access for dairy products on January 1, 2025.	Facility registration processes deter exporters from entering the market.

The food processing industry requires a wide range of ingredients as well as high-value consumer-oriented and processed foods.	Increasing competition in the food processing sector from Central America, South America, and China.
U.S. food products are competitive in terms of price and quality.	Costa Rican rice distributors and consumers prefer South American rice attributes; tariff cuts increased South American rice availability.
Costa Rica has an on-line product registration system, which has reduced registration times for new imported products.	Slow and cumbersome bureaucracy poses a challenge to doing business in the country.
Costa Rica recognizes the equivalence of the U.S. meat and poultry inspection systems, eliminating the need for approval of individual plants.	Costa Rica requires facility registration for dairy, seafood, lamb, and egg products. The plant approval process generally takes several months.
A strong tourism sector (domestic and international) creates opportunities for U.S. bulk-formatted items destined for food service.	Relatively high prices compared to regional tourism destinations and domestic transportation challenges.
Costa Rica is not self-sufficient in commodities, depending on imported grains and legumes.	South American grains compete aggressively with U.S. grains on price and quality.
Costa Rica generally supports science-based international standards.	An FTA with China increases competition within certain categories, like dried black beans.
Costa Ricans are beginning to consume higher quantities of frozen and prepared foods.	Regional suppliers of prepared foods are price competitive and attuned to local flavor profiles.

## SECTION II. EXPORTER BUSINESS TIPS

The Costa Rican market offers good opportunities for U.S. exporters of consumer-oriented agricultural products. Negotiations in Costa Rica tend to proceed at a slower pace than those in the United States. Below are some important characteristics that should be noted:

### Market Access

FAS San José recommends the following steps when entering the Costa Rican market:

1. Do your homework – investigate import requirements and comparable product availability/pricing.
2. Identify a reliable importer/distributor, knowledgeable in your product category and of Costa Rican regulations and import procedures.
3. Consider whether participating in a trade show (including virtual) or participating in USDA- or SRTG-funded promotional activities could assist in finding a dependable import partner.

Other important elements to consider while doing business in Costa Rica are:

- A personalized approach to business – with consistent attention to service and delivery, frequent visits, and follow-ups – is important in Costa Rica.
- Navigation of Costa Rica’s import procedures can be tricky. It is best to work with experienced representatives, agents, and importers – there are many in the country.
- Costa Rican law provides two main forms of representation: a representative and a distributor. The representative can also be considered an agent. It is possible for one person to be both a representative and an agent or a distributor at the same time.
- Once a potential representative is identified, the next step is to negotiate an agreement. The content of this agreement will determine the legal basis for any relationship between the exporter and the representative. Engaging a qualified, local lawyer is strongly advised.
- Once a partner has been selected, the U.S. firm should obtain business and/or credit reports on the Costa Rican company, as part of the U.S. firm’s due diligence.
- Contracts should be written and reflect agreements made by top decision-makers in each firm.
- Marketing funds and flexibility in purchase order volumes can help close a business contract.
- Credit terms: 3 to 4 months can pass between the time the importer places an order with an exporter to the time they collect payment from retailers.
- Trademark registration and protection is important.
- Printed materials should be in Spanish, although most Costa Ricans in the business sector are bilingual.

In addition, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) provides trade services at no cost to U.S. companies interested in exporting agricultural, fishery, and forestry products. FAS works with other USDA agencies as well as the Food and Drug Administration to coordinate the U.S. Government response to sanitary, phytosanitary, and technical barriers to trade, including challenges posed by new procedures introduced at ports or acquiring, translating, and coordinating the U.S. Government response to draft regulations that could affect U.S. exports.

### **SECTION III. IMPORT FOOD STANDARDS & REGULATIONS**

U.S. exporters should consult the latest FAS/San José Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards (FAIRS) report (available [here](#)) to better understand the regulatory requirements applicable to their product. Key Costa Rican regulatory agencies and resources are linked below:

**[Ministry of Health Registration and Control Department](#)** (Ministerio de Salud, Dirección de Registros y Controles) handles processed foods and beverages.

**[Plant Health Service](#)** (Servicio Fitosanitario del Estado) handles grains and oilseeds, ornamental plants, fresh fruits and vegetables and other products of fresh fruit/vegetable origin.

**[National Animal Health Service](#)** (Servicio Nacional de Salud Animal) handles live animals and products of animal origin – fresh meat and meat products, milk, cheese, eggs, etc. – pet food, animal feed, and ingredients for pet/animal food.

## SECTION IV. MARKET SECTOR STRUCTURE AND TRENDS

### Overall Business Climate and Consumption Trends

Traditional Costa Rican cuisine is centered around a lightly seasoned grilled protein (e.g., fresh fish, chicken or beef), black beans, and rice. And while beef still holds a symbolic place in the traditional Costa Rican diet, lower-priced poultry meat has long outpaced beef as the most popular protein. Animal protein consumption continues to increase along with the standard of living. Though U.S. seafood exports to Costa Rica reached a record \$14 million in 2023, increasing 17 percent, Costa Ricans prepare and consume far less seafood than other animal proteins.

Though traditional foods remain central to the Costa Rican diet, new tastes are readily accepted. Costa Rican consumers spend more of their food budget on prepared foods than all others in the Central American region. For example, kombucha is increasingly popular as a trendy drink among a growing segment of urban consumers. Kombucha conveniently falls within leading consumer trends including wellness, nutraceuticals (especially probiotics), and prepared food convenience, while offering a range of popular local flavors like, mint, ginger, hibiscus (aka jamaica), and tropical fruits. Local brands (e.g., Wild Brews, Bella Bucha, and Kombucha Cultura) may include CBD and typically retail for between \$3 and \$6 per unit, but FAS/San José sees room in the market for price-competitive imported offerings, despite the expense of shipping beverages.

A strong focus on ‘plant-based’ products among higher income consumers – associated with vegan, vegetarian, and flexitarian lifestyles – is commanding additional shelf space across a wide range of retailers in the GAM. Plant-based dairy alternatives are quite common and increasingly popular, with coconut and almond-based beverages eating into soy-based products’ once-dominant share of the market. The plant-based trend overlaps with continued demand growth for gluten-free products (e.g., pizza crusts, baking flours, and pastas). FAS/San José expects this trend to persist and grow over the medium-term.

Environmentally responsible packaging is another consumer trend that FAS/San José expects will continue to expand in Costa Rica, as consumers increasingly seek out biodegradable (if not compostable) packaging. Costa Rica banned styrofoam packaging and containers in August 2021.

### Food Processing Sector

Costa Rican food processors continue to rely on imported ingredients and raw materials to grow their operations. A more in-depth analysis of the food processing and ingredients market is available in the [Food Processing Ingredients Report](#).

### Retail Food Sector

There are good retail sales prospects for a large range of U.S. consumer-oriented products, including: beef, pork, poultry, cheese, yogurt, ice cream, processed fruits, tree nuts, confectionary, frozen products, food preparations, wine, beer, snack foods, condiments, natural/organic food products, pet food, and bakery goods/cereals/pasta. U.S. consumer-oriented product exports have demonstrated impressive annual growth of 10 percent in recent years, reaching \$458 million in 2023. More information on the Costa Rican retail sector is available in the [Costa Rica Retail Foods Report](#).

### Hotels and Resorts

According to the Costa Rica Tourism Board (ICT), tourism levels increased 14.5 percent in the first half of 2024. Estimates forecasts a record 2.8 million tourists by the end of this year compared to 2.4 million in 2023.

Of the total of 2.4 million travelers arriving in Costa Rica by air in 2023, 1.43 million are from the United States, nearly 60 percent of the total.

Hotels and resorts in Costa Rica offer a wide range of accommodations for the growing business and tourism industries, with a special emphasis on eco-tourism. The popularity of peer-to-peer rental properties – through platforms such as AirBnb or VRBO – is eating into traditional hotel stays, but also driving increasing inbound tourism as the range of properties expands, especially in areas like Guanacaste.

### Food Service Sector

Continued restaurant sector recovery offers U.S. exporters opportunities to supply international franchises and fine dining outlets in the GAM. After more than fifty years after the first franchise restaurant opened in Costa Rica, a new legal framework provides greater legal security for the franchise business model. Unsurprisingly, the number of franchises in Costa Rica has grown 65 percent over the last ten years, generating more than 26,500 direct jobs. In recent years, neighborhoods in eastern San José have become culinary focal points, with innovative establishments in old neighborhoods like Rohrmoser, Los Yoses, and Barrio Escalante. More information on the hotel and food service sectors is available in the latest FAS/San José [Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Market GAIN report](#).

Growth in digital ordering platforms more than doubled across nearly every category of foodservice in 2023, providing operators vast quantities of new consumer data that have accelerated understanding of and responsiveness to consumer behavior and preferences.

**Table 2: Leading Franchises in Costa Rica**

Franchises	Owners	Points of Sale
Subway	Restaurantes Subs SRL Subway	79
McDonalds	Arcos Dorados	75
Kentucky Fried Chicken	Grupo Inversor Intelectiva	64
Pizza Hut	Comidas Centroamericanas	64
Papa John's	Drake Food Service Internacional (DFSI)	57
Taco Bell	Inversiones TB	54
Burger King	Alimentos Exclusivos BKCR S.A.	44
Quiznos	Grupo QZCR	29
Starbucks	Starbucks	29
Cantón	Canton Brand Group	8
Domino's Pizza	Grupo Empresarial - ABLAT	8
Dunkin	AR Holdings	8
Arbys	Alimentos Exclusivos BKCR S.A.	6
Smashburger	Grupo QZCR	5
Teriyaki	Grupo QZCR	4
Johnny Rockets	AR Holdings	4
Ready Pizza	Ready Pizza	1
Krispy Kreme	Krispy Kreme Guatemala y Costa Rica	1
Popeyes	Alimentos Exclusivos BKCR S.A.	1

Source: *El Financiero*: FAS/San José

## SECTION V. AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD IMPORTS

Costa Rica’s economic recovery is expected to continue in 2025, providing excellent opportunities for high-value, consumer-oriented products from the United States. U.S. companies, restaurants, and supermarket chains have been highly successful in Costa Rica, developing a strong presence in the country.

Beef, pork, and poultry sales have increased substantially in recent years, particularly following the elimination of the CAFTA-DR TRQ on chicken leg quarters in 2022. Exports of processed, prepared, and preserved meats expanded significantly in the last years and consumption of prepared food and meals continues to grow. Bakery and confectionary products as well as condiments/sauces, food preparations, and wine continued to demonstrate impressive levels of growth in 2024. Gourmet products and prepared foods are widely distributed throughout the country, servicing tourism outlets and niche communities of high- and medium-income consumers. And though the meteoric growth in pet food sales has slackened, FAS/San José expects U.S. exports will remain strong over the medium-term.

Though relatively small, the Costa Rican food processing sector relies on U.S. exporters to maintain critical supply chains for the manufacturing of confectionary and bakery products, sauces, dressings and condiments, dairy products, and beverages. More information on the food processing and ingredients market is available in the latest [Food Processing Ingredients Report](#).

Costa Rican consumers continue to look for new dairy products, prices for which are quite high in Costa Rica. Facility registration requirements for new-to-market U.S. dairy facilities substantially extend the time required to enter the Costa Rican market, and import volumes remain will limited by restrictive CAFTA-DR tariff rate quotas through January 1, 2025.

**Table 3. Costa Rican Food and Agricultural Import Values from Top Suppliers (\$1,000s)**

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
United States	816,082	813,811	1,089,780	1,031,685	1,085,192
Brazil	49,232	79,826	92,748	177,113	256,933
Mexico	157,830	141,649	174,472	215,389	229,914
Nicaragua	110,765	109,030	113,786	146,852	167,807
Chile	121,452	114,724	132,288	168,772	156,115
Canada	75,145	78,086	104,630	93,828	118,249
Guatemala	88,070	81,664	85,422	103,915	110,191
Honduras	39,787	36,992	48,992	50,620	74,755
Spain	48,078	47,125	65,210	60,385	68,698
Uruguay	28,862	28,515	25,615	40,151	55,940
<b>World total</b>	<b>1,964,427</b>	<b>1,969,811</b>	<b>2,459,633</b>	<b>2,647,415</b>	<b>2,935,149</b>

Data Source: Trade Data Monitor, LLC.

Note: Values in this table reflect CIF landed values of imports from the Costa Rican National Institute of Statistics, and these numbers differ from U.S. Census Bureau data drawn from the FAS Global Agricultural Trade System used throughout the report.



**Table 4. Leading Consumer-Oriented Categories for U.S. Exports in 2023**

Product Category	U.S. Exports to Costa Rica in Million USD	Opportunities for U.S. Suppliers
Poultry Products	52*	U.S. is a major supplier of this protein and demand is expected to continue increasing.
Dog and Cat Food	47*	Pet food will keep increasing reflecting the growing trend of pet owners and the demand for quality nutrition particularly in urban areas.
Pork & Pork Products	38*	The upward trend of pork consumption has been steady in recent years.
Processed vegetables	36*	Consumer demand for processed vegetables and fruits has grown since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Also driven by the demand for convenient healthy foods and preparations.
Food Preparations	32*	Retail and food service outlets support growing demand for food preparations that reduce preparation time.
Bakery Goods, Cereals and Pasta	23*	Costa Rican consumers are searching for new bakery trends, nutritional cereals, and new flavors / varieties of pasta.
Seafood	13*	Seafood imports have been steadily increasing as part of the trend of diversifying the food industry for the HRI segment.

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau Trade Data

\*Denotes record high export levels

**Table 5. Top 10 Exports to Costa Rica in 2023**

Commodity	Total Value (USD)	Total Volume (Metric Tons)	10-Year Average Value (USD)	10-Year Growth
<a href="#">Corn</a>	\$145.54 Million	467,775	\$147.87 Million	-4%
<a href="#">Soybeans</a>	\$145.51 Million	256,298	\$120.69 Million	126%
<a href="#">Soybean Meal</a>	\$83.17 Million	160,753	\$37.07 Million	282%
<a href="#">Poultry Meat &amp; Prods. (excl. eggs)</a>	\$64.2 Million	35,862	\$32.17 Million	335%
<a href="#">Pork &amp; Pork Products</a>	\$44.27 Million	12,490	\$24.13 Million	213%
<a href="#">Dairy Products</a>	\$42.84 Million	8,295	\$26.25 Million	170%
<a href="#">Dog &amp; Cat Food</a>	\$39.35 Million	17,906	\$27.8 Million	144%
<a href="#">Processed Vegetables</a>	\$36.75 Million	26,371	\$31.15 Million	39%
<a href="#">Food Preparations</a>	\$33.16 Million	7,141	\$23.9 Million	81%
<a href="#">Baked Goods</a>	\$30.48 Million	9,240	\$25.49 Million	52%

## VI. KEY CONTACTS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Services, San José, Costa Rica

Email: [AgSanJose@usda.gov](mailto:AgSanJose@usda.gov)

FAS Website: <https://www.fas.usda.gov/regions/costa-rica>

**Table 6. Key GAIN Reports for Costa Rica**

REPORT #	TITLE	DATE
<a href="#">CS2023-0022</a>	Food Processing Ingredients	April 1, 2024
<a href="#">CS2024-0013</a>	Retail Foods	August, 2023
<a href="#">CS2024-0010</a>	Food and Agricultural Import Regulations & Standards (FAIRS) Report	June 30, 2023
<a href="#">CS2024-0012</a>	FAIRS Export Certificate Report	June 30, 2023
<a href="#">CS2023-0014</a>	Food Service- Hotel Restaurant Institutional	October 16, 2023

Department of Commerce Country Commercial Guide: <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/costa-rica-market-overview>

### Attachments:

No Attachments