Market evolution: Cereal and pastry preparations (CN 19) — 2015–2025

Introduction

Preparations of cereals, flour, starch or milk, together with pastrycooks' products (CN 19), form a large and widely traded food sector. Over the decade 2015-2025, EU external trade in this category expanded strongly, with exports and imports both rising in value and volume, while the structural surplus widened considerably. This report describes the key dynamics, drawing on official trade figures and complementary production indicators, and examines the shifting geography of supply and demand, the evolution of prices, and the growing outward orientation of the sector.

Explosive export growth and a deepening trade surplus

The export rise outpaced imports, lifting the surplus

According to the Trade overview, EU external exports of CN 19 goods jumped from €13.3 bn in 2015 to €23.3 bn in 2025, a gain of **74.9 %**. Imports increased from €2.6 bn to €4.5 bn (+72.6 %), so the trade surplus expanded from €10.7 bn to €18.9 bn (+75.4 %). The EU's net-export position deepened continuously, and the sector's trade surplus played an increasingly important role in the food balance.

Flow	2015 (€ bn)	2025 (€ bn)	Change (%)
Exports	13.35	23.35	+74.9
Imports	2.60	4.49	+72.6
Balance	+10.75	+18.86	+75.4

Source: Trade overview.

Major destination markets saw sharply higher demand

Top partners data reveal that the United Kingdom remained the single largest buyer, with exports rising from €3.4 bn to €6.1 bn (+83.4 %). Even faster growth occurred in the United States (+202.5 % to €2.5 bn) and China (+92.1 % to €2.7 bn). Switzerland, Norway and Saudi Arabia also posted solid gains, while shipments to Russia fell by 11.4 % following the imposition of sanctions.

Export partner	2015 (€ mn)	2025 (€ mn)	Change (%)
United Kingdom	3 351	6 144	+83.4
China	1 398	2 686	+92.1
United States	838	2 535	+202.5
Switzerland	584	1 088	+86.2
Norway	425	677	+59.1
Saudi Arabia	702	743	+5.8
Russian Fed.	426	378	–11.4

Domestic production and export propensity reinforced the trend

EU production of these goods grew substantially: from 36.1 million tonnes in 2015 to 42.7 million tonnes in 2024, while production value climbed from €72.7 bn to €112.4 bn (+54.8 %) – see Production volumes. The export propensity (the share of production shipped outside the EU) more than doubled, from 5.5 % in 2003 to 16.5 % by 2024, signalling that the sector became markedly more outward-oriented (Export propensity).

Import diversification re-shapes supply sources

Suppliers multiplied, reducing dependence on a few large partners

EU imports of CN 19 products not only grew but also broadened significantly. The import-side Herfindahl-Hirschman Index dropped from 3 166 in 2015 to 1 739 in 2025, a **45.1 % decline** (Concentration HHI). This reflects the emergence of several new or expanding sources, diluting the weight of the traditional top suppliers, especially the United Kingdom.

Several emerging partners registered triple-digit import growth

Top import partners highlights the most dynamic origins. Imports from Ukraine surged by **618.9 %** (to €251 mn), China by 199.1 % (to €322 mn), Vietnam by 191.0 % (to €171 mn) and Türkiye by 183.9 % (to €355 mn). Thailand (+97.7 %) also grew strongly. The United Kingdom, though still the largest source, posted only a 22.2 % increase, causing its share to shrink.

Import partner	2015 (€ mn)	2025 (€ mn)	Change (%)
United Kingdom	1 399	1 709	+22.2
Türkiye	125	355	+183.9
Switzerland	360	322	–10.5
China	108	322	+199.1
Thailand	109	215	+97.7
Ukraine	35	251	+618.9
Viet Nam	59	171	+191.0

Volatility varied across key supply routes

Quantity volatility, measured by the coefficient of variation, was exceptionally high for imports from Ukraine (0.41), China (0.32) and Viet Nam (0.28), highlighting the sensitivity of these flows to geopolitical and logistical shocks (Volatility bars). Older supply lines from Switzerland, North Macedonia and the United Kingdom exhibited much lower variability.

Price appreciation and production-value dynamics

Unit values rose across all major product segments

Both import and export unit values increased over the period (export price +32.2 %, import price +18.9 %). Disaggregated by product heading (Product segment breakdown), the strongest export price gains were recorded for the dominant **1905** (bread, pastry, biscuits etc.) – from €2 984/t to €4 331/t (+45.1 %), and for **1904** (prepared cereals) – from €2 099/t to €3 495/t (+66.5 %). The high-value **1901** category (malt extract, flour/milk preparations) saw a more modest uplift from €3 857/t to €4 561/t (+18.3 %).

Export segment	2015 value (€ bn)	2025 value (€ bn)	2015 price (€/t)	2025 price (€/t)
1905 (bakery)	4.93	10.64	2 984	4 331
1901 (malt, flour prep.)	6.10	8.98	3 857	4 561
1902 (pasta)	1.44	2.66	1 292	1 730
1904 (cereal snacks)	0.78	1.06	2 099	3 495

Production value climbed much faster than volume, signalling quality upgrades

EU production quantity grew by 18.5 % between 2015 and 2024, while production value surged by 54.8 % (Production volumes). The resulting implied domestic unit value jumped from €2.02/kg to €2.63/kg (+30 %), pointing to a clear shift toward higher-added-value and premium products. This trend aligns with the strong price increases in exported bakery and cereal-snack categories and underlines the sector’s ability to sustain profitability.

Price shocks in 2022 reflect temporary market tightness

The concentration and volatility analysis (Supply shocks) identifies several notable price events. In 2022, the export unit value for South Africa jumped by 44.4 % above its baseline, while Senegal (Serbia) experienced a 17.3 % import price surge and the United Arab Emirates saw a 27.7 % export price hike. These spikes, concentrated in the year of general commodity-price upheaval, were absorbed without lasting disruption, and post-shock volumes remained stable, reflecting the resilience of the trading system.

Conclusion

The EU's external trade in cereal and pastry preparations grew substantially over the 2015-2025 period, driven by buoyant global demand and a competitive domestic production base. Exports more than kept pace with imports, deepening an already large surplus. The import portfolio diversified markedly, while export concentration remained moderate and stable. A powerful combination of higher unit prices, production-volume expansion, and quality upgrading raised the sector's trade intensity and export propensity to record levels. Even short-lived price shocks did not reverse these secular trends, suggesting that the EU's position in this globally important food category remains robust and internationally competitive.

Generated on 2026-07-24 based on data from tradedashboard.eu

Auto-generated report: it accelerates, and sometimes misleads, human analysis. It cannot replace it in full.

If you need advice on European trade policy, or representation for your interests in Brussels, feel free to contact me at support@tradedashboard.eu. You can find my CV at this address.