EU TRADE EXPLORER

Market evolution: Soya beans (CN 1201) — 2015–2025

Introduction

The European Union is a structural importer of soya beans (CN 1201), relying on overseas supply for its livestock feed and food industries. This report analyses the EU's extra-EU trade in soya beans over the eleven years from 2015 to 2025. Using data from the EU Trade Dashboard, it traces the main dynamics in import volumes, prices, supplier geography, export patterns and market structure. The period was marked by a massive price shock in 2022, a reconfiguration of supply origins, and extreme volatility on the small export side.

Price spikes, not volume growth, drove the surge in import values

Annual import quantities fluctuated within a 2.1 million tonne range over the entire period

The EU's physical need for soya beans proved relatively inelastic. Annual import volumes as reported by member states never fell below 12.98 million tonnes (in 2017) and never exceeded 15.08 million tonnes (in 2020). By 2025 imports stood at 14.21 million tonnes, only 5.0 % higher than the 13.53 million tonnes recorded in 2015. In practice, the market absorbed a very stable volume of beans every year.

Import prices doubled from their 2019 low to the 2022 peak, inflating the EU's soya bill

What changed dramatically was the unit price. The average import price fell to a low of 335 EUR/tonne in 2019 before rocketing to 595 EUR/tonne in 2022. Consequently, the total import value surged from 4.7 billion EUR in 2017 (the cheapest year) to 8.3 billion EUR in 2022, even though the physical tonnage received that year was slightly lower than in 2020. After 2022 prices retreated, and by 2025 the import value had fallen back to 5.6 billion EUR, roughly 11.9 % above its 2015 level. The import bill thus mirrored global soya bean price cycles rather than any fundamental increase in EU demand.

The non-seed segment (120190) dominates trade, with seed imports (120110) remaining marginal

The product breakdown confirms that “soya beans, other than for sowing” (CN 120190) account for more than 99 % of all imports in both volume and value. In 2025, non-seed imports reached 14.21 million tonnes (5.59 billion EUR), while seed beans (CN 120110) amounted to just 6 139 tonnes (12.5 million EUR). The seed segment is therefore a niche with no material impact on the overall trade balance.

Supplier consolidation: Brazil and the US reinforce their dominance, Ukraine rises, and Mercosur partners vanish

Brazil and the United States together supplied between 63 % and 79 % of EU imports by value

The two largest suppliers have consistently been Brazil and the United States. Their combined share of extra-EU imports varied from 63 % in 2019 (when both posted relatively low values) to 79 % in 2022 (at the height of the price spike). Over the entire period, imports from Brazil rose by 17.4 % (from 1.96 billion EUR to 2.30 billion EUR) and imports from the US grew by 30.7 % (from 1.68 billion EUR to 2.20 billion EUR), as shown in the table below.

Partner	2015 (million EUR)	2022 (million EUR)	2025 (million EUR)	Change 2015–2025
Brazil	1 956.6	4 137.0	2 297.4	+17.4 %
United States	1 680.2	2 895.0	2 196.1	+30.7 %
Canada	388.1	532.3	352.9	–9.1 %
Ukraine	135.7	486.9	627.3	+362.3 %
Paraguay	428.5	0.0	0.0	–100.0 %
Uruguay	296.0	81.3	0.0	–100.0 %
Serbia	28.0	10.6	5.1	–81.8 %

Source: Top trading partners

Ukraine’s share expanded dramatically, overtaking the collapsing flows from Paraguay and Uruguay

Ukraine stands out as the dynamic entrant. Its sales to the EU multiplied from 135.7 million EUR in 2015 to 627.3 million EUR in 2025 (+362.3 %). In volume terms, Ukrainian shipments more than quadrupled, making the country the EU’s third or fourth largest source in the later years. In parallel, imports from Paraguay and Uruguay – which together supplied over 720 million EUR in 2015 – shrank to practically zero by 2024-25. This restructuring partly reflects the EU's efforts to diversify origins and the impact of preferential trade arrangements with Ukraine, while traditional Mercosur suppliers lost market share.

The Herfindahl-Hirschman Index signals a measurable increase in supplier concentration

The market concentration (HHI) for extra-EU imports rose from 2 835 in 2015 to 3 391 in 2025 (+19.6 %). Although the index remains at moderately concentrated levels, the upward trend reflects the growing weight of Brazil and the United States and the exit of several smaller suppliers. A more concentrated supplier base can increase vulnerability to price and availability shocks.

EU exports: a small, highly concentrated flow buffeted by extreme price volatility

EU soya bean exports remain a minor complement to the domestic deficit, but they grew by two-thirds in value over the period

With a structural trade deficit that exceeded 4.5 billion EUR in every year, the EU is far from being a net exporter. Still, extra-EU exports of soya beans expanded from 88.9 million EUR in 2015 to 147.8 million EUR in 2025 (+66.3 %). This growth was driven by higher average unit values (from 410 to 476 EUR/tonne) and a rise in exported tonnage (from 217 000 to 310 000 tonnes). The bulk of exports consists of non-seed beans (CN 120190), while seed exports remain marginal.

Three price shock events – in Serbia (2020), Russia (2022) and the United Kingdom (2021) – reshaped export patterns

Export markets were hit by three extraordinary price surges. The dashboard's shock detection identifies:

- **Serbia (2020):** A price jump of 391 % while exported quantities collapsed to near zero. The shock reflects a temporary supply disruption in the region.
- **Russia (2022):** A price surge of 501 % that coincided with the trade disruptions following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, causing export volumes to plummet.
- **United Kingdom (2021):** An 85 % price spike linked to post-Brexit trade frictions, accompanied by a sharp drop in volumes.

These events illustrate how thin and bilateral the EU's soya export flows are: a single shock can obliterate an entire annual flow and then see it partially recover.

The export market has become significantly more concentrated, with a few neighbouring destinations dominating

The export HHI jumped from 2 165 in 2015 to 3 488 in 2025 (+61.1 %). By 2025, Serbia alone absorbed 55 % of all extra-EU exports by value (81.9 million EUR), followed by Norway (23.6 million EUR), Russia (12.4 million EUR), the United Kingdom (9.3 million EUR) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (6.4 million EUR). The increase in concentration is partly a consequence of the collapse of flows to Turkey (down 94.9 %) and the sustained growth of shipments to Serbia and Norway.

Destination	2015 (million EUR)	2022 (million EUR)	2025 (million EUR)	Change 2015–2025
Serbia	33.3	63.0	81.9	+145.9 %
Norway	0.3	2.6	23.6	+8 055.0 %
Russian Federation	6.2	2.5	12.4	+99.2 %
United Kingdom	15.8	25.8	9.3	–41.0 %
Bosnia and Herzegovina	5.6	6.8	6.4	+14.8 %
Switzerland	5.3	11.0	7.1	+33.6 %
Türkiye	15.5	12.2	0.8	–94.9 %

Source: Top export destinations

Croatia and Romania have emerged as the EU's main re-export hubs

Within the EU, the member state data shows a clear shift in export logistics. Croatia and Romania together accounted for 62 % of extra-EU exports in 2025, up from 43 % in 2015. Croatia's exports rose from 43.9 million EUR to 60.1 million EUR (+36.7 %), while Romania's grew from 13.9 million EUR to 31.8 million EUR (+128.0 %). Meanwhile, traditional re-exporters such as the Netherlands saw their outflow collapse (–80.2 %), and Belgium's exports fell by 40.3 %. The rise of Black Sea ports and Balkan routes has therefore reshaped the geography of EU soya bean re-exports.

Conclusion

The EU's extra-EU trade in soya beans (CN 1201) between 2015 and 2025 was defined by price-driven import swings, a restructuring of supply origins, and an increasingly concentrated and volatile export vector. Physical import demand stayed remarkably constant around 14 million tonnes per year, while global price cycles – notably the 2022 spike – inflated the import bill temporarily. On the supply side, Brazil and the United States tightened their grip, Ukraine emerged as a major alternative, and traditional Mercosur suppliers like Paraguay and Uruguay disappeared. The small but growing export trade became more concentrated and was repeatedly disrupted by price shocks linked to geo-political and regulatory changes. Looking ahead, the EU's dependence on a handful of overseas suppliers, combined with the high sensitivity of export flows, will keep the market exposed to international price volatility and sudden policy shifts.

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