

Export of fruits and vegetables from Uzbekistan: current situation, challenges and solutions

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Received: 09 December 2024; **Accepted:** 11 January 2025; **Published:** 13 February 2025

Abstract: This article aims to describe the current situation in Uzbekistan regarding the export of fruits to foreign countries. The paper will discuss the challenges and possible ways of solving them for the increase of exports.

Keywords: Export, fruits, vegetables, storage and distribution facilities.

Introduction: Exports play a crucial role in a nation's economy by generating revenue, creating employment opportunities, and driving economic growth. Countries benefit from their comparative advantages by exporting goods and services, enhancing trade balances and foreign currency reserves. Uzbekistan, traditionally reliant on cotton as its primary export commodity, has recently shifted focus to horticulture due to food security concerns and environmental challenges linked to cotton cultivation. As a result, fruits and vegetables have become a significant component of the country's export profile, contributing substantially to economic development.

METHODS

This study analyzes Uzbekistan's fruit export sector using statistical data, government reports, and market research studies. It assesses production volumes, export trends, challenges, and proposed solutions based on official data sources such as the Statistics Agency of Uzbekistan and reports from international trade organizations.

RESULTS

The global demand for fresh fruits and vegetables continues to rise, presenting an opportunity for Uzbekistan to expand its exports. In 2023, the country exported 1.7 million tons of fruits and vegetables, generating revenue of \$1.2 billion. Key export commodities include grapes (126,100 tons), peaches (87,200 tons), melons and watermelons (148,100 tons), and onions (299,600 tons). Major export destinations include Russia (37% of total exports), Pakistan (16.7%),

China (12.3%), and Kazakhstan (10.3%). The export volume increased by 1.1% compared to 2022.

DISCUSSION

Historically, agri-food trade in Uzbekistan has been shaped by the Government's goals of self-sufficiency and economic independence. Cotton has been Uzbekistan's main export commodity and an important source of hard currency for the Government since the early 1990s, resulting in significant Government involvement in its production, marketing and export. However, food security issues, together with the environmental and social problems associated with cotton production, have precipitated a corresponding shift in the country's crop mix, first to wheat and now to horticulture, in which Uzbekistan has a comparative advantage. As a result, Uzbekistan's fruit and vegetable products are rapidly becoming the second-largest export commodity group in the country. Revenues from horticultural exports have more than tripled, from about US\$500 million in 2006 to US\$1.2 billion in 2023.

As the population of the world keeps growing the demand for fresh fruits and vegetables keeps growing accordingly. Becoming a major player in this market can significantly contribute to the country's economy.

Year	2020	2028
Value	\$143 904 million	\$211 073 million

Table 1: Fresh fruits and vegetables market size and forecast.

Fruits and vegetables make up a significant portion of Uzbekistan's agricultural industry in terms of both potential and present production as well as exports. Apples and peaches, which constitute the majority of the global fruit market and are the most popular fruits exported from Uzbekistan, are among the most popular fruits in the international fruit and vegetable market. Other popular fruits include grapes, apricots, and melons. Uzbekistan's main vegetable exports are

onion, cabbage, and tomato. With 1.7 million tons grown in 2023, the fruit and vegetable industry ranks sixth overall in Uzbekistan's export profile and brought in US\$1.2 billion. They accounted for 6.8 per cent of Uzbekistan's total exports of US\$24.4 billion in 2023. Within edible fruit exports, melon and watermelon accounted for 148.1 thousand tons or 8.7 per cent, and onion accounted for 299.6 thousand tons or 17.6 per cent.

№	Name	Tons	Percentage
1	Grapes	126 100	7.4
2	Peach	87 200	5.1
3	Melon & watermelon	148 100	8.7
4	Cherry	45 000	2.6
5	Apricot	63 000	3.7
6	Tomato	57 500	3.4
7	Cabbage	97 200	5.7
8	Onion	299 600	17.6
9	Dried grape & plum	93 300	5.4
10	Others	683 000	40.2

Table 2: Fruits and vegetables primarily exported from Uzbekistan.

According to the Statistics Agency, the export figure increased by 1.1% or 18.9 thousand tons compared to 2022.

The export of fruit and vegetables from Uzbekistan is mainly done to neighbouring countries and CIS countries such as Russia.

№	Name of the country:	Percentage from total export:
1	Russia	37
2	Pakistan	16,7
3	China	12.3
4	Kazakhstan	10.3

Table 3: Countries where Uzbekistan mainly exported fruit and vegetables in 2023.

Challenges and ways to resolve them:

Uzbekistan has considerable export potential for horticulture products, and maximizing this potential is crucial to strengthening the nation's export standing.

Although prices for Uzbek (and other Central Asian) fruit and vegetable products could be higher in Russian and Chinese markets, it is anticipated that they will be reduced due to issues with quality and safety.

One of the reasons for that is because fruits and vegetables may contain pests as well as pollution residues (pesticides, nitrates, etc.) that are beyond allowable limit values. Additionally, a wide variety of pesticides that are illegal in the USA, EU, and other countries due to their acknowledged danger are permitted for use in Uzbekistan.

Fruit and vegetable quality control has for many years mostly focused on certification, or testing finished goods before their release onto the market. But it's been several decades since many safety indications were updated. Farmers began using hundreds of

various kinds of preparations that had suddenly hit the market without any control. Individual substance indications were and are contained in national regulatory papers; however, numerous novel chemicals have surfaced throughout time and are not listed in these publications. Not to mention that the test procedures are quite outdated, and the current laboratory infrastructure prevents competent testing even for the indicators listed in the statute.

This gap has numerous causes. Isolation comes first. The government has also outright prohibited the export of certain food items because of the inadequate level of food security. The second factor is the lack of competition in the domestic food production industry. In other words, businesses aren't always eager to spend money updating their facilities, implementing global hygienic and excellent manufacturing processes, teaching staff new techniques, etc. This explains the lack of demand for experts in disciplines including chemistry, agro-technology, food microbiology, animal husbandry, and crop production. Thirdly, Uzbekistan's food laboratories lack international accreditation. Their infrastructure is outdated, and experts aren't properly trained in contemporary procedures, testing techniques, etc.

The steps required to solve the quality problem are quite simple but need huge budgeting. The list of chemicals should be updated with all the chemicals currently present at the market and used by farmers. The government must facilitate all the laboratories with needed facilities and organize training for their workers. With these two changes, the standards of food safety will rise and farmers will start investing in the. The steps required to address the quality problem are relatively simple, but they require a significant budget. Firstly, the list of chemicals used by farmers needs to be updated, including all the chemicals currently available in the market. Secondly, the government must provide the necessary facilities to all laboratories and organize training for their workers. These two changes will improve the standards of food

safety, which will encourage farmers to invest in upgrading their cultivation technologies to meet the new standards.

The other major problem is the current state of pre-cooling technologies. Pre-cooling of fruits and vegetables is a process of rapid reduction of their temperature from the initial temperature (after harvest) to the required temperature for subsequent technological operations (transportation, short-term or long-term storage).

Although a vast network of sizable cold storage facilities has been created in Uzbekistan, their main purpose is not pre-cooling. For the same reason, the number of facilities offering pre-cooling, cleaning, sorting, packaging, and further cooling services is now restricted. Furthermore, farmers frequently overlook the significance of maintaining the proper temperature for fruits and vegetables during pre-cooling. A significant consideration in this process is the crop of fruits and vegetables, which they overlook when choosing the pre-cooling temperature. Additionally, to prevent the spread of diseases, various products require different storage facilities. Fruit and vegetables are frequently sorted and packaged as soon as they are harvested, which results in a higher risk of rotting goods, reduced prices, and rejected customers, especially in the EU. Nevertheless, they must first be pre-cooled before being sorted and packaged.

Investments in modest cooling chain facilities close to the fields could help with these issues. It's crucial to launch an educational campaign aimed at farmers, outlining the cooling chain's significance and the proper ways of using it. Fruit quality concerns will be addressed in this way and the amount of time they can be stored before, during, and after export will be increased.

The last main problem that needs to be resolved to increase export rates is international standard certifications. The government should encourage farmers to get certificates of quality such as Global G.A.P. or ISO 22000 to prove to exporting countries the quality of fruits and vegetables.

However, the primary issue is that certifications are expensive: Global G.A.P. may cost up to \$10,000. Not only are credentials expensive, but the process of becoming certified requires money-spending on things like production reorganizations and employee training. The government pays for the certificates, but not the preparation. An additional issue is that manufacturers frequently prioritize being certified above developing long-lasting quality control systems and fostering that culture.

Establishing long-lasting quality management systems

in businesses through the combination of financial assistance, education, and training is how the government should address this issue.

CONCLUSION

The export sector of fruit and vegetables in Uzbekistan has a huge potential for development. Addressing problems related to quality, storage, and certification would help in entering new markets. The government should eradicate these problems to open new possibilities for economic growth.

Acknowledgement: I would like to thank my academic adviser Abduraimova.N.

for helping to write this paper. And I would like to acknowledge the contributions of the Statistics Agency of Uzbekistan and various market research institutions for providing valuable data and insights.

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