

Practical market insights into your product

Dates in Germany

Focus on organic dates from Tunisia

Dates are more and more popular in Germany due to their healthy aspects. They are used as substitutes for other snacks. Organic dates account for a small share of the market. But German buyers indicate that demand for organic dates is growing; they are increasingly offered in mainstream supermarkets – not just in organic shops. Tunisia is the main supplier of dates to Germany, though still faces market access challenges.

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PRODUCT DESCRIPTION



Dates are the fruits of the date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*). This species is widely cultivated in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as in the United States.

There are hundreds of varieties or cultivars of date fruits, but only a small range of varieties is sold on international markets. The production of most varieties is limited to specific countries or regions.

This study identifies opportunities for organic dates on the German market, with a special focus on dates from Tunisia. The main variety produced in Tunisia is the Deglet Nour date. This is a semi-dried date and seen as the second best variety on international markets. Deglet Nour dates are also produced in Algeria, Israel and the United States. Medjool dates, seen as the best variety internationally, are produced in Morocco, Israel, the United States, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the State of Palestine. The main market in Germany/Europe is for pitted dates.

Dates are practically and commercially sub-divided into “soft”, “semi-dry”, and “dry”, which is based on their external qualities of texture and pliability at the full maturation stage (*tamr*). In Germany and other European countries, dates are commercialised as a dried produce.

PRODUCT SPECIFICATIONS

QUALITY

General – International requirements

The minimum requirements for dates applying to producers worldwide are covered by the ‘Codex Alimentarius’ [Standard for Dates \(CODEX STAN 143-1985\)](#). It applies to commercially-prepared pitted or un-pitted whole dates, packed ready for direct consumption. It does not apply to other forms such as pieces or mashed dates or dates intended for industrial purposes.

These requirements revolve around product definition, varietal types, styles & sub-styles, composition & quality factors, food additive levels, hygiene, weights & measures, labelling and methods of analysis & sampling.

General – European requirements

When marketing dates on the German market (or other markets in the European Union), the exporter must meet the [General Marketing Standards for Fruit & Vegetables](#) according to [Commission Implementing Regulation \(EU\) No. 543/2011](#). The standards apply to a wide range of fresh and processed fruit and vegetables, excluding those intended for processing. They are complementary to *Codex Alimentarius* standards, covering the following:

1. Minimum quality requirements

General tolerances which are further specified for dried dates in UNECE standard ([UNECE Standard DDP-08](#)).

2. Minimum maturity requirements

The products must be sufficiently developed, but not over-developed, and fruit must display satisfactory ripeness, but must not be overripe.

The development and state of maturity of the products must be such as to enable them to continue their ripening process and to reach a satisfactory degree of ripeness.

3. *Tolerance*

A tolerance of 10% by number or weight of product not satisfying the minimum quality requirements shall be permitted in each lot. Within this tolerance, not more than 2% in total may consist of produce affected by decay.

4. *Marking of origin of produce*

Full name of the country of origin is necessary. For products originating in a European Union country, this shall be in the language of the country of origin or any other language understandable by the consumers of the country of destination.

For products originating elsewhere, this shall be in any language understandable by the consumers of the country of destination. If you package products for the consumer market, you will need a label in German. However, if you work with companies that supply retailers, find out if your buyer provides the labels.

For more information, please refer to the section on labelling below.

Product-specific requirements

The European Union refers to the [UNECE Standards for Dry and Dried Produce](#) for specific quality requirements for dried dates ([UNECE Standard DDP-08](#)).

They specify the general requirements for fruits and vegetables described above. The purpose of the standard is to define the quality requirements of dates at the export-control stage, after preparation and packaging. Again, this is only applicable to dates intended for direct consumption, not for industrial processing.

The **minimum quality requirements** for dried dates are:

- Intact. Dates affected by mashing, tearing, breaking of the skin (leaving the pit visible) are excluded.
- Sound. Dates affected by rotting or deterioration such as to make it unfit for consumption are excluded.
- Clean. Practically free of any visible foreign matter, excluding coating ingredients.
- Free from living pests (whatever their stage of development).
- Free from pest damage visible to the naked eye. This includes dead insects and/or mites, and their debris or excreta.
- Free from mould filaments visible to the naked eye.
- Free of fermentation.
- Free of unripe fruit (light in weight, stunted or distinctly rubbery in texture).
- Free of un-pollinated fruit (indicated by stunted growth, immature characteristics and absence of pit).
- Free of blemished fruit (scarred, discoloured or sunburnt, darkened head or spots having, or abnormalities affecting an area at least as large as a circle of 7 mm diameter).
- Free of abnormal external moisture.
- Free of foreign smell and/or taste.

The condition of the products must be such as to enable them:

- To withstand transport and handling.
- To arrive in satisfactory condition at the place of destination.

The **moisture content of dried dates** should not exceed 26% for cane sugar varieties and 30% for invert-sugar varieties. In their natural state, the maximum moisture content for the Deglet Nour variety shall be 30%. The moisture content is determined [according to UNECE standards](#).

The **minimum weight of dates** shall be 4.0 g per date.

Dates are **classified into three groups: “Extra” Class, Class I and Class II**.

This classification is based on the tolerance levels for defects (in %, number or weight) covering:

- Produce not satisfying the minimum requirements.
- Size.
- Other defects.

Other requirements in the UNECE standard cover the following aspects of **product presentation**:

- Uniformity: Packages should contain dates which are uniform, of the same origin, quality and variety. The visible parts should be representative of the entire content of the package.
- Packaging materials: The product should be protected properly when packaged. The materials used inside the package must be clean and avoid damage to the dates. Paper and stamps bearing trade specifications can be used, but printing/labelling must be done with non-toxic ink or glue. Packages should be free from foreign matter; decorate material like rachis, stems and plastic forks are allowed, but should respect the tolerance levels.
- Other aspects: Dates must be presented in bags or solid containers, each package being of the same weight. Dates may be presented:
 - In clusters (mainly rachis and stems) or in stems (separated from the rachis):
Stems should be at least 10 cm in length and carry around 4 fruits each.
A maximum of 10% loose dates is allowed. The ends of the stems must be cleanly cut.
 - Separated in individual fruits, arranged in layers, or loose in the package.

There are also **marking provisions** for dates which are sold in bulk:

- Name and physical address of packer and/or dispatcher, or a code mark officially recognized by the national authority.
- Name of the product: “Dates”, when not visible from the outside.
- Name of the variety and/or commercial type (optional).
- “Cluster” or “stems”, where appropriate.
- “Pitted”, where appropriate.
- Country of origin. Optional: District where dates are grown, or national, regional or local place name.
- Class.
- Crop year (optional).
- “Best before”, followed by the date (optional).
- Official control mark (optional).
- **Organic**: Name/code of the certifying body and certification number.

Labelling for consumer packaging

Dates which are pre-packed at origin must follow the [European Union's labelling requirements](#). The focus lies on providing as much information as possible to the consumer, including:

- Name of the food. For dates, that can include variety or commercial type, pitted/unpitted, organic (if compliant with [European Union standards](#)).
- List of ingredients.
- Ingredients or processing aids causing allergies or intolerances.
- Quantity of ingredients or categories of ingredients.
- Net quantity.
- "Use by" date.
- Storage conditions and/or conditions of use.
- Name and address of business.
- Country of origin.
- Lot number.
- Nutrition information (provision will apply as of 13 December 2016).

The information above will have to be in **German or multi-language including German**. Pay attention to other aspects like minimum font size.

In addition, any certification logo, or retailer logo in the case of private label products, should be displayed on the label.

Organic: To be marketed as organic-certified in Germany and generally in the European Union, they must contain [the European Union's organic logo](#), along with other information on the label like the number of the certification body.

Organic-certified dates must comply with the European Union regulation for organic farming & marketing. The regulation is explained more extensively in the requirements section of this document.

In addition to the European Union logo, Germany has its own organic logo, the [Biosiegel](#). This logo is less commonly used than the European organic logo, but may be demanded by some retailers. Discuss these options with your buyers.

FIGURE 1: EXAMPLE OF MULTI-LANGUAGE RETAIL LABELLING FOR DATES:



Source: ProFound

Packaging and packaging materials

The UNECE standards establish some general requirements for the packaging of dried dates, applying to both bulk and consumer packaging. They include protection and presentation of the product. However, packaging materials are not specifically mentioned. Both bulk and consumer packaging can be done in the country of origin, for example in Tunisia. It is not common to send packaging materials to the origin country, but buyers expect you to sign a conformity statement to show that the packaging matches their requirements.

For bulk packaging of dates, the most common material is cardboard box with plastic lining for extra protection, with weights usually ranging between 5 and 8 kg. When packaged in corrugated or millboard cartons, the product should be transported on pallets. They should conform to the conventional pallet sizes (800x1200 mm and 1000x1200 mm).

**FIGURE 2: EXAMPLE OF BULK PACKAGING FOR DATES:
PITTED DATES IN CARDBOARD BOX WITH PLASTIC LINING (10KG)**



Source: *Tilouche Imports*

Some of the most common consumer packaging solutions for organic dates in Germany are:

- 200 to 500 gram plastic bags (especially loose dates)
- 180 to 250 gram plastic or carton trays (especially dates in clusters/stems)
- 1 to 5 kg carton boxes (both loose and in clusters or stems)

FIGURE 3: EXAMPLES OF RETAIL PACKAGING FOR ORGANIC DATES

PLASTIC BAG (200 GRAMS)



Source: *Rinatura*

CARTON BOX (5 KG)



Source: *Tilouche Fruchtimport*

CARTON TRAY (200 GRAMS)



Source: *Real Bio*

Handling, transportation and storage

The correct handling, transportation and storage of dates are essential in safeguarding their quality. Dates are vulnerable to contamination and decay, but you can follow general guidelines to avoid further problems.

One crucial aspect for **organic dates**: they should remain physically separated from conventional dates at all stages of harvesting, processing, transportation, storage and packaging to avoid contamination and to facilitate traceability.

Dates should be stored and transported in cool and dry conditions, with good ventilation if required; high-quality dates (dessert dates, selected) are transported in cold stores.

- At temperatures < 10°C, possible mite growth is inhibited.
- At temperatures > 25°C, syrup forms and fermentation may occur. There is a risk of the syrup ("date honey") seeping out of the packaging and damaging other goods. Discoloration may also occur, such as darkening or blotchiness.
- At a relative humidity > 70%, dates have a tendency to become mouldy, to support yeast growth and to ferment.
- At a relative humidity < 60%, dates become tough and hard.

Infestation with moths (almond moth, meal moth), beetles (sap beetle, saw-toothed grain beetle, flour beetle), rats, mice and ants leads to contamination and loss of volume.

More tips and tools on the handling, storage and transportation of dates can be found on the website of the [German Transport Information System](#).

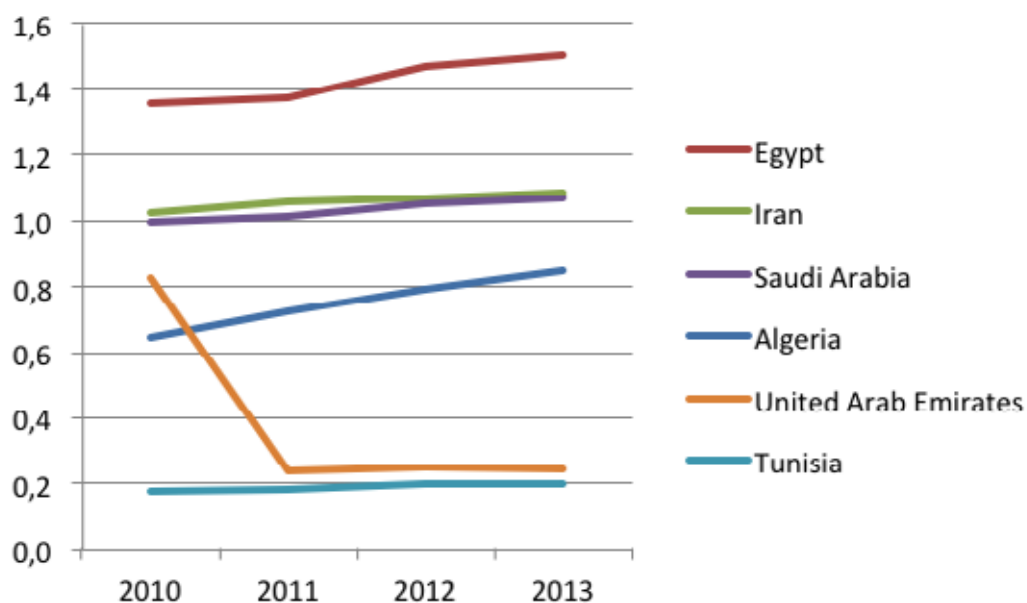
As described in the requirements section, insect infestation is the most common problem which German and other European buyers face with dates. German buyers recommend the use CO₂ pressure to remove infestation. **For organic dates, it is not allowed to use chemicals in the fumigation process.**

WHAT IS THE DEMAND FOR ORGANIC DATES IN GERMANY?

The German market offers good opportunities for Tunisian date producers, especially for organic dates. Tunisia is the largest global exporter of dates in terms of value and the main supplier to the German market. Deglet Nour dates, the main variety produced in Tunisia, is the most common variety on the German market. Moreover, Tunisian exports of organic dates are growing substantially. Germany is one of the main importers of these organic dates.

PRODUCTION AND EXPORTS OF DATES

Tunisia is a relatively small producer, but because most of its production is destined for exports, it is an important player on the international markets. [Up to 60% of the Tunisian production](#) is exported.

FIGURE 4: LEADING PRODUCERS OF DATES, IN MILLION TONNES

Source: FAOSTAT, 2016

According to FAOSTAT, Egypt and Iran are the largest producers of dates worldwide, followed by Saudi Arabia and Algeria. These countries put a less strong focus on exports than Tunisia as they have a much larger domestic market for dates. To compare, Saudi Arabian consumers of dates eat on average 9kg a year, Algerians consume 7kg a year, whereas Tunisians consume 3.4kg a year. Germans only consume an average of 0,2kg of dates/year ([INC Global Statistical Review](#)).

The main exporters of dates (in volume) are the United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Iran ([ITC Trademap](#)). Most of these producers have their own distinct date varieties that they export to Europe.

TUNISIAN EXPORTS

The main date variety produced in Tunisia is Deglet Nour, which is also the most common variety demanded in German supermarkets according to industry sources. By producing Deglet Nour dates, Tunisia is [targeting European markets specifically](#). This variety comprises over 70% of total Tunisian production and 85% of date exports. Other countries that produce this variety include Algeria, Israel and the United States.

Globally, Tunisia is the largest exporter in terms of value and among the six largest exporters in terms of volume ([ITC Trademap](#)). According to industry sources, Tunisia's high value for exported dates is a result of the high value variety produced (Deglet Nour) and the quality of dates exported.

From 2010 to 2015, Tunisian date exports fluctuated but averaged between 80 and 100 thousand tonnes per year. Tunisia expects an excellent crop in quantity and quality for the [2015/2016 harvest](#). Therefore, exports are expected to grow compared to previous years.

Although Germany is a small export market for Tunisian dates, Tunisia is Germany's main supplier. In 2014, Tunisia directed around 6% of its total date exports to Germany. This amounted to 6.5 thousand tonnes (around 16.6 million euros). Tunisia's most important export markets are Morocco, France and Italy.

International demand for organic dates has been growing in the last decade, as has Tunisian exports of the organic fruit. Germany is the main destination for these organic dates. In 2011, Tunisia exported 4,000 tonnes of organic dates, of which 68% was exported to Germany. The Tunisian government supports the organic sector financially and production of organic dates has increased in recent years. A packer in Tunisia estimates that the country now exports around 10,000 tonnes of organic dates. The main markets for these organic fruits are Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom and Switzerland.

TIPS:

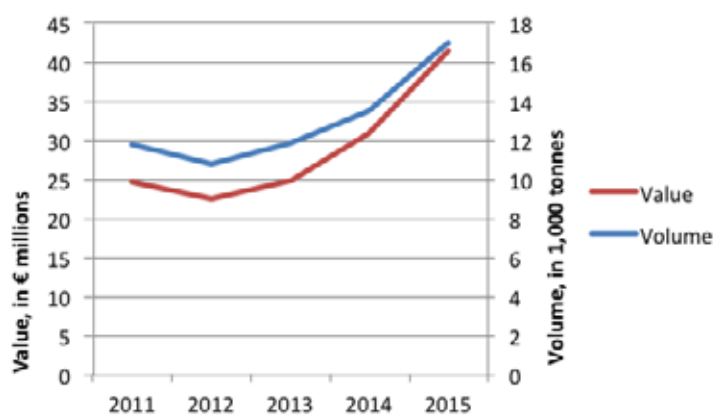
- For more information on competitive sources for Tunisian dates, see the section on competition.
- See [FAOSTAT](#) for more information on production of dates.
- See the [European Export Helpdesk](#) and [Intracen Trademap](#) for more information on date exports.

GERMAN IMPORTS AND MAIN SUPPLIERS

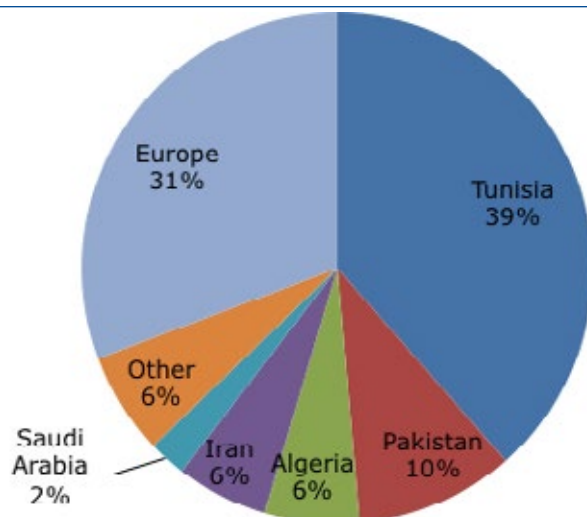
Tunisia is Germany's leading supplier of dates, at nearly 40% of total imports. Supplies by Tunisia steadily increased in the last five years (+3.2% annually).

German total date imports increased 10% annually from 2011 to 2015, reaching 17 thousand tonnes at 41 million euros in 2015. Almost 70% of imports (in volume) originated in developing countries.

FIGURE 5: GERMAN DATE IMPORTS, IN VALUE AND VOLUME



Source: Eurostat, 2016

FIGURE 6: LEADING SUPPLIERS OF DATES TO GERMANY, % OF 2015 IMPORT VOLUME

Source: Eurostat, 2016

Germany's other main suppliers could be competitors for Tunisia, especially Algeria. In the last five years, German imports from Algeria experienced the strongest growth (+71% annually). Most of this growth occurred between 2014 and 2015 (+161%). Supplies from Pakistan and Iran varied considerably in the last five years.

Other developing country suppliers to Germany include Turkey, Israel and Egypt. The main European suppliers to Germany are the Netherlands and France; each amounted to 2 thousand tonnes in 2015, but these reflect re-exports.

In addition to being the third largest importer of dates in Europe, Germany is also an important re-exporter. In 2015, Germany accounted for 15% of total European re-exports of dates (4.8 thousand tonnes /14 million euros), behind France (39%) and the Netherlands (17%). The main destinations for German re-exports were nearby countries:

- Slovakia: 16%
- Austria: 14%
- Romania: 11%
- Denmark: 10%
- Poland: 7.2%

GERMAN CONSUMPTION OF DATES

Because Germany also exports dates, consumption differs from the country's imports. The International Nut and Dried Fruit Council estimates that German consumption of dates varied between 2.5 and 3 thousand tonnes from 2009 to 2013. This comes down to a consumption of 200-250 grams per German date consumer.

The most common date variety on the German market is the Deglet Nour date. So called 'common dates' also represent a large share in the market. These dates are placed in lower market segments, such as Kouat Aligh from Tunisia.

German buyers indicate that demand for organic dates is growing, although this is still a small share of the market. In Europe, Germany is the largest market for organic food products. German households spent 8.62 billion euros on organic food in 2015, a growth of 11% since 2014. Data on consumption of organic dates specifically are not available.

TIPS:

- Follow developments in the German trade for dates and identify developments, such as the emergence of new suppliers and decline of established ones. A good source for analysing the German trade dynamics yourself is the [Eurostat Statistics Database](#).
- Visit the website of the [German Economic Development Agency](#) for general information on German trade dynamics.

WHAT TRENDS OFFER OPPORTUNITIES ON THE GERMAN MARKET FOR ORGANIC DATES?

Demand for dates is growing in Germany. More and more supermarkets and web shops make it part of their assortment and websites post an abundance of recipes with dates. This demand is driven by several trends:

FROM ETHNIC SNACK TO HEALTHY FOOD INGREDIENT

Traditionally in Europe, dates were predominantly consumed by communities originally from the Middle East and North Africa region. Consumption is still particularly high during Ramadan, a month of fasting in Islam. Dates are consumed as Muslims break their fast, at the beginning of meals after the sun has set.

However, more recently, dates have become more popular among other German communities as well. This is driven by the trend towards healthier living. In general, dried fruits are increasingly replacing unhealthy snacks such as cookies and chips. Dates are [one of the new superfoods](#) on the German market and there is a vast amount of information about the fruit's acclaimed health benefits. More and more, consumers eat dates as a healthy snack.

Dates are promoted as a good source of calories and energy, because they have a high carbohydrate content. They also contain dietary fibre and are a source of minerals, such as potassium, calcium, magnesium and phosphorus. They have a low sodium content.

TIPS:

- In your marketing materials and product documentation, include an analysis of the nutritional composition of your dates. Stick to facts and do not make nutritional or health claims! Only claims which are listed in the [EU Register of nutrition and health claims made on foods](#) are allowed.
- Also refer to online sources on the health benefits of related to that composition. See a research article on the [composition and health benefits of dates from Tunisia](#) as an example.

GROWING ORGANIC MARKET

Organic certification offers opportunities for date producers as this fits well with the healthy image of dates. Although organic dates take up a small share of the total date market, buyers indicate that it is a growing market.

The organic market in Germany is the largest in Europe. From 2014 to 2015, this market grew by 11.1%, [reaching a market of 8.6 billion euros](#). The interest in and supply of organic foods is growing, offering opportunities on the German market. Consumer food safety concerns, especially over pesticide residues, are driving the interest in organic foods to ensure food safety.

TIPS:

- For more information on requirements for organic food products, see the section “What are the requirements for niche markets?”
- See the section on market channels and segments for more information on retail channels for organic dates.
- Visit the website of the [German organic food association](#) for more information. Also see the [German page of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements](#).

COOKING WITH DATES

The health benefits of dates are leading to ‘new’ uses of the fruit. Recipes abound for dates, either for their health benefits or as an ingredient in Arabic cuisines. Recipes for dates include salads, stews, bread, cake, muffins, sauces and spreads, energy and granola bars, to milk shakes and cocoa date truffles.

The expansion of ethnic cuisines in Europe is leading to a growing interest in dates used in cooking and baking recipes. This is especially evident in Western European niche markets, where the trend continues to correspond to the high-end segment.

Dates are also used in vegan recipes, to thicken or bind ingredients without using butter or eggs. Such uses are interesting for the German market, the largest vegan and vegetarian market in Europe. Germany [counts almost a million vegans](#) and 7.8 million vegetarians. The [Vegetarian Union Germany](#) (VEBU) estimates that, every day, 200 people become vegan in Germany.

TIPS:

- Demonstrate how your dates can be used in different new and exciting recipes. In your marketing materials, add recipes of traditional dishes from your home country or refer to online sources such as the [Food Network](#).
- If you want to target the vegan market in Germany, make sure that there are no insect infestations in your dates. Then the product is no longer vegan.

IMPORTANCE OF CONVENIENCE PRODUCTS

Convenience in eating is an important trend in Germany, as consumers wanting to cook at home are pressed for time. For dates, this means that you can find more and more [pitted dates in supermarkets](#). According to industry sources, this is the most common form of dates on the market.

TIP:

- Determine if you can produce pitted dates. If you pit dates by hand, you need to pasteurise them as well.

WHAT LEGAL REQUIREMENTS SHOULD ORGANIC DATES COMPLY WITH?

MARKETING STANDARDS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The quality requirements for dried dates in Germany and other European Union countries are described under the section on product specifications.

However, dried dates are also subject to minimum legislative standards which are applicable to other food products in the European Union as given below.

ORGANIC CERTIFICATION

This study has a specific focus on organic-certified dates, which is regulated in the European Union [by specific legal provisions](#) (Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 and Commission Regulation (EC) No 889/2008 (OJ L-250 18/09/2008)).

“Organic by default” does not exist from the perspective of European authorities and buyers. Organic certification implicates more than “naturally grown” and the non-use of pesticides.

For a company to market their product as **organic** in Germany and in the European market, it must comply with the law for organic production and labelling. Organic products must be grown using organic production methods which are laid down in legislation and growing and processing facilities must be audited by an accredited certifier. This will allow you to negotiate a premium with your buyer, to place the European Union and the German organic logo on your products and to target this specific market.

One of the factors which exporters have to pay special attention to is whether their organic certification is de facto recognised by the European Union legislation. Therefore, producers/exporters should search for a certifier whose standards are accredited by the European Union. The European Commission's [Agriculture and Rural Development](#) website provides a thorough explanation of import regulations and other related issues.

If you are an exporter from Tunisia, bear in mind that Tunisia is on the third country list of the European Union, which means that Tunisia's inspection and certification scheme according to the [Tunisian law on organic agriculture](#) is recognised as [equivalent by the European Commission](#).

Organic inspection and certification follows a number of steps:

Organic Systems Plan:

- This document has to be submitted to the inspection and certification body before the inspection. It must contain the following:
 - conformity declaration of the operation manager;
 - complete description of the operation and its facilities;
 - description of all production procedures.
- Inspection of Agricultural Operations:
An announced inspection takes place once a year, but other inspections (announced or not) can be part of the certification procedure. The inspector verifies all necessary documents, records and amenities.
- Certification:
Certification is based on the Organic Systems Plan. Conditions may be imposed and communicated in written form. Notification may be given with measures, according to the catalogue of measures. The tracing of implementation of conditions is done by the inspection and certification body. This will lead to the decision/issuance of the organic certificate.

If you want to target niche markets in Germany, you can also explore possibilities within [DEMETER](#) certification, which is a biodynamic certification label and regarded as the highest grade of organic farming in the world. DEMETER guidelines need to be fulfilled on the whole production chain from farm to export market. Farmers, Processor, Traders etc. need to get registered, inspected and certified before being able to market DEMETER Products.

TIPS:

- Investigate the possibilities for organic certification, including the opportunities and costs involved in the process. For information on organic certification in Europe, visit the website of [Organic Farming](#) in the European Union, which also contains guidelines concerning imports of organic products. Also consult the [International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements \(IFOAM\)](#) website for information on certification standards.
- If you are an exporter from Tunisia, look into the different propositions of inspection and certification agencies based in Tunisia. Currently, there are 5 agencies operating in the country:
 - [Ecocert \(France\)](#)
 - [CCPB \(Italy\)](#)
 - [KIWA BCS \(Germany\)](#)
 - [SuoloeSalute \(Italy\)](#)
 - [INNORPI \(Tunisia\)](#)
- Check the [Bio-Siegel](#) website to get acquainted with Germany's national organic label. Other trademarks on the German market include [Naturland](#) and [Bioland](#).
- Browse through the website of the trade fair [BioFach](#) trade fair to get acquainted with German and other European buyers dealing with organic-certified dates (you can filter your search per product). BioFach is the largest trade fair for organic-certified products worldwide, and takes place annually in Nuremberg, Germany.
- Check out the company database on the website of [Organic-Bio](#), which centralises some of the most important companies dealing with a range of organic-certified products, including dates.

FOOD SAFETY: TRACEABILITY, HYGIENE AND CONTROL

Food safety is a key issue in the European Union's food legislation. All food products in the European Union, including organic dates, must comply with the [General Food Law \(Regulation \(EC\) 178/2002\)](#).

This legislation lays down the general principles and requirements of food legislation and procedures in matters of food safety, including:

- **Traceability:** The ability to track food products through the stages of production. Your buyers expect you to know and document your buyers and suppliers, which products are used during your production process and to label final products for traceability in case of a food safety problem.
- **Hygiene:** An important aspect to control food safety hazards is defining critical control points ([HACCP](#)) by implementing food management principles. Another important aspect is subjecting food products to official controls. Products that are not considered safe will be denied access to the European Union.

Control of food imported to the EU

In the event of repeated non-compliance of specific products originating from particular countries, such products can only be imported under stricter conditions such as having to be accompanied with a health certificate and analytical test report. Products from countries that have shown repeated non-compliance are put on a list included in the Annex of [Regulation \(EC\) 669/2009](#). No cases specifically involving (organic) dates are currently listed under this annex.

TIP:

- Read more about sanitary and phytosanitary requirements at the [EU Export Helpdesk](#) and pay special attention to the following documents from the European Commission:
 - [Import requirements and the new rules on food hygiene and official food controls](#)
 - [Implementation of certain provisions of Regulation \(EC\) No 852/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the hygiene of foodstuffs](#)
 - [Implementation of procedures based on the HACCP principles](#)

CONTAMINATION SOURCES AND MAXIMUM LEVELS

Contaminants are substances that may be present as a result of the various stages of harvesting, processing, packaging, transport or storage of (organic) dates.

One of the most common problems faced by exporters of dates is contamination. For this reason, it is crucial for exporters to learn and comply with the maximum contamination levels allowed by the European legislation. The different sources of contamination in dates, and the respective legislation addressing them, are:

- **Mycotoxins:** Even though dried fruits such as dates are not highly perishable, [they are still subject to mould growth](#) due to their sugar content, method of harvest and drying conditions. Toxigenic fungi of the *Aspergillus* species are the main contaminants in dried fruits of the Mediterranean region. In dates and prunes, aflatoxin contamination caused by *Aspergillus flavus* is especially relevant, but attention should also be given to Ochratoxin A ([Mycotoxin risks and toxigenic fungi in date, prune and dried apricot among Mediterranean crops, 2012](#)). See section the Annex of Regulation (EC) No 1881/2006 for specific limits in dried fruits for direct consumption:
 - Aflatoxin B1: 2.0 µg/kg
 - Sum of Aflatoxin B1, B2, G1 and G2: 4.0 µg/kg
 - Ochratoxin A: 10 ng/g
- **Heavy metals:** There are maximum limits for lead and cadmium. Fruits cannot contain more than 0.10 mg/kg of lead; fruits and vegetables cannot contain more than 0.050 mg/kg of cadmium (both based on the wet weight).
- **Pesticides:** the European Union has set maximum residue levels (MRLs) for pesticides in and on food products. But this does not apply for organic-certified products, in which pesticide residues **are not** tolerated.
- **Microbiological:** In the current [EU legislation](#), no microbiological criteria have been set specifically for dates or other dried fruits. Food safety authorities however can withdraw imported food products from the market or prevent them from entering the European Union when salmonella or other microbes such as *E. coli* are found present.
- **Foreign matter:** Contamination by foreign matter like insects, mites, dust or other materials like metal parts is a threat for dates. There is no specific legislation on these issues, but products can be rejected on this basis. As described in the section on product specification, foreign matter is also a determinant of quality classification.

TIPS:

- On the website of the [Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed \(RASFF\)](#), you can browse through various border rejections and alerts for specific organic dates under the product category 'fruits and vegetables'. You can learn about common problems faced by suppliers during border controls and adopt appropriate measures to avoid them. The most common example for dates is [insect infestation](#).
- Read more about [contaminants in the EU Export Helpdesk](#) and check the European Commission's factsheet on food contaminants: [Managing food contaminants: how the EU ensures that our food is safe](#).

- Many border rejections come from improper transport of dates. For information on safe storage and transport, refer to the website of the [German Transport Information System](#).
- Do not use chemicals in fumigation processes. The use of chemicals is not allowed for organic dates. German buyers recommend suppliers to use CO₂ pressure to deal with this problem, especially in terms of insect infestation.

FOOD CONTACT MATERIALS

For consumer packaging materials which come in contact with food (example: plastic trays and carton boxes), specific [health control provisions](#) apply. Food contact materials made from (recycled) plastic and ceramic, for instance, must be manufactured so that they do not transfer constituents to food in quantities that could endanger human health, change the composition of the food in an unacceptable way or deteriorate the taste and odour of foodstuffs. Common restricted substances are vinyl chloride monomer N-nitrosamines, N-nitrosatable BADGE, NOGE, BFDGE and heavy metals.

TIP:

- The European Union legislation on food contact materials is quite extensive. It is not easy to prove to your importer that your product complies with all requirements. Therefore, German and other European importers of food products might require documentation on toxicology and risk assessment of chemical migration from food contact materials and/or declarations of compliance.

LABELLING

Organic dates are subject to the general [EU Regulation 1169/2011](#) on provision of food information, which set new labelling requirements, most of which have been applicable since December 2014. This regulation applies to exporters of dates which are sold as final/consumer products and are described under the section on Product specifications.

TIPS:

- Make sure to declare and list all allergens used in your production process. Possible contact with allergenic substances (example: your production line is also used for the processing of nuts) should also be listed. Refer to [Annex II](#) of Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 for an overview of all allergens.
- Do not make any nutrition or health claims which are not backed by scientific evidence. Make sure to check the [EU Register of nutrition and health claims made on foods](#) for claims which are allowed for dates, and under which conditions.

FULL OVERVIEW OF REQUIREMENTS FOR DATES

For a list of requirements consult the [EU Export Helpdesk](#) where you can select your specific product code under 080410 (fresh or dried dates); you can select your respective origin and export destination (Germany).

WHAT ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS DO BUYERS OFTEN HAVE?

FOOD SAFETY CERTIFICATION AS A GUARANTEE

Food hygiene (based on HACCP methodology) is a legislative requirement for producers and exporters of (organic) dried dates to enter the European market. In addition to the minimum and mandatory food safety standards, buyers in Germany and in the European Union increasingly demand compliance with food safety standards which are more comprehensive.

By complying with such additional standards, organic dates exporters are able to enter specific market segments or gain competitive advantage in relation to their competitors. Certifications on general quality and food safety management systems from recognised and trustworthy sources demonstrate the supplier's commitment to high and consistent quality and safety.

This is highly relevant to the production and handling of organic dates, especially regarding exporters of organic dates in consumer packaging. As a general rule, the further processed and packaged the product is, the stricter the quality management requirements become.

The adoption of standards which go beyond HACCP will depend on the profile of your buyer; usually large retailers and private label manufacturers are more demanding and will require compliance with one or more of the following:

- [International Featured Standards \(IFS\)](#) – Food corresponds to ISO 9001, but with a focus on food safety, HACCP, hygiene, the manufacturing process and business surroundings. The IFS is a quality and safety standard published by the union of German supermarket chains, [HDE \(Hauptverband des Deutschen Einzelhandels\)](#).
- [British Retail Consortium \(BRC\)](#) is a private institution which promotes private (BRC) standards, which contain more extensive rules on Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) than HACCP, for example regarding organisation and communication.
- [ISO 22000](#) combines the HACCP plan with prerequisite programmes (PRPs). It specifies the requirements for a food safety management system along the food chain, up to the point of final consumption.
- [FSSC 22000](#) is based on existing international standards ISO 22000 and ISO/TS 22002-1.

All the mentioned management systems are recognised by the [Global Food Safety Initiative \(GFSI\)](#), which means that any of them should be accepted by several major retailers in Germany. However, in practice some buyers still have preferences for one specific management system. Generally, IFS is the most commonly required standard in Germany, although this may differ among buyers.

Some Germany buyers might also require adherence to [GLOBALG.A.P.](#) standards, especially when working with retailers. Although GLOBALG.A.P. certification is normally requested from exporters of fresh fruits and vegetables, industry sources indicate that buyers of dried dates can also demand it.

TIPS:

- Identify which food safety hazards are most common in your production line, and establish how a food safety management system can improve the quality of your product.
- Market entry preparation is more likely to include implementing a food safety management system than not, and it is therefore important to familiarise yourself with them. HACCP is a minimum requirement.
- Always check with your buyer which specific food safety management systems are requested. In any case, choose for a management system that is GFSI approved.
- An interesting Information source covering food safety standards, which also publishes news items on this topic is the website of HACCEUROPA.

CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

German buyers may expect you to comply with their supplier codes of conduct regarding social responsibility, which are often based on the [ILO labour standards](#). This can be the importer's own code of conduct or a code of conduct as a part of an initiative in which the importer is participating. The adoption of those standards is most common among large-scale importers, food manufacturers and retailers.

This also affects you as a supplier. Common requirements are the signing of a suppliers' code of conduct in which you declare that you do your business in a responsible way, meaning that you (and your suppliers) respect local environmental and labour laws, stay away from corruption etc. These aspects are also investigated further in company audits carried out by your (potential) buyer.

TIPS:

- Verify with your (potential) buyer the extent to which social standards are required and/or appreciated.
- In selecting suppliers, German and other European buyers might look for those with an appropriate Code of Conduct and targets for improvement in key areas such as child labour and the environmental footprint of the company. Key references at the international level are the [UN Global Compact](#) and [ISO 26000](#) on Social Responsibility.
- Implementing a management system such as [ISO 14000](#) (environmental aspects), [OHSAS 18001](#) (occupational health and safety), [SA 8000](#) (social conditions) or [Business Social Compliance Initiative \(BSCI\)](#) is a complementary strategy to address sustainability and possibly gain competitive advantage on the German market.

WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR NICHE MARKETS?

Additional requirements for niche markets mainly concern fair trade certification, which addresses the social aspect of production and trade.

FAIR TRADE

[Fairtrade International](#) is the leading standard-setting and certification organisation for Fairtrade. Products which carry the Fairtrade label indicate that producers are paid a [Fairtrade Minimum Price](#).

Fairtrade International has a complete minimum price structure for dates, which are classified per origin (Tunisia and Egypt) as well as category (organic/conventional).

Other fair trade standards available in the European market are [Fair Trade Ecocert](#) and [Fair for Life](#). Fair Trade Ecocert provides for guaranteed minimum prices, producer support and good agricultural practices; this standard requires an organic certification. There are [Fair Trade Ecocert-certified operators](#) for dates in Tunisia and Iran, as well as France.

Fair for Life has a similar proposition, and is a standard for companies which demonstrate decent working conditions and commit to fair sourcing and responsibilities towards their primary producers. Organic certification is not compulsory for Fair for Life holders. At the moment, [there are no registered Fair for Life operators](#) handling dates.

TIP:

- Before engaging in a Fair Trade certification programme, make sure to check (in consultation with your potential buyer) that this label has sufficient demand in your target market and whether it will be cost-beneficial for your product. In general, Fairtrade International is the most common fair trade label in Germany.

WHAT DO THE TRADE CHANNELS AND INTERESTING MARKET SEGMENTS LOOK LIKE IN EUROPE AND GERMANY?

MARKET CHANNELS

FIGURE 7: TRADE CHANNELS FOR ORGANIC DATES

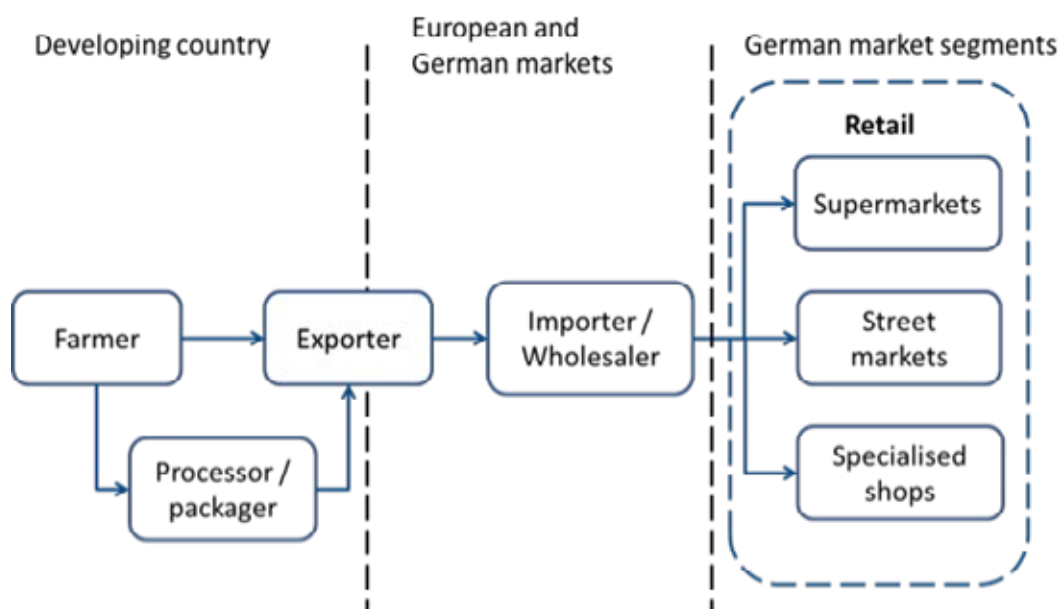


Figure 7 gives an overview of trade channels for dates for the German market. Dates ripen on the tree and require little processing in the country of origin. After harvesting, they are cleaned and graded and sorted according to quality and size. Often, they are pitted as well. If dates are pitted by hand, they need to be pasteurised before exports.

The dates are packaged, either in bulk or consumer packaging, and exported to European or German markets. Dates **in bulk** packaging are repacked in Germany (or other European countries) by importers, before they are sold to various retail chains. Dates **in consumer packaging** are usually distributed through wholesalers directly to retail chains.

Deglet Nour dates from Tunisia do not require a cold chain as these are semi-dry dates. Soft dates, such as Medjool, do need to be transported in a cold chain, to extend their shelf life and retain quality.

TRADE THROUGH IMPORTERS/WHOLESALERS

Aside from direct imports from Tunisia, traders in the Netherlands and France play an important role in date supplies to Germany. Date importers are usually specialised in imports of dried fruits and nuts, or other snacks.

Importers of dates **in bulk** take care of necessary administrative formalities and often provide services such as (re-)packaging (for example, in retail-sized packaging), transportation and logistics to then sell the produce to the retail market.

Importers commonly use CO₂ treatment to take out insect infestations of organic dates. If date producers can treat dates with CO₂ pressure as well, this can be a competitive advantage for them.

Dates **in consumer packaging** usually reach the market through importing wholesalers, who rely on their distribution network and forward the products to various retail chains. Wholesalers can be independent companies or integrated to the retailer's operational structure.

RETAIL

In Germany, organic dates are most commonly sold through supermarkets, street markets and specialised organic or ethnic food shops. Supermarkets such as Edeka and Rewe sell both organic and conventional dates.

TIPS:

- Determine if you can implement CO₂ treatment of your organic dates. Find out if you can earn back the investments you need to make.
- Make sure that the packaging materials and labelling match your buyer's specifications.
- Follow international standards on the grading of dates. Refer to the section on product specifications for more details.
- Ensure that your processing and packaging facilities comply with hygiene requirements. See the section on buyer requirements for more information.
- Contact an experienced importer/distributor before you enter the German market for more information on requirements and expectations from supermarkets.
- Be aware that delivering to supermarkets is very demanding in buyer requirements and price. In order to supply directly to retailers, not only do you need to supply consistent volumes in a short lead times (to avoid large stocks), but also meet very strict quality requirements and manage returns.

MARKET SEGMENTS

Dates on the German market can be segmented according to their variety, quality and certifications. In the high-end market segment, you can find premium and fresh dates, such as Medjool and Deglet Nour varieties, with organic and/or fair trade certification.

The middle segment consists of good quality dates that meet standard retail requirements. These are mostly sold through German supermarkets.

Dates in the low-end segment are sold through discounter retail stores, such as Aldi and Lidl. They are commonly sold under private supermarket labels. This segment mainly consists of dates without certifications, often still with their pit. Lower-priced and quality dates, such as Kouat Aligh, are also included in this segment.

TIPS:

- See the CBI study on [market channels and segments for dried fruit and edible nuts](#) for more information.
- Explore opportunities in certification or quality improvement in order to target higher-end segments on the Germany market.

WHAT ARE THE MARKET PRICES FOR ORGANIC DATES?

PRICE DEVELOPMENTS

German buyers indicate that prices for organic dates are higher than for conventional dates. One interviewed buyer indicated an increase in prices for organic dates of about 20-30% compared to conventional dates.

In Germany, retail prices for organic Deglet Nour dates are around 1.00 to 1.40 euros per 100 gram. Non-organic, non-pitted Deglet Nour dates are also sold in discount supermarkets for prices as low as 0.35 euros per 100 gram.

Medjool dates are among the most expensive dates on the market. To illustrate, prices for Medjool dates can be twice as high as for Deglet Nour dates.

Import prices of dates can vary by up to ten times depending on the variety, origin, packaging and quality of the dates involved.

TABLE 1: IMPORT PRICES OF DATES, PER 5KG, IN WEEK 24 OF 2016

Market	Origin	Variety	Price in euro
France	Algeria	Deglet Nour	5.20
	Israel	Medjool	11.00
The Netherlands	Algeria	unknown	2.75
	Israel	Medjool	7.20-7.55
	Peru	Golden	4.00
	Tunisia	Kouat Aligh	1.88
	South Africa	Medjool	8.70-9.70

Source: [ITC Market Insider](#)

According to industry sources, the Deglet Nour variety from Tunisia is a high quality date. As a result, prices can be quite high compared to dates from other sources.

Prices for common dates from Tunisia (such as Kouat Aligh) are quite low compared to prices from other producing countries. Table 1 lists import prices for dates from various origins in France and the Netherlands, the main European suppliers to Germany.

TIPS:

- Compare the price of your product with other products on the German market. Investigate which aspects are affecting the competitiveness of your price. For retail prices of dates in Germany, have a look at the [Supermarket Check portal](#).
- Check the [International Trade Centre's Market Insider](#) to stay up to date on European import prices of dates. These are listed under prices for tropical and off-season fresh fruits.
- Justify the value of your product. Buyers and consumers might be willing to pay a higher price for products which convey quality, sustainability and smart marketing.

COMPETITOR ANALYSIS

MARKET ENTRY

As requirements to enter the German market are becoming stricter, market entry becomes more challenging. European legislation and its control mechanisms establish maximum limits for contaminants, but also look into commonplace issues faced by exporters, such as insect infestation. It is essential to streamline efforts to address quality issues at the origin in order to access the German market successfully. High quality will also allow for access to higher-end market segments.

Moreover, most market channels require minimum volumes (which can vary between a number of pallets or a full container), which can be a challenge for small-scale producers. Limited access to finance and scarcity of water in some countries, such as Tunisia, can further aggravate this problem.

TIPS:

- Comply with market access requirements on food safety, quality and traceability. See the section on buyer requirements for more information.
- Ensure that you can supply stable supplies of dates, both in quantity and quality. Link up with sector associations or other producers/cooperatives if you cannot reach the required volumes by yourself.

PRODUCT COMPETITION

Various products on the German market compete with organic dates. As the most common use for these fruits is as a snack, other snacks are the main substitute products, especially snacks that are seen or marketed as healthy options.

These include fresh fruits, other dried fruits and nuts, but also products that use these ingredients, such as granola and energy bars. Dried fruits such as raisins, prunes or figs are also used to substitute dates in bakery products.

Although unhealthy snacks are a smaller force of product competition, they can still be used as substitute products. Such products include savoury snacks and bakery products.

TIPS:

- Use the healthy food trend and the nutritional composition of dates as a unique selling point for your dates (high in fibre and minerals). Promote them as healthy snacks or bakery ingredients.
- Add value to your dates and set them apart from competition by adding recipes, investing in storytelling and marketing communication, showing the final consumer where and how your dates have been produced (label, website, social media).
- See the market trends above on 'From ethnic snack to healthy food ingredient' and 'Cooking with dates' for more information on healthy aspects of dates.

COMPANY COMPETITION

Your source of competition depends on the variety of dates you produce. For Deglet Nour producers in Tunisia, competition for the German market mainly comes from Algeria and Israel, which also produce Deglet Nour dates. Of these, Algeria is a growing supplier to the German market.

According to industry sources, dates from Algeria are cheaper than dates from Tunisia, because of a lower quality. Algeria is a larger date producer than Tunisia, but makes up a much smaller share of European and German date imports.

Israel is a small supplier of dates to Germany. Next to its production of Deglet Nour dates, this country sets itself apart with a relatively high production of Medjool dates. Prices of Israeli dates are much higher than the global average.

Other producers of Deglet Nour dates are the United States and the State of Palestine. However, supplies of these countries play a very small role on the German and European markets.

Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt make up most of the remainder of date supplies to Germany. These countries produce different date varieties from Tunisia. Iran and Saudi Arabia are known for their fresh date varieties.

In international competition, Tunisia has several strengths:

- The country specialises in Deglet Nour dates, which is the most common date variety on international markets.
- Tunisia focuses its production on exports. The country has made investments in modern plantations and employed a marketing strategy to increase exports. As a result, it has a reputation for producing high-quality dates among German importers. Moreover, the country sells its dates for [3.4 times more than the global average price](#).
- Tunisian production and exports of organic dates more than doubled in the last five years.

However, the country also has some weaknesses:

- Product infestation is quite high for dates from Tunisia, according to industry sources and the [RASFF database](#).
- [Quality of packaged dates](#) can be inconsistent.
- Dates face problems from pests and diseases. In Tunisia, the carob moth is an urgent problem for the production and export of Deglet Nour dates.

In general, German retailers, particularly supermarkets, have a strong position in the supply chain. As a result, they have very strict requirements and conditions for products. Moreover, competition between supermarkets is mainly on price, which makes price an issue for importers/wholesalers who supply these retailers as well. They will put pressure on you as a supplier as well to meet competitive prices.

TIPS:

- Make sure that you are a reliable and accessible partner. Adhere to your agreements and make sure you are easy to contact, for example e-mails should be responded to within one or two days.
- Always be available for communication! Be open and honest in your communications and promptly answer questions and requests from your (potential) buyers.
- Develop treatments and techniques to solve pest problems and treat diseases for date palms. Do not use the fumigant methyl bromide, as this has a harmful effect on human health and the environment.
- Prevent or treat dates for product infestation, for example with CO₂ treatments.
- Invest in packaging facilities, staff and materials to ensure consistent packaging of dates.

USEFUL SOURCES

- Tunisian Centre Technique des Dattes – www.ctd.tn/en/index.php
- Tunisian Centre Technique de l'Agriculture Biologique – www.ctab.nat.tn/default.php
- Federation of German Food and Drink Industries (BVE) – www.bve-online.de
- German association of organic food products – www.boelw.de
- FAOSTAT, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations – <http://faostat3.fao.org/home/E>
- EU Export Helpdesk – <http://exporthelp.europa.eu/thdapp/index.htm>
- ITC Trademap – www.trademap.org/Index.aspx
- ITC Standardsmap – <http://standardsmap.org>
- Open Trade Gate Sweden – www.opentradegate.se
- VEBU, advocacy for vegan and vegetarian people in Germany, also includes recipes – <https://vebu.de>
- International Nut and Dried Fruit, for information on dried fruits and nuts – www.nutfruit.org
- Nutra Ingredients, trade press – www.nutraingredients.com

SOME EXAMPLES OF GERMAN COMPANIES

- Agiba Frishimport – www.agiba.net
- Sandner Früchte – www.sandner-fruechte.de
- Biovisio – www.biovisiogmbh.de
- Kluth Gruppe – www.kluth.com

RELEVANT TRADE FAIRS

- BioFach, Nuremberg, Germany – www.biofach.de/en
- Anuga, Cologne, Germany – www.anuga.com
- SIAL, Paris, France – www.sialparis.com

MORE INFORMATION

CBI market information: Promising EU export markets.

EU Expanding Exports Helpdesk – <http://exporthelp.europa.eu> – go to 'trade statistics'.

Eurostat – <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/newxtweb> – statistical database of the EU.

Several queries are possible. For trade, choose 'EU27 Trade Since 1995 By CN8'.

International Trade Statistics – www.trademap.org – you have to register.

This survey was compiled for IPD & CBI by ProFound – Advisers In Development in collaboration with IPD expert Klaus Merckens, July 2016