

# Market Development

**MARKET BRIEF**

**ON**

**OKRA**

**ITC**



INTERNATIONAL TRADE CENTRE UNCTAD/WTO

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ON

OKRA

ITC



INTERNATIONAL TRADE CENTRE UNCTAD/WTO  
GENEVA  
1998

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**M.DPMD/98/0101**

**A. PRODUCT DESCRIPTION**

In international trade okra is classified in heading: CN 07.09.90 "Other vegetables, fresh or chilled".

**B. STATISTICS**

**Production**

Okra can have various colours: green-white, violet or red. Depending on how early it is harvested, it is described as early (harvested 40 to 50 days after sowing), semi-early (55 to 60 days after sowing) or late (70 to 75 days after sowing). The cultivars with hairless or only slightly hairy fruit are the most sought after. The early and semi-early varieties are generally preferred.

Some varieties of okra			
VARIETY	EARLY	SEMI-EARLY	COLOUR
Annie Oakley			Green
Artist			Red
Better Five			Green
Clemson Spineless			Green
Emerald Green			Green
Green Star			Green
Sun Star			Green
White Okra			White

**Source:** CTIFL.

Whatever the target market, CLEMSON SPINELESS is the variety most exported.

Okra is imported all the year round, mainly from Mexico and Cyprus. A native of India, it is widespread in tropical Africa and the Mediterranean basin.

**Supply calendar**

Country of origin	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Brazil												
Cyprus												
Egypt												
India												
Kenya												
Mexico												
Nigeria												
Sri Lanka												
Trinidad and Tobago												
Turkey												
Zambia												
Zimbabwe												

**Source:** COLEACP.

## **Imports**

### **Imports into the European Union**

The main suppliers of the European Union are: Kenya, Egypt, Thailand, Mexico, Gambia, Cyprus and Mauritania.

Great Britain and France are, respectively, the first and second outlets for okra in Europe. Brazil and Mexico are prominent alongside the traditional suppliers of the ethnic minorities (Kenya, Antilles).

Apart from fresh okra, Germany imports canned okra from Bulgaria, Greece and Egypt.

Although okra has recently had some success on the exotic products market, the ethnic communities are still the main consumers.

Thus, it is hardly surprising that the United Kingdom, with its many ethnic communities, should be the primary market for this product.

Kenya, the principal supplier of the British market, is followed by Cyprus and, less closely, by India and Jamaica. The exports from these countries are mainly intended for the Indian, Pakistani, Cypriot and Greek communities in the cities.

### **Imports into the United States**

In 1996, the United States imported 24,923 tonnes of okra (23,651 in 1995) with a value of US\$ 10.3 million.

Mexico is by far the leading exporter, followed by Guatemala. The smaller suppliers include El Salvador and Egypt.

### **Imports into Japan**

The Japanese market, supplied mainly by Mexico, is proving to be a very marginal outlet.

## **C. MARKET CHARACTERISTICS**

Although okra is well known in all the tropical and subtropical regions of the world, it still has only limited appeal outside Africa and the Antilles. In recent years, however, several producing countries have tried to gain access to the European market by incorporating okra into a range of other exotic products. So far, the results have been only moderately encouraging.

Since Brazil is promoting okra as part of its huge range of products and since the quantities currently being marketed are extremely small, its exports should increase substantially over the next few years.

Up to now, the okra market has been based exclusively on the demand from the catering trade, but the situation should change as the supermarket chains have been launching promotion campaigns and, in particular, distributing recipe leaflets.

Mexico is another producing country that should benefit from the revival of interest. Mexican okra and particularly its relatively good keeping qualities are appreciated by British buyers. It stays fresh for a

week, slightly longer than Brazilian okra and considerably more than Kenyan okra which will not keep for more than two or three days.

## **D. MARKET ACCESS**

### **Standards**

There are no special standards for okra. Thus, it is the commercial practices of the importers that need to be respected.

### **Legislation**

A phytosanitary certificate is mandatory for admission to the destination markets. This is issued by the competent authorities of the exporting country.

### **Customs tariffs**

#### **European Union**

The common external tariff applied to okra imports entering the European Union is 14.4% *ad valorem*. However, there are preferential tariffs for some countries (subject to the production of a FORM A certificate).

For Mexico, for example, the tariff is 12% *ad valorem* while that for Kenya and Jamaica is only 10% *ad valorem*.

#### **United States and Canada**

The following table shows the customs duties applied on the North American markets in terms of the principal countries of origin of okra imports.

<b>Origin</b>	<b>US import tariffs</b>	<b>Canadian import tariffs</b>
New Zealand	22.5% of FOB price	Exempt
Mexico	Exempt	Exempt
Trinidad and Tobago	Exempt	Exempt

*Source:* CFCE/DPA.

In order to benefit from exemptions or preferential tariffs on the various markets a FORM A certificate needs to be produced.

In the United States, a sales tax amounting to 0.21% of the FOB price and, in the case of consignment by sea, a port tax of 0.125% of the FOB price should be added to the customs duty.

#### **Japan**

The customs tariff applied by Japan is 5% *ad valorem* (January 1996); the ASEAN countries are granted a preferential tariff.

## **E. PRICES**

As a guide, in 1997 the price of okra on the Rungis (France) wholesale market was:

- T 20 FF/kilo for Mexican okra,
- T 17 FF/kilo for Mauritanian okra.

## **F. DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS**

Okra is imported by importers specialising in exotic fruit and vegetables.

It is distributed both through the traditional channels: exporters - importers - wholesalers -specialised retailers (shops and street markets mainly frequented by Asian and African customers) and directly from the exporter to the specialised retailer.

## **G. COMMERCIAL PRACTICES**

### **Keeping qualities**

When marketed at an early stage, okra will not keep very long. It is recommended that the crop be cooled to 16EC and the okra kept at between 7 and 10EC and 95% relative humidity. Under these conditions the okra, often plastic-wrapped, can be stored for one or two weeks. However, the temperature must not be allowed to fall below 5EC. In stock, the product has a life of only two days, withering very quickly when exposed to the open air.

### **Packaging**

Various forms of packaging are used (see table below): for most origins in cardboard boxes weighing 3 to 5 kg net, but Mexico and Mauritania prefer wooden or plastic crates weighing from 10 to 13 kg. Putting up in 500 g or 250 g trays helps to improve the value added of the product.

<b>Country of origin</b>	<b>Packaging used</b>
Brazil	Variable
Cyprus	4.5/5.4/6.4 kg
Egypt	4 kg
India	10 lb
Kenya	2 kg
Mexico	5 kg
Nigeria	4 lb
Sri Lanka	2 kg
Trinidad and Tobago	Variable
Turkey	Variable
Zambia	4 lb
Zimbabwe	4 lb

*Source:* Fruitrop.

### **Quality criteria**

For marketing purposes, okra should be bright green, firm and free of insect marks and other blemishes. The importers do not care for okra that is too young or too ripe since it then has little flavour and tends to be fibrous and stringy. Similarly, the importers reject soft or yellowing pods and those less than 4 cm long.

Okra is ideal for marketing when it measures 4 to 9 cm in length and is green, tender and easy to shell.

### **Grading and packing**

It is recommended that any capsules which have changed colour be removed, together with any displaying black bruising on the ridges, traces of chemicals or defects caused by insects. All the capsules that meet the size specifications can be packed loose in cardboard boxes. Grading according to individual sizes is unnecessary. Okra is hand-sorted on conveyor belts or standard grading tables, conveyor belt sorting being faster. The net weight depends on the importer's requirements and varies from 3.5 to 4.5 kg (8 to 10 pounds).

### **Packaging - Inside dimensions of boxes**

T 10.9 x 34 x 26.9 cm (4.3 x 13.4 x 10.6 inches)

T 16 x 37.6 x 27.9 cm (6.3 x 14.6 x 11 inches)

### **Logistics**

Okra has a high respiration rate which can lead to a rapid rise in temperature. Accordingly, the capsules should be quickly cooled after packaging to prevent them turning black or deteriorating.

A suitable cooling temperature is 10 to 12 degrees. Okra should not be stored for more than 36 hours before shipment. Pallets must be used for transport, particularly air transport.

In the case of transport by air in unventilated containers, the okra should be taken out of cool storage 2 or 3 hours before the container is loaded so that the condensation water can evaporate from the capsules. If this is not done, the high level of humidity and the increased temperature of the capsules will lead to yellowing and blackening of the ridges and mould will form on the stems.

## **H. MARKET PROSPECTS**

Whatever the target market, okra imports are still very limited, even though they are showing a tendency to increase, particularly in Europe where some supermarkets occasionally include okra in their range of tropical vegetables. It therefore seems that for okra one means of market penetration is to become associated with a range of tropical products.

Thus, the market for okra is still relatively narrow and restricted to the demand from the ethnic communities in the cities.

However, the interest being shown by the supermarkets in the product and the consumers' marked taste for exotic fruit and vegetables are encouraging signs of future expansion.



### **Prospects for okra in the supermarkets?**

The considerable development of sales of exotic fruit and vegetables is closely linked with increased supermarket sales.

It is the importers who know the supermarkets' requirements and undertake to pass them on to the exporters.

Thus, through the importers, various export opportunities are available to those who can meet the requirements of the large retailers, that is, those who can offer quality (flavour, resistance, long life), volume and uniform prices.

### **Prospects for consumption**

Since at present only relatively small amounts are being consumed, there is reason to expect the market to grow.

Although the market for okra will remain relatively restricted as compared with that for other more popular exotic fruits and vegetables such as mango and papaya, there are nevertheless a number of promising consumption trends:

**T** For more than 5 years, in the fruit and vegetables category exotic fruit and vegetables have been the group to experience the highest rates of growth.

In France, for example, for the minor exotics, excluding products such as pineapple and mango, the household penetration rate rose from less than 10% at the end of the eighties to nearly 20% in the mid-nineties.

**T** Consumers are traveling more and more, especially in the tropics, and products such as okra are becoming more and more widely known and appreciated.

**T** Finally, in general, it is easy to link the exotics with values which appeal to the modern consumer, such as nature, the tropics, discovery, etc.

## ANNEX I

### LIST OF OKRA IMPORTERS IN EUROPE

(Non-exhaustive list)

#### GERMANY

##### **ATLANTA HARDER & Co.GmbH**

Breitenweg 29-33  
28195 BREMEN  
F : 49/4213-09-22-86  
49/4213-09-22-71  
Telex: 245485/244512  
Fax: 49/4211-36-95

##### **BOCCHI FRUIT TRADE INTERNATIONAL**

Fr. Offermann Str. 5  
D-5060 BEGISCH  
F : 49/2204-40-90  
GLADBACH  
Fax: 49/22204-40-91-80

##### **FRUCHTHANSA**

Marktstraße 10  
D-50968 KÖLN  
F : 49/221-93-75-70  
Telex: 8882753  
Fax: 49/221-937-57-54

##### **FRUCHTRING & Co.GmbH**

Lippelstr. 1  
D-2000 HAMBURG 1  
F : 49/4032-13-51  
Fax: 49/4032-39-17

##### **T. PORT HAMBURG GmbH & Co**

Kontorhaus Grossmarkt  
Lippelstraße 1  
D-20097 HAMBURG  
F : 49/4030-10-00-77  
Telex: 17402272, 2161301  
Fax: 49/4030-10-00-44

##### **P. VAN WYLICK GmbH**

Rather Str. 25  
D-40476 DÜSSELDORF  
F : 49/211-46-90-30  
Telex: 8584048  
Fax: 49/211-46-09-44

##### **WEICHERT**

Fruchthof 2000  
HAMBURG 1  
F : 49/4032-90-00  
Fax: 49/4032-90-03-99

#### BELGIUM

##### **GOOSSENS & Fils S.A.**

CEI Quai des Usines 112-154  
Magasins 44-45  
1210 BRUXELLES  
F : 32/22-16-92-55  
32/22-16-92-41  
Telex: 21915  
Fax: 32/22-16-29-46

##### **SPIERS**

Zeevarstraat 2  
Mag. 50 en 51  
1210 BRUXELLES  
F : 32/22-42-64-10  
Fax: 32/22-45-44-75

##### **STAR FRUIT Company**

112-154 Quai des Usines  
Magasin 49  
1210 BRUXELLES  
F : 32/22420876  
Telex: 24700  
Fax: 32/22-42-12-08

#### FRANCE

##### **ANAREX S.A.**

94, rue de Carpentras  
Fruileg 303  
94612 RUNGIS CEDEX  
F : 331/41-73-02-70  
Telex: 260 393  
Fax: 331/46-86-25-74

**COMPAGNIE FRUITIERE  
IMPORT**

B.P. 354  
13309 MARSEILLE CEDEX 14  
F : 334/91-10-17-10  
Telex: 410 027  
Fax: 334/91-10-17-00

**S.A. DREVIN EXOTICS**

7 et 13, rue d'Avignon  
Bât. C2 - Fruileg 671  
94574 RUNGIS CEDEX  
F : 331/45-60-70-80  
Telex: 261 090  
Fax: 331/46-86-35-58

**EXOFARM**

Cour d'Alsace  
PLA 389 - Bât. C6 B  
94619 RUNGIS CEDEX  
F : 331/45-60-42-71  
Telex: 263 558  
Fax: 331/46-87-33-39

**HELPER S.A.**

1, rue des Tropiques  
Entrepôt 133  
94538 RUNGIS CEDEX  
F : 331/45-12-36-50  
Telex: 263 288  
Fax :331/45-60-48-52

**MALET-AZOULAY**

24, rue du Pont des Halles  
94656 RUNGIS CEDEX  
F : 331/49-78-20-00  
Telex: 260 351  
Fax: 331/46-87-16-45

**POMONA IMPORT**

21, rue du Pont-Neuf  
75039 PARIS CEDEX 01  
F : 331/40-28-30-00  
Telex: 220 997  
Fax: 331/40-28-30-14

**SELECTION**

36, rue d'Angers  
Bât. A3 - Fruileg 708  
94584 RUNGIS CEDEX  
F : 331/45-12-27-80  
Telex: 265 100

Fax: 331/46-87-07-42

**UNITED KINGDOM**

**EXOTIC FARM PRODUCE**

628 Spur Road  
FELTHAM, Middlesex TW14 OSX  
F : 44/818 90-22-22  
Fax: 44/818 90-62-61

**FRUMAR**

Tolworth Tower, Tolworth  
Surbiton, Surrey KT6 7EL  
F : 44/181 390-11-33  
Fax: 44/181 399-34-99

**GEEST TROPICAL PRODUCE**

Hellmann House  
Colnbrook Bypass  
Colnbrook  
BERKSHIRE SL3 0EG  
F : 44/1753-68-76-97  
Fax: 44/1753-68-92-73

**J.O. SIMS Ltd**

16 Winchester Walk  
LONDON SE1 9AQ  
F : 44/71 407-07-56  
Fax: 44/71 403-48-89

**MACK MULTIPLES DIVISION**

Transfesa Road  
Paddock Wood  
KENT TN12 6UT  
F : 44/1892-83-55-77  
Telex: 95215  
Fax: 44/1892-83-48-90

**SAPHIR PRODUCE**

The Oast Perry Court  
London Road Faucrsham  
KENT ME13 8RY  
F : 44/795-53-07-00  
Fax: 44/795-53-07-90

**FYFFES GROUP**

F231-235 Fruit and vegetable  
New Covent Garden Market  
LONDON SW8 5EW  
F : 44/1720-88-81

**FYFFES GROUP**

12 Yorkgate  
Regent Park  
LONDON NW1  
F : 44/1714-87-44-72  
Fax: 44/1714-87-36-44

**MACK MULTIPLES DIVISION**

Mr LEGGE  
Transfesa Road  
Paddock Wood  
KENT TN12 6UT  
F : 44/1892-83-55-77  
Telex: 95215  
Fax: 44/1892-83-4890

**SAPHIR PRODUCE**

The Oast Perry Court  
London Road Faucrsham  
KENT ME13 8RY  
F : 44/795-53-07-00  
Fax: 44/795-53-07-90

**WEALMOOR**

Jetha House, Springfield Road  
HAYES Middlesex UB4 0JT  
F : 44/15-69-17-60  
Fax: 44/15-69-17-55

**NETHERLANDS**

**BUD HOLLAND B.V.**

Transportweg 67  
3155 RJ MAASLAND  
Postal address: Postbus 411  
3140 AK MAASSLUIS  
F : 31/174-53-53-53  
Telex: 38361  
Fax: 31/174-51-39-12

**F.T.K. HOLLAND B.V.**

Klappolder 191-193  
2665 MP BLEISWIJK  
F : 31/105-24-17-00  
Telex: 22593/23482  
Fax: 31/105-21-96-16

**JOS VAN DEN BERG B.V.**

Klappolder, 170  
P.O. Box 188  
2665 ZK BLEISWIJK  
F : 31/105-24-22-22  
Telex: 23574  
Fax: 31/105-21-94-49

**VAN DEN BERG B.V.**

Rochussenstraat 209 A  
NL-3021 NS ROTTERDAM  
F : 31/10-76-73-77

**VAN DEN BRINKS B.V.**

Marconistraat 19  
Postbus 6179  
NL-3002 AE ROTTERDAM  
F : 31/10-76-73-77

**VELLEMAN & TAS**

Marconistraat 19  
Postbus 6118  
3002 AC ROTTERDAM  
F : 31/104-76-86-44  
Telex: 22189  
Fax: 31/104-76-06-23  
31/104-76-65-34

## ANNEX II

### OTHER USEFUL ADDRESSES

First of all, it is recommended that an approach should be made to any organisations which might exist in the countries of origin whose business is to support and inform potential exporters.

Apart from these organisations, other addresses in destination countries may be useful to know.

#### INDUSTRY ORGANISATIONS IN THE FRUIT AND VEGETABLE SECTOR

##### FRANCE

CTIFL (Centre Technique Interprofessionnel des Fruits et Légumes)

Address: 22 rue Bergère, 75009 PARIS

Tel: 331/47-70-16-93

Fax: 331/42-46-21-13

FIFFEL (Fédération des Importateurs Français de Fruits et Légumes)

Address: 3, rue de la Corderie Centra 40394616 RUNGIS Cedex

Tel: 331/45-60-72-80

Fax: 331/46-75-36-31

##### GERMANY

Zentralverband des Deutschen Früchte Import und Grosshandels e.V.

(Federation of Fruit and Vegetable Importing Wholesalers)

Address: Schedestrasse 11, D-53113 BONN

Tel: 49228 91-14-50

Fax: 49228 21-32-65

Bundesverband Deutscher Fruchthandelsunternehmen (BVF)

Tel: 4930 396-23-90 (Berlin)

Fax: 4930 396-26-62 (Berlin)

Tel: 4989 76-48-22 (München)

Fax: 4989 76-30-72 (München)

Tel: 4940 33-76-24 (Hamburg)

Fax: 4940 33-77-75 (Hamburg)

##### UNITED KINGDOM

Fresh Produce Consortium

Address: 266/270 Flower Market, New Convent Garden, London SW8 5NB

Tel: 44 171 627-33-91

Fax: 44 171 498-11-91

##### ITALY

ANIPO (Associazione Nazionale Importatori Prodotti Ortofrutticoli)

The association which includes importers of tropical fruit

Address: Largo Brindisi 5, I-00182 ROMA (RM)

Tel: 396 70-49-74-72

Fax: 396 700-44-28

## **EUROPEAN UNION**

COLEACP (Europe-Caribbean-Pacific Liaison Committee)

This is an organisation financed by the European Commission which is responsible for promoting tropical fruit and vegetables, fruit and vegetables which are out of season and flowers and plants originating from Africa, the Pacific and the Caribbean.

Address: 5 rue de la Corderie Centra 342 94586 RUNGIS Cedex France

Tel: 331/41-80-02-10

Fax: 331/41-80-02-19

CIMO (Confederation of Importers and Marketing Organizations in Europe of fresh fruit and vegetables)

This is an association which includes the main European importers of overseas fruit and vegetables. Its purpose is to support and develop the importation and distribution of these products.

Address: Avenue de Brocqueville 272 bte 4, B-1200 BRUSSELS Belgium

Tel: 322/771-36-35

Fax: 322/762-94-25

## **CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE**

These are organisations from which general information on international and national trade can be obtained (company databases - customs regulations – organisation of trade missions). Chambers of Commerce generally make a charge for these services.

## **BELGIUM**

Fédération Nationale des Chambres de commerce et d'Industrie de Belgique

Address: Avenue des Arts, 1/2 bte 10 b-1040 Brussels

Tel: 322/217-36-71

Fax: 322/217-46-34

## **GERMANY**

Deutscher Industrie und Handelstag (DIHT)

Address: Adenhauallee 148, D-53113 Bonn

Tel: 49228 10-40

Fax: 49228 10-41-58

## **SPAIN**

Consejo Superior de Camaras de Comercio Industria y Navegacion

Address: Claudio Coello, 19, 1EE-28001 Madrid

Tel: 341 575-34-00

Fax: 341 435-23-92/435-42-55

## **FRANCE**

Assemblée des Chambres Françaises de Commerce et d'Industrie (ACFCI)

Address: Avenue d'Iéna, 45P-75769 PARIS

Tel: 331 40-69-37-00

Fax: 331 47-20-61-28

### **ITALY**

Unione Italiana delle Camere di Commercio, Industria, Artigianato e Agricoltura  
Address: Piazza Sallustio 21, I-00187 Roma  
Tel: 396/470-41  
Fax: 396/474-47-41

### **NETHERLANDS**

Vereniging, Van Kamers Van Koophandel en Fabrieken in Nederland  
Address: Watermolenlaan 1, NL-3440 GT Woerden  
Tel: 3134 8-42-69-11  
Fax: 3134 8-42-43-68

### **UNITED KINGDOM**

Association of British Chambers of Commerce  
Address: 9, Tufton street GB-LONDON SW1P 3QB  
Tel: 44171/222-15-55  
Fax: 44171/799-22-02

## **OTHER ORGANIZATIONS**

### **GERMANY**

BFAI (Federal Office of foreign Trade Information)  
P.O.Box 10 06 22  
D-50445 KÖLN  
Tlx: 8882735 BFA D  
Fax: (49221) 205-72-12  
Tel: (49221) 205-70

PROTRADE (GTZ Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit GmbH/PROTRADE)  
Dag-Hammarakjöld-Weg 1  
D-65726 ESCHBORN  
Tlx: 407501-0 GTZ D  
Fax: (496196) 79-73-72  
Tel: (496196) 79-31-69

### **UNITED KINGDOM**

DECTA  
St Nicholas House  
St Nicholas Road  
Sutton, Surrey SM1 1EC  
Tlx: 948116 DECTA G  
Fax: (44181) 693-80-30  
Tel: (44181) 643-33-11

## **NETHERLANDS**

CBI (Center for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries)

P.O.Box 30009

3001 DA Rotterdam

Tlx: 27151 CBIBZ NL

Fax: (3110) 411-40-81

Tel: (3110) 201-34-34

## **SWEDEN**

SWEDECORP Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)

10625 Stockholm

Tlx: 14135 SWCORP S

Fax: (468) 20-88-64

Tel: (468) 698-50-00

## **CANADA**

TFOC (Trade Facilitation Office Canada)

56 Sparks Street

Suite 500

Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5A9

Fax: (1613) 233-78-60

Tel: (1613) 233-39-25

## **JAPAN**

JETRO (Japan External Trade Organization)

2-5, Toranomon 2-Chome

Minato-Ku

Tokyo 105

Tlx: 24378 JETRO J

Fax: (813) 35-87-02-19

Tel: (813) 35-82-55-22

## **NORWAY**

NORIMPOD (Norwegian Import Promotion Office for Products from Developing Countries)

P.O.Box 8034-DEP

0030 Oslo

Tlx: 76548 NORAD N

Fax: (47) 22-31-44-03

Tel: (47) 22-31-44-00