

REPORT

El Niño 2026/27 and UK food imports

September 2026

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Executive summary

The past 11 years have been the hottest on record and global temperatures over the period 2023-2025 averaged more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. This is caused by burning fossil fuels and eroding nature and biodiversity. The resulting climate change is driving ever more dangerous impacts. The UK has seen five heatwaves in rapid succession since May 2026, breaking temperature records by more than 2°C – including one that stood since the 1976 heatwave. Summer 2026 has also seen unprecedented and devastating wildfires in Spain and France, as well as dangerous wildfire outbreaks – some widespread and devastating – across many European countries, including the UK.

In 2026/2027, El Niño will turbo-charge worsening impacts being driven by human-caused climate change. El Niño is a natural system that adds heat into the climate as a whole, as well as fuelling hotter and drier weather in some regions around the Pacific, whilst adding moisture and energy to bring stormier and wetter weather in others. Early evidence suggests this could be a particularly strong El Niño, with one study already suggesting it raises the chances to 35-40% that at least one month in the coming year will be 2°C hotter than pre-industrial times.

The UK imports two fifths of the food it consumes from overseas, much of which cannot be grown in the UK, or could only be grown here for parts of the year, or with heavy reliance on energy-intensive horticulture systems. By value, a quarter of our food, worth £17.1 billion in 2025, comes from the four continents where El Niño impacts are already being felt and will be felt the most – Asia, Africa, South America, and North America. By volume, these foods account for nearly a third of our imports.

This includes coffee, for instance. We imported £824 million worth of coffee last year – nearly a third of it from our biggest provider, Brazil. Here, climate change is already making it harder to grow coffee beans, and the last El Niño in 2023/24 brought erratic rainfall, additional heat, and disease, as well as the pressure of heat

stress on workers. In 2025, the price we paid per kg of coffee from Brazil rose 77%, on top of a 7% rise in 2024.

16% of our coffee imports came from Vietnam last year, a country that saw extreme heat made five times more likely by climate change, and some 1.7°C hotter than it would have been before the burning of fossil fuels, in 2024. The UK paid 39% more per kg in 2025 for Vietnamese coffee than it had the previous year.

El Niño brings additional heat, extremes, and therefore uncertainty to already serious and worsening climate change impacts. Before the last El Niño, Pakistan saw devastating floods in 2022 that claimed many lives, destroyed infrastructure, and damaged large swathes of agriculture. Pakistan is the second biggest supplier of rice to the UK and, in 2023, the year after the flooding, the price per kg of rice bought from there rose 33%. At the same time, the price from our biggest supplier, India, rose 10%, after they were hit by below average monsoon rainfall.

Cocoa beans saw some of the biggest price hits in recent years as cocoa producing nations in West Africa went, during the last El Niño, from having too much rain (caused crops to rot), to not enough as they headed into droughts typical of El Niño. In 2024, as global cocoa price spiralled upwards, the price per kg paid by the UK for imports from Côte d'Ivoire – provider of three quarters of our cocoa bean imports – rose 28% on the previous year before, in 2025, nearly doubling (up 95%) on the 2024 price.

In short, impacts driven by climate change, made worse by El Niño, are driving food prices up, meaning we are paying more, for less. In 2022 and 2023, we know that climate change impacts alone added £360 to the average UK household food bill. We also know that just five products – of which cocoa and coffee are two – drive 30-40% of UK food inflation, even whilst making up just 11% of the basket of indicators.

El Niño's direct impact on the UK is less well established, but the UK Met Office assesses that this year's is set to bring wetter and stormier weather this autumn and winter. The last El Niño brought similar conditions. A historically wet winter saw record rainfall and widespread flooding hampering crop planting, reducing the wheat harvest by a fifth, and increasing livestock production costs through difficult lambing conditions, reduced grass growth, and damaged silage quality.

El Niño is a natural climate system, and we can do nothing to prevent it. However, 2026/27 El Niño arrives at a time when humans have heated our planet by 1.4°C since before we started burning coal, oil and gas to fuel our world. It also arrives amidst the second major fossil fuel crisis in five years. The risks posed to global food production by this polycrisis are serious and profound, and hit the poorest hardest – whether in terms of fuelling food insecurity and hunger in the poorest countries on the planet, or in terms of adding more and more cost to the food bills of the poorest people, in the midst of a serious cost of living crisis.

The solutions to strengthening food security everywhere lie with the things we can fix. The only scientific solution we have to halt climate change and limit further global temperature rises is to cut our planet-heating emissions to net zero. But as we have already heated the planet by more than 1.4°C, we already need to adapt. Wealthier nations, including the UK, have collectively committed to providing \$300 billion a year in climate finance to developing nations to support them both to cut their own emissions, and to adapt. To 2024, [UK climate finance via the six largest multi-lateral funds](#) had contributed to at least 348 projects supporting overseas farmers hit by climate change in 111 countries – 84 of which (76%) grow food sold on UK supermarket shelves. Despite recent overseas aid and climate finance cuts, this remains a powerful tool both to support poorer nations at risk of increasing food insecurity undermining basic nutrition, and to support farmers to adapt to climate impacts protecting the availability and affordability of our own imported food supplies. This, alongside support to farmers in the UK to adapt to more sustainable food production practices, as worsening harvests at home also hit UK food production.

Context

El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO)

The El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is a natural climate phenomenon that occurs over the tropical Pacific Ocean. It brings effects to countries around the Pacific, as well as having global impacts.

In normal times – or ENSO-neutral periods – trade winds blow from east to west across the tropical Pacific, moving warmer surface water across the ocean towards Australia, Indonesia and Southern Asia. This creates an upwelling of cooler water off the coast of Central and South America. Those cooler waters bring nutrients with them from the deep, creating ideal conditions for marine life to feed and breed, which is good for biodiversity as wildlife can thrive, and also makes for good fishing. Above the warmer waters in the west, the atmosphere is also warmer, which means it holds more moisture. This brings more rain to Australia, Indonesia and Southern Asia. Conversely, Central and South America stay drier, and the central part of the Pacific Ocean remains relatively cool.

But as human societies developed, fishermen started noticing that unusually warm waters would disrupt fishing conditions off the coast of Central and South America every few years. This phenomenon was named El Niño de Navidad, referring to Jesus and the nativity, as the strange currents tended to arrive around Christmas. Over time, this was shortened to El Niño ('Little Boy'). People lived with these conditions for hundreds of years before science caught up: El Niño only started being formally recorded around the 19th century.

ENSO has three phases: ENSO-neutral (normal), El Niño (warm) and La Niña (cool). An El Niño event is typically declared when sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific remain at least 0.5°C above average for a sustained period. Under El Niño, the westerly trade winds weaken, meaning less warm water

is moved west, creating warmer conditions off the coast of Central and South America. This warm surface water prevents the upwelling of cold, nutrient-rich water from the depths, creating poorer conditions for marine life. For countries like Ecuador, Chile and Peru, where fishing is one of the principal industries, this risks devastating impacts as fish populations in the region fall sharply. Additionally, warmer water means warmer, wetter air, resulting in intense rainfall and storms over the Pacific coast of the Americas. Conversely, Australasia, Southeast and Southern Asia receive much less rainfall and experience drought.

Under La Niña, the cooling phase, some regions of the tropical Pacific see surface temperatures become several degrees cooler than surrounding waters. The westerly trade winds become stronger and move warm surface waters further into the far west of the tropical Pacific. This drives warmer, wetter air further inland over Australia and parts of Asia, creating heavier monsoon rains. Conversely, Central and South America is much drier, and fishing conditions benefit from the upwelling of cold, nutrient-rich water from the deep.

Neither El Niño nor La Niña occur on a regular schedule, appearing anything from two to seven years apart, but both will usually last for around nine to 12 months. Though it occurs over the tropical Pacific, ENSO's effects extend far beyond the region. As Earth's oceans, land and weather systems are interconnected, they are felt globally.

Climate change and El Niño

[2025 was the third hottest year on record](#), after 2023 (second hottest) and 2024 (hottest). [Global average temperatures are rising](#), and heat records are being broken every year – [sometimes monthly](#), and occasionally [daily](#) – in all parts of the world.

The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) [announced in early June](#) that the necessary heat thresholds had been met to enable them to declare that ENSO was almost certainly entering a warming phase – in other words, that El Niño was beginning. Agencies in the [US](#) and [Japan](#) declared it definitely underway a few days later. In early July, the WMO further [announced that El Niño is intensifying](#) and will likely add heat to all parts of the planet, between the polar regions, through July to September 2026. The [UK Met Office](#) has more recently indicated that this may be the strongest El Niño in living memory, and probably since the 19th century.

El Niño is an example of a 'teleconnection' – where one oceanic/atmospheric process drives weather and climate anomalies in different places around the planet. Its impacts are first felt in regions around the Pacific Ocean, and historic data suggests that it usually first hits India and southern Asia, before then being felt in the west Pacific, and South America, as El Niño develops.

El Niño adds heat into the climate system, and 2023/24 was the last occurrence. [Experience shows](#) that it increases the risk of drier conditions across southern Asia, Australia and parts of South America around the equator, whilst increasing the likelihood of wetter conditions in other parts of South America and the southern

United States. It will likely peak during summer in the southern hemisphere/winter in the northern hemisphere, at which point impacts are likely to be felt most in southern Africa, the west Pacific and parts of Australia.

In 2026/2027, El Niño does all this at a time when human activity – most notably the burning of coal, oil and gas – has heated the planet by an average of 1.4°C since the Industrial Revolution. El Niño is therefore super-charging the worsening impacts we are seeing in all parts of the globe, caused by climate change. It may well propel 2026 and/or 2027 into the pantheon of hottest years. Whilst it is expected to decline and end in spring 2027, the tail from its effects are likely to continue beyond that, and may increase the risk of flooding in parts of Asia.

Food impacts

Covid 19 demonstrated, in 2020, how fragile and interconnected our food supply chains and systems are, and how vulnerable to shock they can be. Since then, climate change impacts – both on crops, and [on farmers](#) – have become more and more in evidence, as the world has faced two major fossil fuel crises in less than five years. They – Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the US and Israel's war against Iran – have driven oil and gas prices higher, with the volatility adding costs to many parts of people's day to day lives, including energy bills and food. Fossil fuels remain important for production, processing, and transport of food, as well as for fertiliser production. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz over recent months has put further pressure on fertiliser for global agriculture, as around [half of the world's fertiliser relies on urea or ammonia](#), and around a [quarter of the global trade in nitrogen fertiliser](#), and a third of the trade in urea, originate from the Middle East, with a heavy reliance on shipping through the Strait of Hormuz for their export. Rising costs of fertilisers are [forecast by some](#) to increase by more than 30% this year.

El Niño therefore arrives at a time of multiple threats to the global food system. And it threatens to throw fuel onto an already raging fire, raising the threat of significant disruption to sowing and harvest of crops, and threats to the livelihoods, health, and even lives, of the people most exposed to climate extremes that will be made worse by El Niño in the coming months.

The most acute threat is to regions and countries already facing severe food insecurity, as El Niño events are estimated to [hit crop yields on at least a quarter of global croplands](#). Historical analysis shows hits to maize yields in southern Africa and central America, wheat yields in Australia, and rice yields in southeast Asia. With [some economists](#) warning that the impacts of El Niño-caused food shocks could ripple through even until 2028. This is why, in June 2026, [the World Food Programme and the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation](#) (FAO) kicked off action to finance assistance to protect some nine million people, across 22 countries, most at risk from the additional threat which El Niño poses. [Lessons from FAO assessments of anticipatory actions](#) ahead of previous El Niño events suggest that,

for every \$1 invested, it creates a return for farming families of more than \$7 in avoided losses and added benefits.

One of the impacts El Niño will have will be on food available for export, therefore affecting the availability and cost of imported food commodities around the world. Damaged and lost harvests put further pressure on supplies and further drive up prices.

In the UK, we import two fifths of the food that we consume – much of it commodities like rice, tea, coffee, cocoa beans, bananas and many other fruit and vegetables that we cannot easily grow at scale, or at all, in the UK, as they require tropical climates. Already, since the start of the cost of living crisis in 2021, [food prices have risen by 40%](#), and climate change impacts alone [added £360 to the average UK household food bill](#) across 2022 and 2023. [Just five climate-impacted staples](#) (coffee, chocolate, beef, butter, and milk) drive between 30% and 40% of food inflation, whilst accounting for just 11% of the average shopping basket.

We looked at the top crop food imports to the UK by value, from around the world, to consider what could be hit by El Niño supercharging climate change impacts in the coming months. We did this using the [UK trade database, owned by HM Revenue and Customs](#).

Asia

(Comprising Asia and Oceania in the trade stats grouping.)

In 2025, nearly 10% by value (£6.5 billion) and nearly 8% by volume (3.1 billion kg) of our food imports came from Asia.

El Niño typically leads to drier and hotter weather across Asia and Australia – areas to the north and west of the Pacific. This means that Asia is hit by weaker monsoon rains – particularly in India – stronger heatwaves, drought, and water shortages. Water-hungry crops – like rice, and maize – come under particular stress. [The 2015 El Niño](#) saw output of both fall, pushing up prices. And in the 2023/24 crop season, [disrupted monsoon rains reduced rice production in southeast Asia](#) such that India, the world's biggest rice exporter, imposed export bans and other restrictions to preserve stocks for people at home. [India's rice exports fell by 21%](#), forcing importing countries in sub-Saharan Africa to scramble to find alternative sources, as prices rose by more than a fifth. [Globally, rice prices hit a 15 year high](#), with one benchmark product (Thai white rice 5% broken) rising to its highest price since 2008, at \$650 a tonne.

Coffee, rice, and cashew nuts represent three of the largest crop imports from Asia, by value. The continent represents nearly a quarter (by value) and a third (by volume) of UK coffee imports, and two thirds of our rice imports.

The tables, [drawing from UK trade data](#), show the value (in millions of pounds) and the volume (in millions of kilograms) of selected commodities imported into the UK in 2025 from relevant countries in this continent. The commodities represent crops grown in this continent, from within the top 30 food imports (by value) from the continent. The rankings refer to each country's position by import value for that commodity, across all countries, not only those within the region being analysed in this section. For each commodity, 'total' refers to the total imports of that commodity, in 2025; beneath these are the totals for imports from the relevant continent.

Coffee

2025 total: £824m, 153.7m kg

2025 Asia: £207.9m, 46.7m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Vietnam	2	128.7	30.7
Indonesia	4	52.0	11.2

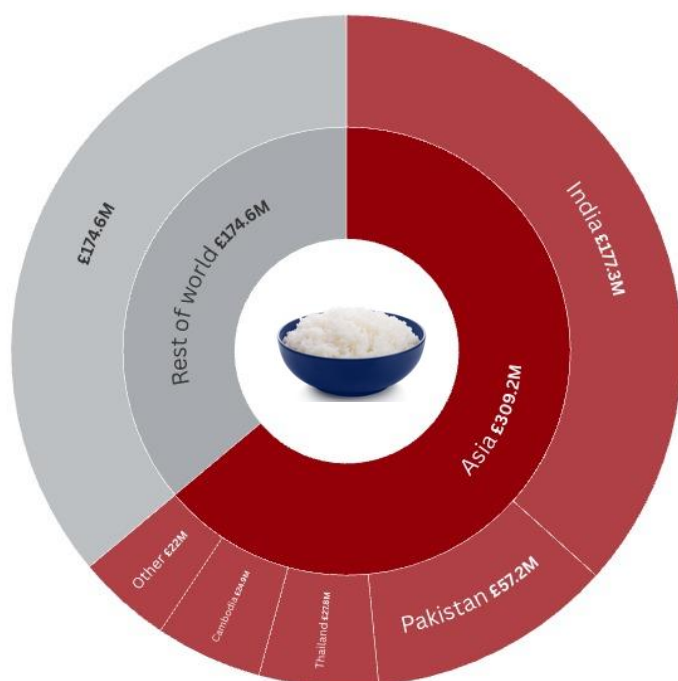


Rice

2025 total: £482.3m, 612.7m kg

2025 Asia: £307.7m, 410.9m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
India	1	177.3	239
Pakistan	2	57.2	70.4
Thailand	5	27.8	34.2
Cambodia	7	24.9	41.0



Paying more for less

The hit from the last El Niño on rice production and prices was shorter lived than earlier climate change impacts on production. 2022 saw below average monsoon rainfall in India, which delayed planting, and devastating flooding in Pakistan which hit harvests. Restrictions on exports and supply generally drove up prices.

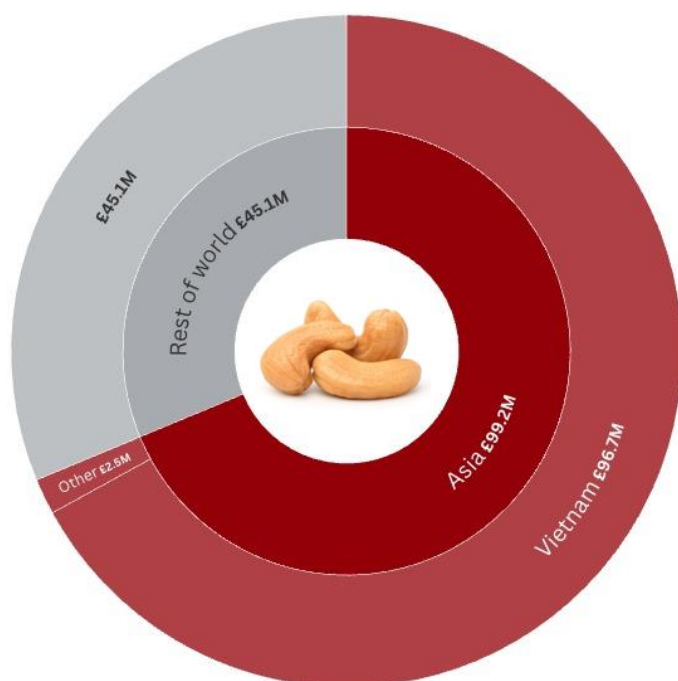
In 2023, the cost of rice imports to the UK from Pakistan rose 30%, whilst the volume fell by 3%. This represented a 33% (one third) rise in the price of rice per kg from Pakistan. In the case of India, costs also increased; whilst the volume imported rose by 26%, the cost rose more sharply (+39%); or a 10% rise in price per kg.

Cashew nuts

2025 total: £144.3m, 28.24m kg

2025 Asia: £99.2m, 20.6m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Vietnam	1	96.7	20.2

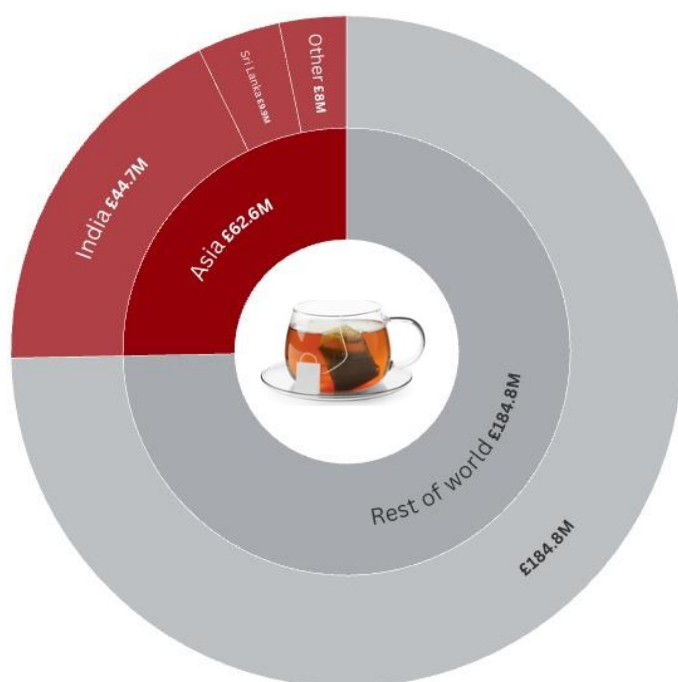


Tea

2025 total: £247.4m, 104.5mkg

2025 Asia: £62.6m, 15.9m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
India	2	44.7	12.8
Sri Lanka	4	9.9	1.4



Guavas, mangos and mangosteens

2025 total: £234.8m, 105.5m kg

2025 Asia: £53.2m, 16.2m kg)

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Pakistan	3	25.3	7.2
India	5	13.8	6.4



Africa

(Comprising Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and Sub-Saharan Africa in the trade stats groupings.)

In 2025, nearly 6% by value (£3.9 billion) and 5.5% by volume (2.1 billion kg) of our food imports came from Africa.

In the most recent El Niño, in 2023/24, southern Africa in particular was very badly hit by drought, with Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Angola, Mozambique and Botswana receiving less than 20% of the expected rainfall in February 2024. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), this was the worst drought seen on the continent in more than a century. This put huge strain on people, livestock, water systems, and pasturelands and pushed more than eight million people into food insecurity as shorter growing periods led to reduced cereal production. According to some assessments, more than half of the annual harvest was destroyed, which led to rapidly depleting stocks, and rising food prices. By September 2024, prices for maize were up to 55% higher in some southern African

nations, whilst food inflation in Angola hit 35%. Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe declared a state of emergency.

The FAO's forecast suggests a greater than 50% probability of agriculture across countries in southern and east Africa being hit by drought again this time around.

The following crops represent the largest imports from Africa, by value. West Africa provides most of the world's cocoa, with just two countries (Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana) being the source of around 80% of UK cocoa imports. African nations provide two fifths of our grape imports, and 58% (by value), or 75% (by volume) of our tea. This is in addition to around half our imported citrus fruits (43% by value, and 53% by volume), and just under a quarter of our imported tomatoes.

The tables, [drawing from UK trade data](#), show the value (in millions of pounds) and the volume (in millions of kilograms) of selected commodities imported into the UK in 2025 from relevant countries in this continent. The commodities represent crops grown in this continent, from within the top 30 food imports (by value) from the continent. The rankings refer to each country's position by import value for that commodity, across all countries, not only those within the region being analysed in this section. For each commodity, 'total' refers to the total imports of that commodity, in 2025; beneath these are the totals for imports from the relevant continent.

Cocoa beans

2025 total: £400m, 67.6m kg

2025 Africa: £338.7m, 59.7m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Côte d'Ivoire	1	286.0	52.2
Ghana	2	34.0	4.9
Nigeria	4	16.9	2.2



Cocoa producing nations in Africa went, last time there was an El Niño, from having too much rain – which caused crops to rot with black pod disease – to not enough, under droughts typical of El Niño. This fed through to international commodity prices, with cocoa hitting record highs in recent years, at thousands of dollars per tonne.

These impacts are driven by climate change, with extremes that used to be very infrequent, becoming far more likely, and often more intense, as a result of the emissions we have added to the atmosphere from the burning of fossil fuels. In March 2024, the extreme humid heatwave which hit West African nations was, say [scientists at World Weather Attribution](#), made 4°C hotter and 10 times more likely by climate change. El Niño events throw fuel onto this existing fire, making conditions even harder for farmers.

Paying more for less

From 2023 to 2024, the cost of our imports from Côte d'Ivoire – by far our largest supplier of cocoa beans – rose 21% for a volume of cocoa beans that fell by 5%. And whilst the volume we purchased in 2025 rose 9% on the previous year the price more than doubled, rising by an eye-watering 112%. In 2024, then, the price per kg rose 28% to £2.81 before, in 2025, nearly doubling (+95%), to £5.48 per kg.

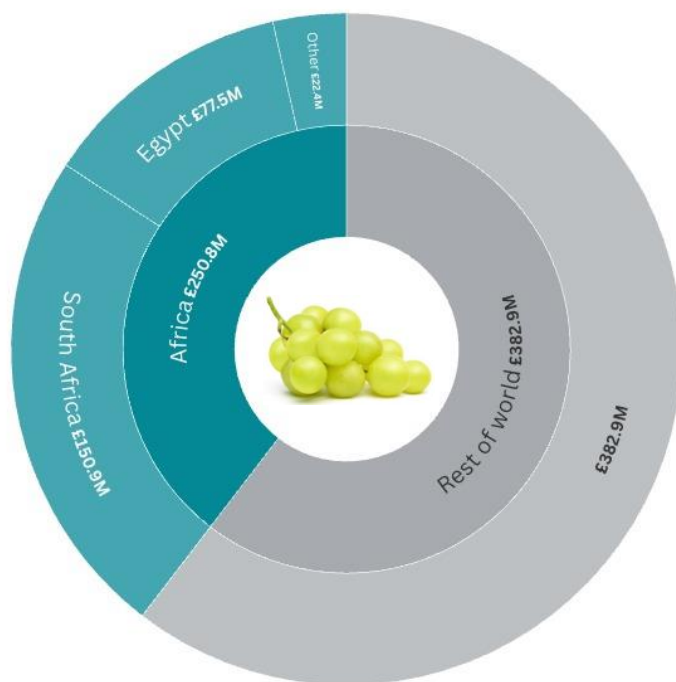
From Ghana, our second biggest supplier, price rises meant that for 26% more volume in 2024, over 2023, we paid 61% more than the previous year. In 2025, the volume we bought from Ghana fell by 41%, whilst the cost rose by 49%. This meant that, in 2024, the price per kg rose 27% to £2.74 and then by two and a half times again (+151%) to £6.89 in 2025.

Fresh table grapes

2025 total: £633.8m, 282.9m kg

2025 Africa: £250.82m, 114.8m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
South Africa	1	150.9	67.0
Egypt	3	77.5	37.2

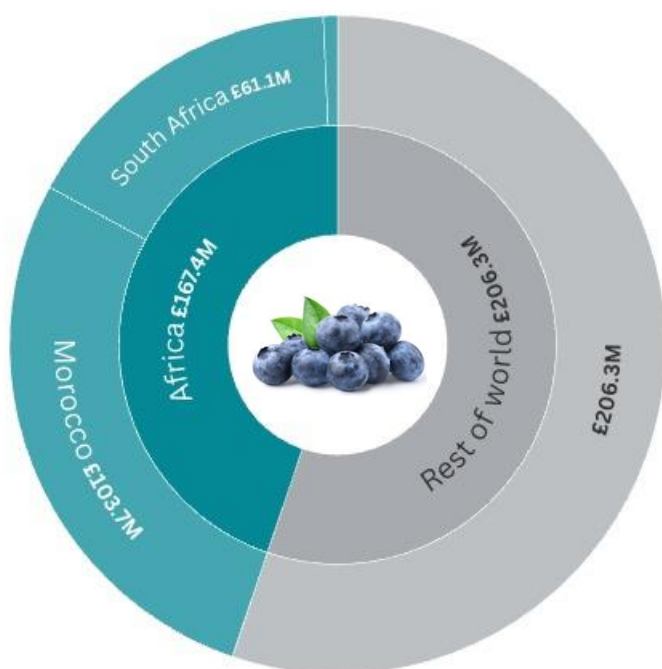


Cranberry and blueberry

2025 total: £373m, 66.3m kg

2025 Africa: £166.7m, 29.2m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Morocco	2	103.7	18.1
South Africa	3	61.1	10.7



Raspberries

2025 total: £228.2m, 29.3m kg

2025 Africa: £138.7m, 19m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Morocco	1	132.9	18.4



Citrus fruits

2025 total: £692.4m, 729m kg

2025 Africa: £299.2m, 387.5m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
South Africa	2	199.3	234.4
Morocco	3	55.3	67.8
Egypt	4	39.3	79.8



The number one supplier in 2025 was Spain, from where we imported 208.1m kg, worth £262.1m.

Tea

2025 total: £247.4m, 104.5mkg

2025 Africa: £142.4m, 78.2m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Kenya	1	116.8	62.3
Malawi	5	7.2	5.5

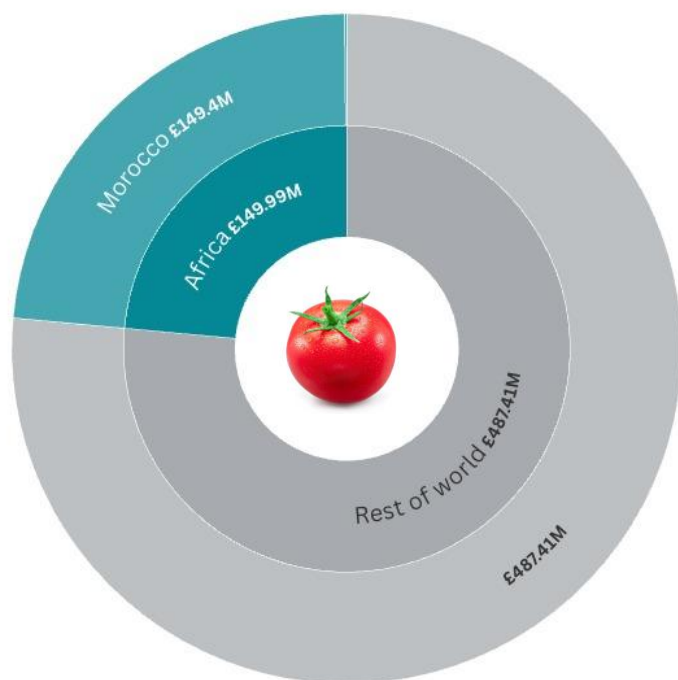


Tomatoes

2025 total: £637.42m, 389.78m kg

2025 Africa: £149.99m, 119.49m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Morocco	2	149.4	119.0



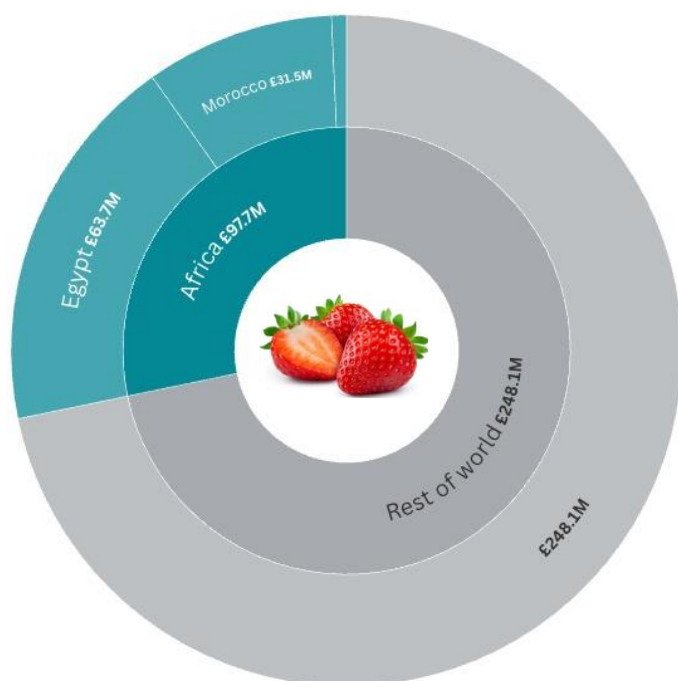
Most of our tomato imports come from European nations, the top supplier being the Netherlands (169.2m kg, worth £295.5m in 2025), and the third biggest being Spain (43.9m kg, worth £88.5m). The UK also grows tomatoes for part of the year.

Strawberries

2025 total: £345.8m, 72.6m kg

2025 Africa: £97.7m, 20.6m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Egypt	3	63.7	12.6
Morocco	4	31.5	7.7



The number one supplier of strawberries from overseas in 2025 was Spain, from where we bought 34.3m kg, worth £129.4m. The UK also grows strawberries for part of the year.

Avocados

2025 total: £302.4m, 146.1m kg

2025 Africa: £91.5m, 40.3m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Israel	2	46.0	19.4
South Africa	4	28.3	13.7



Guavas, mangos and mangosteens

2025 total: £234.8m, 105.5m kg

2025 Africa: £82m, 26.2m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Ghana	2	33.9	5.3
Egypt	4	14.9	4.5



Apples

2025 total: £341.6m, 294.2m kg

2025 Africa: £81.3m, 78.7m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
South Africa	2	81.0	78.5



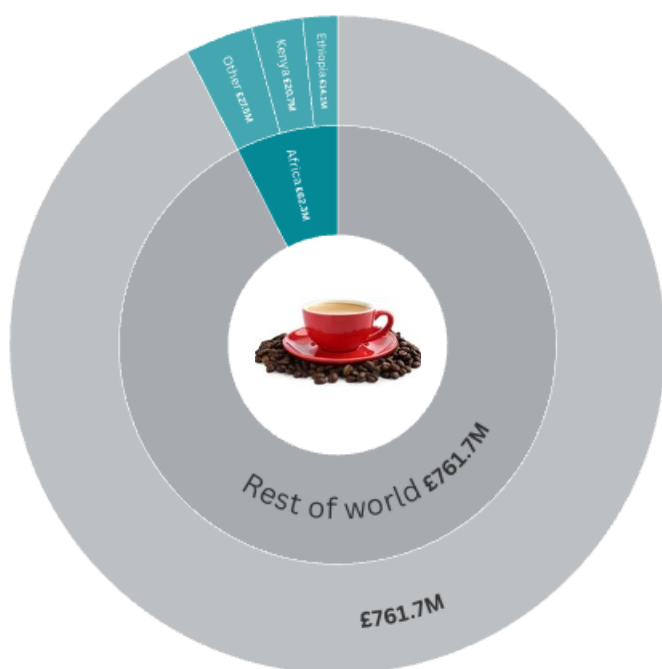
The single biggest supplier to the UK in 2025 was France, from where we bought 86.9m kg, worth £120m. The UK also grows apples.

Coffee

2025 total: £824m, 153.7m kg

2025 Africa: £62.3m, 12.4m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Kenya	8	20.7	4.2
Ethiopia	11	14.1	3.0

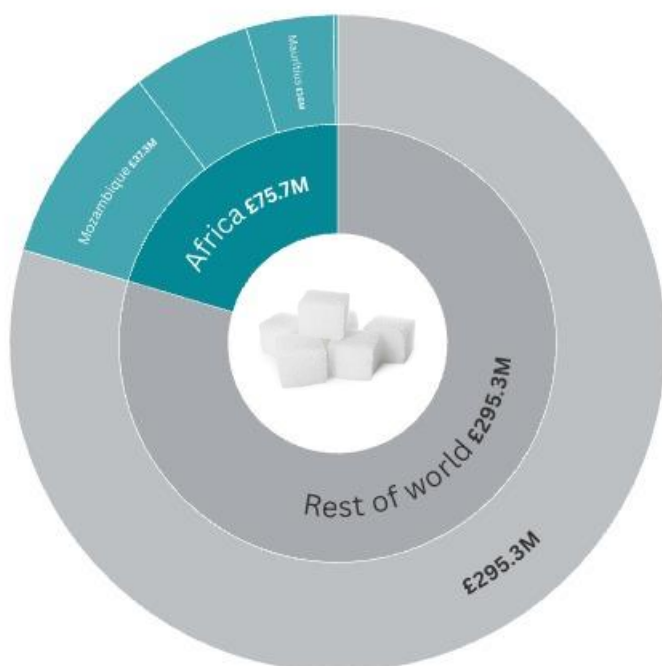


Sugar

2025 total: £371.4m, 811.1m kg

2025 Africa: £75.7m, 167m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Mozambique	3	37.3m	78.3
South Africa	5	21.7	66.0
Mauritius	6	16.0	21.7

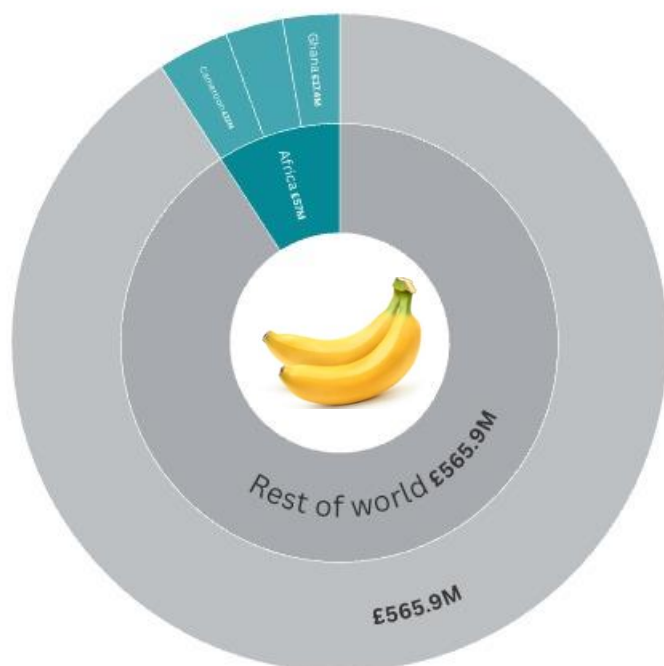


Bananas

2025 total: £622.8m, 960.5m kg

2025 Africa: £56.9m, 104.2m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Cameroon	8	22.0	38.4
Côte d'Ivoire	9	17.6	42.3
Ghana	10	17.4	23.4



Onions

2025 total: £228.8m, 377.6m kg

2025 Africa: £41.9m, 45.9m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Egypt	3	33.8	39.1

The top supplying nations for onion imports are in Europe. In 2025, the Netherlands was the biggest supplier (157m kg worth £78.6m). The UK also grows onions.

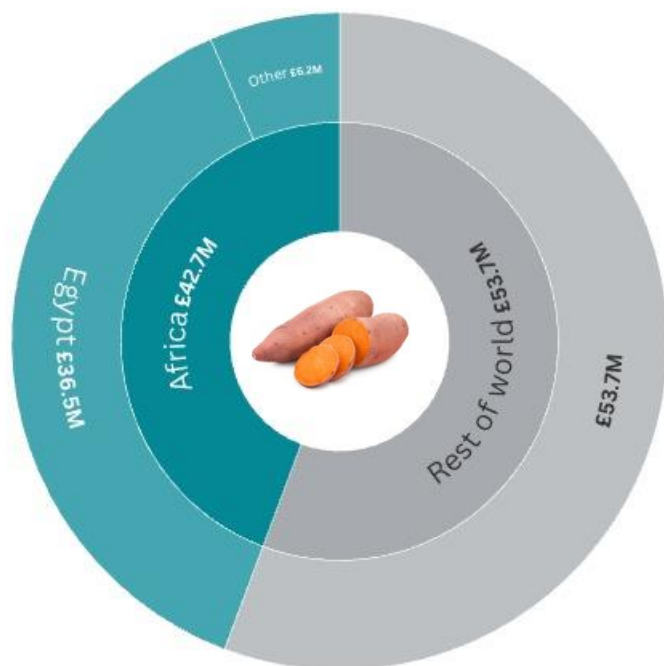


Sweet potatoes

2025 total: £96.4m, 159.1m kg

2025 Africa: £42.7m, 74.6m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Egypt	1	36.5	67.9



South America

(Latin America and the Caribbean in the trade stats grouping.)

In 2025, just over 6% by value (£4.1 billion) and 9.6% by volume (3.8 billion kg) of our food imports came from South America.

South America is threatened by higher temperatures and droughts under El Niño, combined with heavier and more intense tropical storms that often lead to flooding. Both pose threats to crops, and often heavy rainfall following periods of drought can intensify flooding risk.

[El Niño in 2015/16](#) left 3.5m people facing food insecurity in, and the [last El Niño, in 2023/24](#), caused agricultural losses that also exacerbated food insecurity in the region, as well as creating economic hardship for farming communities by reducing crops for export sales. Current forecasts point to a 70% probability of below-normal rainfall across the region.

How El Niño is driving up fishmeal prices – and why that could make fish more expensive

This analysis is principally focused on crops, but because El Niño first manifests in waters off the coast of South America, and disrupts the flow of heat and cold in ocean currents, it has a significant impact on fish and marine life, with serious consequences for fisheries.

A strengthening El Niño is disrupting anchovy fisheries off the coast of Peru, the source of around [one-fifth](#) of global fishmeal production and source of 60% of anchovy imports. Warmer waters cause anchovies to move deeper and become harder to catch, while concerns about juvenile fish have prompted authorities to impose fishing restrictions and lower catch quotas.

The resulting supply squeeze has sent fishmeal prices soaring. According to the [FAO](#), premium Peruvian fishmeal reached around US\$2,500 per tonne in May 2026, up from roughly US\$1,400 a year earlier. Fishmeal is a protein-rich feed commodity made primarily from small fish such as anchovies and is a key ingredient in aquaculture feed used to farm salmon, trout, sea bass and shrimp. Peru's dominant role in global production means supply shocks there can quickly affect feed costs worldwide, including for UK aquaculture producers. Higher feed costs are then expected to feed through to higher prices for farmed fish and seafood for consumers.

The following crops represent the largest imports from South America, by value. The region is responsible for large quantities of fresh produce for export to the British market. This includes almost all of our bananas (88%), and around a fifth of imported grapes, along with guavas, mangos, pineapples and melons. Over half the coffee we import, by volume, comes from South America – with Brazil, our

number one supplier, alone accounting for a third of all coffee imports. Nearly 60% of our avocados are imported from the region, with Peru alone providing around a third of those, along with two thirds of imported asparagus.

The tables, [drawing from UK trade data](#), show the value (in millions of pounds) and the volume (in millions of kilograms) of selected commodities imported into the UK in 2025 from relevant countries in this continent. The commodities represent crops grown in this continent, from within the top 30 food imports (by value) from the continent. The rankings refer to each country's position by import value for that commodity, across all countries, not only those within the region being analysed in this section. For each commodity, 'total' refers to the total imports of that commodity, in 2025; beneath these are the totals for imports from the relevant continent.

Bananas

2025 total: £622.8m, 960.5m kg

2025 South America: £548.3m, 845.1m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Colombia	1	213.0	335.6
Costa Rica	2	106.7	179.2
Dominican Rep	3	56.1	75.5
Belize	4	50.1	55.0
Nicaragua	5	40.4	63.3
Ecuador	6	38.3	61.7
Guatemala	7	24.1	42.0



Coffee

2025 total: £824m, 153.7m kg

2025 South America: £479.5m, 82.8m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Brazil	1	262.1	47.7
Colombia	3	88.9	14.2
Honduras	5	48.6	8.2



Drought and heat are bad for coffee growing, and climate change is already hitting harvests in coffee growing countries whilst, over time, [reducing the land suitable for coffee growing](#). Shifts from one type of coffee (arabica) to another (robusta) have helped Brazil adapt to some extent, but both types of coffee are vulnerable to climate change driven extremes.

El Niño adding heat to the climate system is a further problem for coffee as the plants need favourable conditions at several key points of their cycle, which can be disrupted by too little or too much rain, as well as excess heat. [During the last El Niño](#), South American coffee-producers faced erratic rainfall, heat and disease, as well as the pressure of heat stress on workers. A hit in either of the two main coffee producing countries (Brazil and Vietnam) has a serious impact on prices.

Paying more for less

Following the 2023/24 El Niño hit, the price we paid for coffee imports from Brazil in 2025 rose by 32%, as the volume we purchased fell by 25%. This meant that the price per kg shot up by 77%, from £3.11 to £5.49 in 2025. This followed a 7% rise in price per kg in 2024, when the overall cost of imports stayed the same, but the volume which that price purchased fell by 7%.

Imports from Colombia told a similar story in 2025, with the price we paid rising 97%, whilst volumes rose 36%; a 45% rise in price per kg. Imports from Honduras that year were 55% more expensive than in 2024, whilst the volume was 2% lower. That represented a price per kg rise of nearly two thirds (58%).

This came after extreme rainfall and dangerous flooding hit large parts of southern Brazil. [World Weather Attribution](#) analysis found that climate change and El Niño both had a part to play in making these events more likely and more intense. However, [exceptional drought](#), which hit the Amazon River Basin in 2023 – affecting several nations, including Brazil and Colombia – was driven by climate change, not El Niño.

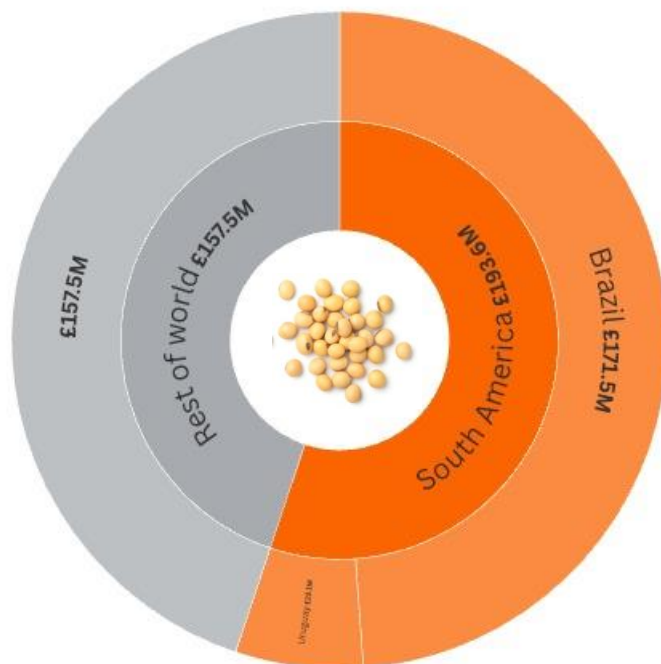
In Vietnam, where [extreme heat made more likely by climate change](#) hit in 2024, the cost of our coffee imports that year rose 9% whilst volumes fell 28% – a rise in price per kg by half again (51%) on the previous year, to £3.02. In 2025, the price rose at more than three times the rate of the volume increase from 2024 to 2025 – a 71% price rise for a 23% rise in volume. That represented a further rise in the price per kg of 39% in 2025, over 2024, to take it to £4.20 per kg.

Soya beans

2025 total: £351m, 994.2m kg

2025 South America: £193.5m, 571.5m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Brazil	1	171.5	505.5
Uruguay	4	22.1	66.0



The UK also relies on imported soya beans to feed livestock. Soy production is problematic at current scale, driving deforestation that reduces important carbon sinks and undermines rainforests' role in regulating the global climate.

On average, in previous El Niño events, [soybean production has actually increased](#). However, soy crops are at risk from climate change impacts, like drought and fire – both of which are, ironically, made all the more likely by the deforestation that gave way to large soya bean plantations. In Brazil and the US, which together accounted for around three quarters of our supply in 2025, drought and fire risk are intensified during El Niño years.

Avocados

2025 total: £302.4m, 146.1m kg

2025 South America: £163.1m, 86.3m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Peru	1	94.1	52.8
Chile	3	40.4	18.0
Colombia	6	20.3	11.3



Fresh table grapes

2025 total: £633.8m, 282.9m kg

2025 South America: £151.5m, 64.3m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Peru	4	74.0	27.8
Chile	6	41.9	21.6
Brazil	7	35.1	14.7



Cranberry and blueberry

2025 total: £373m, 66.3m kg

2025 South America: £137.8m, 24.9

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Peru	1	105.7	18.2
Chile	4	27.4	5.8

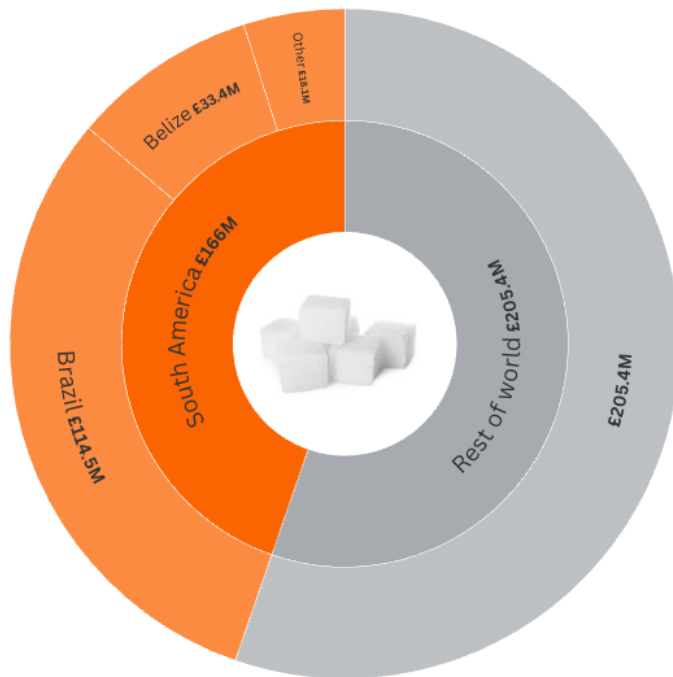


Sugar

2025 total: £371.4m, 811.1m kg

2025 South America: £166m, 413m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Brazil	1	114.5	307.7
Belize	4	33.4	67.3



Groundnuts (peanuts)

2025 total: £126.4m, 107.5m kg

2025 South America: £86.1m, 74.4m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Argentina	1	58.0	53.9
Nicaragua	2	20.3	13.5



Guavas, mangos and mangosteens

2025 total: £234.8m, 105.5m kg

2025 South America: £75.2m, 50.8m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Brazil	1	48.4m	27.8

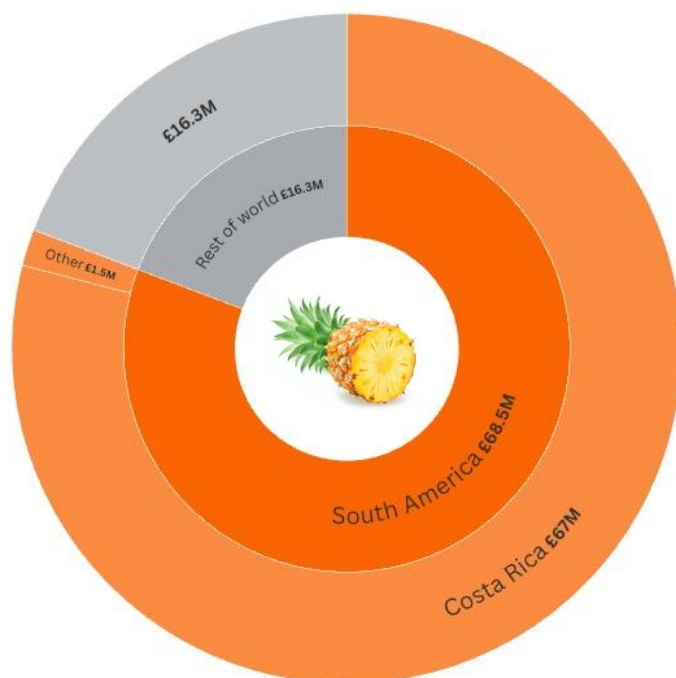


Pineapples

2025 total: £84.8m, 123.7m kg

2025 South America: £68.5m, 111.4m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Costa Rica	1	67.0	109.3



Melons

Comprising: melons (excluding watermelons); and watermelons.

2025 total: £280.1m, 361.3m

2025 South America: £123.2m, 166.6m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Brazil	1	97.4	133.2
Costa Rica	4	13.1	17.2

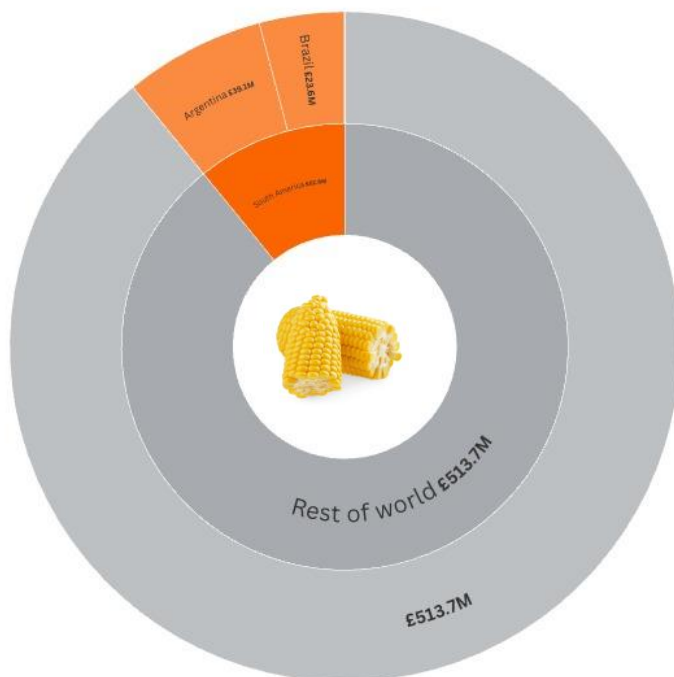


Maize

2025 total: £576.5m, 2.8bn kg

2025 South America: £62.8m, 272.8m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Argentina	6	39.1	152.3
Brazil	8	23.6	120.4



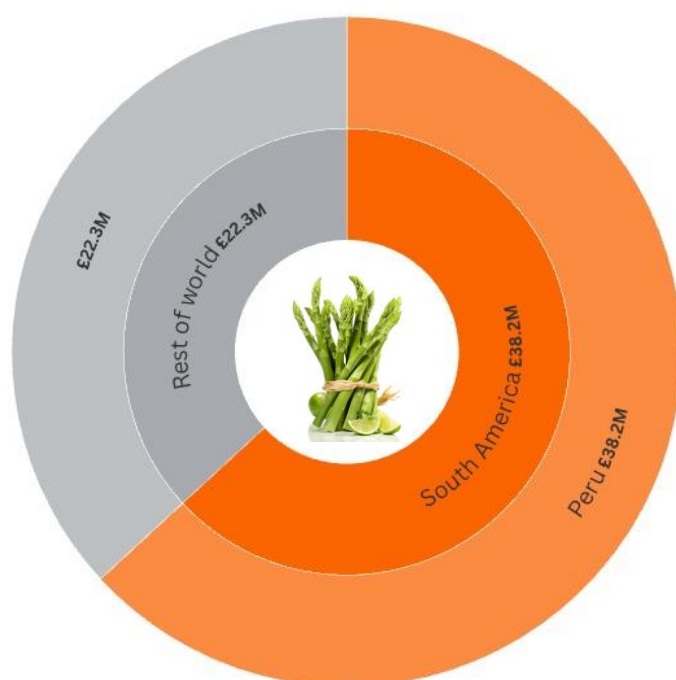
The top supplying countries in 2025 for maize imports to the UK were the US and Canada (see below), followed by France (436.1m kg worth £94.2m), Poland (306.9m kg, worth £58.8m), and Ireland (295.4m kg, worth £55.7m). The UK also grows maize.

Asparagus

2025 total: £60.5m, 11.7m kg

2025 South America: £38.2m, 7.3m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Peru	1	38.2	7.3

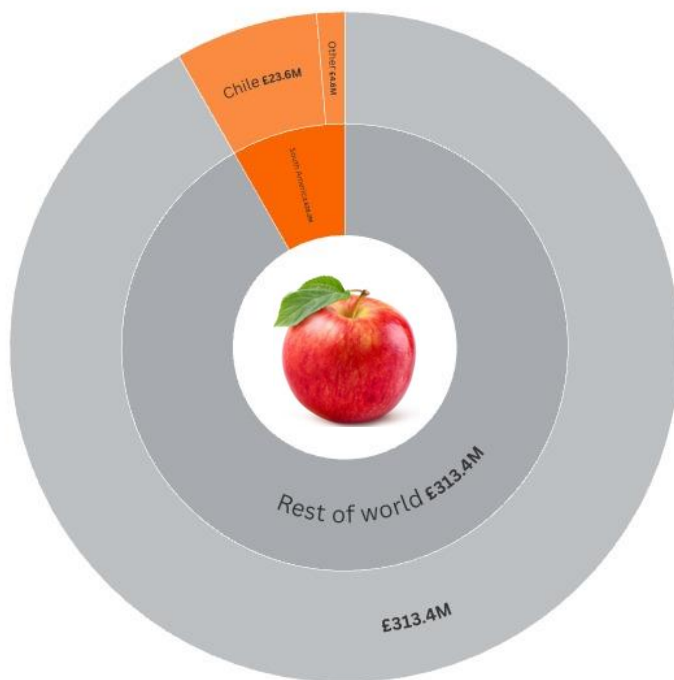


Apples

2025 total: £341.6m, 294.2m kg

2025 South America: £28.2m, 25.4m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Chile	5	23.6	20.9



North America

(Comprises: United States; Canada; Mexico; and Greenland in trade stats groupings.)

In 2025, nearly 4% by value (£2.6 billion) and 9.5% by volume (3.74 billion kg) of our food imports came from North America.

El Niño has diverse impacts throughout North America. It can make the northern US and Canada drier and warmer than usual, which could negatively impact soy production – concentrated in the upper Midwest – as soy is a water-loving plant. Conversely, El Niño tends to bring wet weather and flooding to the south and to the Gulf Coast.

The following crops represent the largest imports from North America, by value. North America provided around 40% of UK imports of maize in 2025, along with around 30% of wheat, and meslin (which is a mixed cereal/forage crop). Much of the maize is grown in the Midwest, in the corn belt – where longer, more intense heat and drought of the sort which El Niño could bring may reduce growing seasons and diminish yields.

38% of our soya beans come from the region. As referenced above, in previous El Niño events, soybean production has actually increased. However, soy crops are at risk from climate change impacts, like drought and fire – both of which are likely in the US as a result of climate change and exacerbated in the areas of the northern US during El Niño. The US also provides around a third of the sweet potatoes we import, Canada provides almost all of our kidney beans, and the two countries together account for a third of our imported asparagus.

The tables, [drawing from UK trade data](#), show the value (in millions of pounds) and the volume (in millions of kilograms) of selected commodities imported into the UK in 2025 from relevant countries in this continent. The commodities represent crops grown in this continent, from within the top 30 food imports (by value) from the continent. The rankings refer to each country's position by import value for that commodity, across all countries, not only those within the region being analysed in this section. For each commodity, 'total' refers to the total imports of that commodity, in 2025; beneath these are the totals for imports from the relevant continent.

Maize

2025 total: £576.5m, 2.8bn kg

2025 North America: £234.2m, 1.2bn kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Canada	1	137.4	757.3
United States	2	96.6	455.7



Wheat and meslin

2025 total: £580.1m, 2.6bn kg

2025 North America: £172m, 691.4m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Canada	1	172.0	691.4



The next biggest supplying countries in 2025 were Germany (638.9m kg, worth £148.8m) and France (673.7m kg, worth £130.1m).

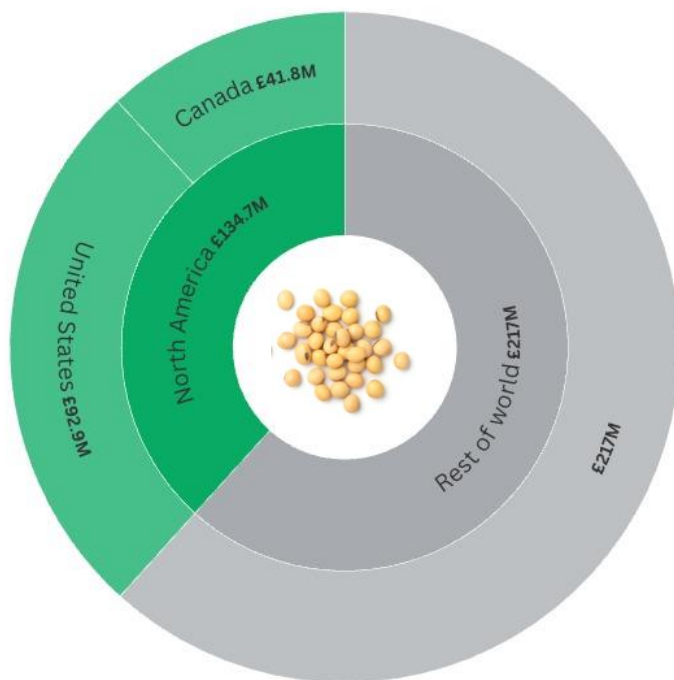
It is worth noting that, as wheat is a widely traded commodity, the UK is largely a price-taker rather than a price-setter. Major wheat-producing countries such as India, Australia, China, Pakistan and Russia all play an important role in determining global supply, even if the UK imports relatively little wheat directly from them. When El Niño brings hotter and drier conditions to key producing regions – particularly Australia and parts of South Asia, including India – harvests can be reduced, tightening global supplies and pushing up international wheat prices. Those higher global prices are then felt in the UK through commodity markets, regardless of where our imports originate, meaning climate impacts on Australian and Indian wheat production can still contribute to higher costs for UK consumers.

Soya beans

2025 total: £351m, 994.2m kg

2025 North America: £134.7m, 380m

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
United States	2	92.9	266.4
Canada	3	41.8	113.6



Almonds, walnuts, pistachios and pecans

2025 total: £318.1m, 51.7m kg

2025 North America: £193.8m, 32.6m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
United States	1	189.2	32.0



Kidney beans

2025 total: £46.1m, 51.9m kg

2025 North America: £45.3m, 51.1m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
Canada	1	45.3	51.1



Sweet potatoes

2025 total: £96.4m, 159.1m kg

2025 North America: £34m, 50.1m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
United States	2	33.9	50.0

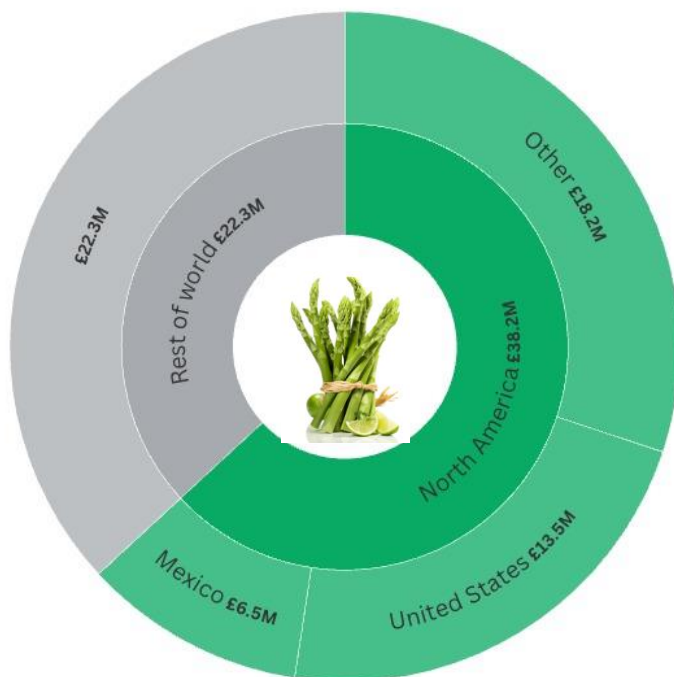


Asparagus

2025 total: £60.5m, 11.7m kg

2025 North America: £38.2m, 7.3m kg

Country	Rank	£ million	Million kg
United States	2	13.5	2.8
Mexico	3	6.5	1.2



Europe

Europe is much less directly impacted by El Niño, than many of the world's other regions. Unlike in parts of South America, Southern Africa and Asia, where El Niño has strong and well-established impacts on weather and agricultural production, its impacts in Europe are weaker and less predictable.

Climate change is already making the UK's winters milder and wetter, and the [Met Office](#) has warned that this year's El Niño is set to increase the chances of wetter, stormier conditions for NW Europe, including the UK, in the coming autumn and early winter. Warmer air can hold more moisture, meaning storms can bring heavier rainfall and increase the risk of flooding.

What a wetter autumn and winter might mean for UK food production

The last El Niño, which began in July 2023 and ran until March 2024, saw the UK experience a historically wet winter followed by a hot summer. The winter half-year from October 2023 to March 2024 was the wettest for both England and Wales on record (dating back to 1766) ([Carbon Brief](#)). The rainfall associated with the winter storms was found to be [around 20% heavier](#) because of climate change (World Weather Attribution, 2024), while the exceptionally wet conditions between October 2023 and March 2024 were made four times more likely. The result was widespread flooding, waterlogged soils and severe disruption to agricultural production across much of England.

The impacts were felt most acutely in the arable sector. Winter planting was severely hampered by saturated soils and flooding, particularly in the East Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber, with many farmers unable to establish winter wheat crops. Continued wet conditions into spring also disrupted the planting of spring crops. Wheat production ultimately [fell by 20%](#), while winter barley production dropped by 24% as waterlogging reduced crop performance and yields (Defra, 2025). Although some farmers switched into spring barley, boosting production of that crop, planting delays led to a protracted harvest. Overall, England recorded its second worst harvest on record (at the time), highlighting the vulnerability of domestic crop production to extreme rainfall.

Livestock sectors were also affected. A wet spring created difficult lambing conditions and contributed to [lower sheep slaughter numbers](#) (Defra, 2025), while prolonged rainfall reduced grass growth and damaged silage quality for dairy and beef producers. In the dairy sector, milk production was lower year-on-year through much of 2024 as wet weather constrained grazing and forage production, although many farmers maintained output by purchasing additional feed at higher cost. Beef producers faced similar challenges, with waterlogged pastures extending winter housing periods and increasing feed requirements. The wet winter therefore had consequences well beyond crop production, raising costs across livestock systems and fuelling inflation.

The implications for food imported from Europe

While El Niño may influence weather patterns in Europe, the larger and growing threat to UK food imports comes from climate change itself. In 2025, Europe and the Mediterranean accounted for 76% of UK food imports by value (£51.5 billion) and 70% by volume. Across these regions, rising temperatures, more frequent heatwaves, droughts, floods and wildfires are already affecting agricultural production. Although El Niño can exacerbate these pressures, the long-term risk to UK food security stems primarily from worsening climate impacts across the European food-producing regions on which the UK depends.

Solutions

Cutting emissions

The only solution to halt climate change, and avoid ever worsening climate impacts is cutting emissions to net zero, so as to stop adding greenhouse gases to the atmosphere. A cooler planet would be less exposed to even a strong El Niño than a planet that has, on average, been heated by 1.4°C since pre-industrial times as a result principally of our burning of coal, oil, and gas, and destruction of biodiversity through changes in land use.

The Paris Agreement seeks to limit temperature rises to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. At around 1.4°C of warming, we already see the threats and growing danger; this only worsens with each fraction of a degree of temperature rise. The global clean energy transition – the principal means of achieving net zero – has been driven by policy decisions flowing from nations' commitment to Paris, with investment in clean energy internationally running at around twice the level of investments in fossil fuels each year.

Adapting to worsening impacts

We also need to adapt to the climate impacts we're seeing now, at the current rate of warming, especially as we remain on track, if all nationally determined contributions are delivered, for temperature rises between 2.3° and 2.5°C (or 2.8°C on the basis of current policies). Farmers, everywhere, are among some of the most vulnerable to climate extremes.

Climate finance from wealthy nations to those countries with low climate readiness is a key part of the solution, supporting farmers to adapt to climate impacts. This can be about measures to reduce exposure to heat stress for agricultural workers, as well as about adapting crops and farming methods to cope better with climate change-driven extremes. This can secure both crops and livelihoods – both for consumption at home, and for export. Alongside cutting emissions to net zero, to limit further temperature rises, this will help reduce volatility in our food system. In turn, this supports British retailers in keeping supplies and prices stable for UK consumers.

The UN climate conference in Baku in 2024 – COP29 – agreed that climate finance will rise. Although nowhere near the **£1.3 trillion a year by 2035** that experts say is needed globally, world leaders agreed the level should treble from the current \$100 billion a year to at least \$300 billion.

Despite this, 2025 saw many nations retreat from commitments on overseas development assistance. In the US, Trump closed down USAID. In the UK, the government significantly cut the Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget to partially offset an increase in defence spending. The ODA budget funds our climate finance commitments, which includes support to farmers all around the world who grow staples like rice, bananas, coffee and a whole range of fresh fruit and vegetables that we import.

The UK has recently come to the end of its third round of climate finance commitment, which totalled £11.6 billion over five years, from 2021/22 to 2025/26. Some of that finance goes in bilateral support, directly to nations that need our support. And some of it goes via large, global multi-lateral funds, such as the Green Climate Fund. [ECIU analysis](#) in 2024 showed that UK climate finance, via the six largest multi-lateral funds, had contributed to at least 348 projects supporting overseas farmers hit by climate change in 111 countries, 84 of which (76%) grow food sold on UK supermarket shelves.

Food security is an element of national security, as emphasised starkly in a recent [UK national security assessment](#) of the risks posed by global biodiversity loss which warned, in early 2026 that: *“cascading risks of ecosystem degradation are likely to include geopolitical instability, economic insecurity, conflict, migration and increased inter-state competition for resources.”*

Withdrawal from overseas aid and climate finance would leave some of the world's most vulnerable farmers exposed to climate change, with the potential to undermine global food production.

Yet despite this, and growing [warnings of the rising threat of a food crisis](#), the UK has [reduced its commitment to climate finance](#) for the coming three years. Although climate finance remains roughly the same proportion (20%) of the UK's overseas development assistance (ODA) budget as it was before ODA was cut, the annual climate finance commitment for the next three years will total around £2 billion; down from around £2.3 billion in each of the last five years. This frontloads commitments made by the UK to raise its climate finance, and potentially limits our ability to provide additional support to farmers around the world who produce our food, to enable them to adapt to worsening climate change impacts. The UK is also reported recently to be cutting in half the pledged amount that they provide to the Green Climate Fund.