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**Report Highlights:**

This report is written for U.S. companies interested in doing business in Greece. It contains information on the economic situation, consumer buying patterns, and strategies for market entry. Greece presents market opportunities for many U.S. consumer-orientated products, including tree nuts, distilled spirits, soybeans, forest products, and seafood. However, the COVID-19 crisis and response have impacted the economy and trade and generated uncertainties.

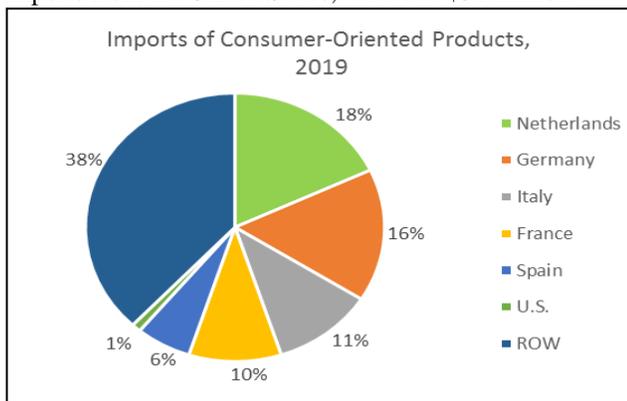
# Market Fact Sheet: Greece

## Executive Summary

With a population of 11 million and a gross domestic product (GDP) of approximately \$222 billion, Greece is a relatively small country. Greece is a part of the EU single market and customs union and is a Eurozone member. Greece continues to break records with the number of tourist arrivals in the country. The Greek Tourism Confederation indicated that more than 30 million tourists visited Greece in 2019. However, the tourism economy has been hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Greece imports significantly more food and beverages than it exports and is reliant on imports to meet the demands of consumers for food products. Opportunities to expand U.S. food and beverage sales exist, but U.S. food processors should study the market well in advance.

## Imports of Consumer-Oriented Products

Consumer-oriented food and beverage products remain the most important agricultural imports from the United States. In 2019, the consumer-oriented sector accounted for 57.7 percent of total agricultural, fish and forestry imports from the United States, valued at \$51 million.



## Food Processing Industry

Food processing is a key sector in Greece, accounting for 10 percent of employment. The food industry accounts for 26 percent of all manufacturing enterprises and in 2019, the sector generated a turnover of approximately \$11 billion.

## Food Retail Industry

In 2019, grocery store sales increased by 0.6 percent to \$19.4 billion. The effects of the recession were still evident, yet the economy seemed to march towards stability. This was mirrored in general retail sales, as consumption increased gradually.

## Quick Facts CY 2019

**Imports of Consumer-Oriented Products (US \$million)**  
\$51 million

### List of Top 10 Growth Products in Greece

- |                      |                        |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1) Almonds           | 2) Food preparations   |
| 3) Fish preparations | 4) Walnuts             |
| 5) Cranberries       | 6) Bourbon             |
| 7) Salmon            | 8) Condiments & Sauces |
| 9) Dried prunes      | 10) Squid              |

### Food Industry by Channels (U.S. \$billion) 2019

Food Industry Output	11.5
Food Exports	6.9
Food Imports	8.3
Retail	19.8

### Food Industry Gross Sales (U.S. \$billion) 2019

Food Industry Revenues (Domestic market) approx. \$20 billion

### Top Greek Food Retailers

- |                        |                 |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| 1) Sklavenitis J&S SA  | 5) Masoutis SA  |
| 2) Ahold Delhaize      | 6) Pente SA     |
| 3) Metro SA            | 7) Market In SA |
| 4) Schwarz Beteiligung | 8) INKA Coop    |

### GDP/Population

Population (millions): 10.8  
GDP (billions USD): 222  
GDP per capita (USD): 27,800

## Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Challenges

Strengths	Weaknesses
Greek importers favor U.S. products because of good quality and wider variety.	Greece's financial situation is sinking domestic demand
Opportunities	Threats
The scale of the U.S. food industry may offer price competitiveness on large volume orders.	Competition from EU member states is strong. COVID-19 has had an enormous financial impact on the HRI industry.

### Data and Information Sources:

Trade Data Monitor (TDM), Greek official statistics

### Contact:

FAS Rome Covering Greece, [AgRome@fas.usda.gov](mailto:AgRome@fas.usda.gov)

## **Section I. – Market Overview**

Greece is the 19th largest economy in the EU-28, accounting for 1.2 percent of EU GDP in 2019. The Greek economy stabilized in 2018, and GDP grew approximately 1.9 percent. The GDP remained stable in 2019, however a decrease is forecast for 2020, primarily due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Greece's public sector accounts for about 40 percent of GDP and tourism accounts for 18 percent of GDP. Greece is a major beneficiary of EU aid equal to about 3.3 percent of annual GDP.

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted the retail industry globally since 2020. The pandemic required the temporary closure of many stores, weakened consumer demand, and increased the cost of doing business for many retailers. The implementation of social distancing policies and city or national lockdowns limited or eliminated in-person dining. In addition, institutions such as schools closed, and some consumers decided that home-prepared food is would be safer, shifting millions of eating occasions into the home and driving a significant increase in retail purchases (Euromonitor, 2020). The Greek economy is highly dependent on the food and beverage industry. There are more than 15,000 enterprises in Greece's food processing sector, with an approximate product value of \$11 billion. According to a Hellenic Federation of Industry (SEV) survey of the impact of COVID-19, revenue in the food sector is forecast to decrease approximately 30 percent. The biggest impact is expected in meat processing (down 50 percent) and distilled spirits (down 50 percent), followed by fruits and vegetables (down 30 percent). The SEV also expressed concerns about a possible lack of workers because a large number of workers are on voluntary quarantine at home.

In 2015, Greece updated its agreement with European creditors regarding the economic measures it needs to introduce as a condition to receive a €10 billion (\$10.7 billion) cash injection for its crippled banks. Greece's economy began to exhibit strengthen in 2018; a strong rebound in exports and modest gains in private consumption contributed to the long-awaited recovery. The COVID-19 pandemic will have a short-term negative impact on all economic indicators, but they are expected to rebound when the pandemic is manageable.

- **Population and Key Demographic Trends**

According to Eurostat, in 2019, Greece's population was estimated at 10.7 million, down 0.2 percent since 2018. According to the latest data available from the Hellenic Statistical Authority, the Region of Attica is home to approximately 3.8 million residents (35.2 percent of the population), followed by the Region of Central Macedonia which has 1.9 million people (17.6 percent of the population). Thus, over half the population lives in Athens and Thessaloniki, the biggest cities in Greece. Greece's population continues to age with the "over 65" population estimated at 2 million (19.5 percent of the population). The number of people aged 85 and over was more than 200,000 during the last official Greek census (2011), accounting for 2.1 percent of the total population.

- **Overall Business Climate**

Greece can be a successful market for those companies willing to invest the time and resources to establish stable contacts. Eighty percent of Greece's import trade is handled through sales agents or distributors. Distributors generally supply the wholesale sector, and in some cases directly to the retail trade, usually based on exclusive sales rights for certain districts or for the entire country. There are

over 14,000 food businesses in Greece, often small, family-owned and operated businesses, each of which deals in a narrow range of foods. For example, the bread and baked goods business is the leading category (61%), followed by oils and fats (10%), dairy products (6%), and all other food categories combined (remaining 23%).

Local representation and personal contacts are required for successful product introduction on the Greek market. A local representative can provide up-to-date market intelligence, guidance on business practices and trade related laws, sales contact with existing and potential buyers, and market development expertise. The Office of Agricultural Affairs in Rome covering Greece maintains lists of potential importers/distributors by sector.

The agricultural sector in Greece remains a very important to economic activity and employment for Greece. The sector employs 12.6 percent of the total labor force in Greece, about 600,000 people. Agriculture contributes roughly 4 percent to GDP. Exports of agricultural products account for one third of total exports in Greece. Agriculture is characterized by small farms and low capital investment. COVID-19 will affect unemployment with the short-term spike probably reaching up to 18.5 percent.

Greece's utilized agricultural area is nearly 5 million hectares, of which 57 percent is in the plains and 43 percent is in mountainous or semi-mountainous areas. There are about 150 million olive trees in Greece, either in systematic orchards or scattered across the country. Lower agricultural productivity in Greece is a direct result of the smaller production area. The economies of scale offered by modern farming practices have limited impact on the small plots of land typically cultivated in Greece. Greece's agricultural output has steadily declined from 17 percent of GDP in the early 1990s to only 4 percent today.

Greece imports significantly more food and beverages than it exports and is reliant on imports to meet the demands of Greek consumers for food products. Greek agricultural product exports decreased 4.5 percent in 2019, compared to the previous year. The value of exports reached \$6 billion. Cotton, cheese and olive oil dominated Greek exports, accounting for 24.5 percent of total product exports in value terms. In 2019, Greek agricultural imports were valued at \$6.9 billion, a decrease of 1.5 percent compared to the previous year. Cheese and meat products were most in demand, totaling \$1.5 billion. Products with good sales potential in Greece include dairy products, meat, cereals, sugar, alcoholic beverages, exotic/counter seasonal fruits, planting seeds, feed, tree nuts, and non-GMO food ingredients for the domestic food processing and confectionary/ice cream sectors. Greece is strongly receptive to U.S. goods and services. In 2019, U.S. agricultural exports were valued at approximately \$88.5 million.

Online grocery shopping is rapidly growing in Greece and experienced a significant surge during the COVID-19 pandemic, growing by 183 percent in the third quarter of 2020, compared to the same period in 2019. Fear among many consumers of being in crowded spaces such as supermarkets, combined with a desire to increase their stock of food, have sent online supermarket sales soaring even though they are usually at particularly low levels in Greece.

## Advantages and Challenges for U.S. Suppliers on the Greek Market

Advantages	Challenges
The scale of the U.S. food industry may offer price competitiveness on large volume orders.	Competition from EU member states is strong and U.S. products are subject to import duties while competing EU goods are not.
The U.S. and Greece have long-standing cultural and political ties.	Poultry and red meat are highly regulated from the EU, as are dairy product imports from the U.S.
The United States has a good brand image in Greece. The quality of U.S. products is highly appreciated.	Labels, including nutritional panels need to be changed. Pack size and pallet sizing may also need changing.
Most importers speak English.	Need to develop relationships with Greek trade contacts and invest in marketing the product.
Strong interest in innovative products. Currently there is high interest in natural, “wholesome” and “healthy” food categories.	Taste buds differ in Greece. Spicy does not necessarily mean high chili content.
Greece needs agricultural imports to sustain its food & feed processing industry.	The Greek feed/livestock sectors are not politically strong and resist engaging at the MS level on EU GE approvals.
Tourism provides a seasonal boost to retail food and drink sales.	The tourism economy has been heavily hit by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.
Greek ports are offering a destination point, which covers a big area of the Balkans and can reduce the transportation costs for U.S. exported goods.	Changes in taxation as part of the bailout may affect shipping rates.

## Section II. – Exporter Business Tips

When looking at the Greek market the following information should be reviewed:

- Basic market research to form an understanding of what kinds of products and services may prove profitable in the Greek market.
- Greek business partners and terms-local representation and personal contacts are required to successfully introduce a product into the Greek market.
- U.S. products may be subject to levies based on an ad valorem cost, insurance, and freight (CIF) basis.
- Greek Tourism adds more than 30 million visitors to the market which increases total food consumption.
- Greece follows EU policies regarding labeling and ingredient requirements. Labels including nutritional panels need to be changed. Pack size and pallet sizing may also need to be changed.

## General Consumer Tastes and Preferences

Food Safety	As a result of food scares over the past two decades in the EU, the Greek food supply chain is now heavily scrutinized, meaning that Greek retailers, foodservice operators and manufacturers are paying more attention to traceability and quality assurance.
Biotech (GE)	Biotech products or products that contain biotech ingredients can only be sold in the EU if the biotech (GE) trait has gone through the EU approval process. However, Greece has adopted an anti-GE stance not only on the cultivation of GE crops, but also on the use of GE products.
Organic	Greece, unlike most European nations, has suffered from declining organic food sales in recent years. Sales peaked in 2008 and have since declined. Greek consumers are unwilling to pay a premium for product labeled as organic.
Health	During the Covid-19 pandemic more Greek consumers are in search of health benefits and good natural sources of vitamin C, increasing also fresh fruit, fruit juices, and low-fat or low-sugar processed food demand.
Package Sizes	On average, Greek households consist of 3 people. Traditionally, kitchens and refrigerators are small and shopping is a daily occurrence with an average monthly expenditure of \$390 in 2019, down 9.7 percent compared to 2018.
Agriculture Supplies	A growing number of Greeks are relocating from the cities back to their family villages as a result of the economic crisis. Many of the younger farmers are well-educated and are choosing to implement non-traditional agricultural production methods, giving ag-related technology good sales potential.

## Section III. - Import Food Standards & Regulations

- **Customs Clearance**

Greece follows EU policies regarding labeling and ingredient requirements. Similarly, Greece employs the same tariffs and border measures as the other EU member states. Products imported into Greece must meet all Greek and EU food safety and quality standards, as well as labeling and packaging regulations. It is important to work with experienced importers and/or have an agent to work with Greek regulatory authorities to ensure the acceptability of specific products. Personal relationships and language ability are of value when conducting business transactions. It is also advisable for the agent to contact the health authorities at the port of entry as interpretation of health directives may vary from port to port.

Complete information on EU import rules for food products may also be found at:  
<http://www.usda-eu.org/trade-with-the-eu/eu-import-rules/>

For more food import regulation information see <http://www.usda-eu.org/trade-with-the-eu/eu-import-rules/certification/approved-u-s-establishments/>.

- **General Import and Inspection Procedures**

Tariffs are based on the Harmonized System, with duties levied on imports from non-European Union (EU) on an ad valorem cost, insurance, and freight (CIF) basis. On average, the import duty is five to seven percent for most products. Most raw materials for manufacturing input can be imported without duties, or with minimal duties. Preferential tariffs and EU tariff rate quotas may apply.

Greece is a World Trade Organization (WTO) member and applies both European Union (EU) mandated and Greek government technical requirements. Greece has been a EU member since 1981 when it fully harmonized its requirements with EU regulations, directives and legislation pertaining to agricultural production and the trade and sale of agri-food products. Special import permits and sanitary and phytosanitary certificates may apply to imports from third countries. For example, tree nuts, plant propagation materials and seeds, wood and wood packing materials, textiles, meat products, and pet food all have special provisions.

It is advisable that U.S. exporters to Greece seek advice from local importers regarding the sanitary and phytosanitary requirements and the tariffs/quotas. Most agricultural product imports are covered by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), under which many items (including cereals, rice, milk and milk products, beef and veal, olive oil, dried fruit, and sugar) are subject to variable levies.

Occasionally, non-tariff barriers are imposed by the Greek government in the form of intensified sampling and laboratory testing for genetically engineered (GE) products, heavy metals, radioactivity, or mycotoxins. Greece also has a de facto ban on the cultivation of GE crops.

For more information on Product Trade Restrictions, Food Standards and Regulations, please refer to Post's [FAIRS GAIN Report](#).

#### **Section IV. – Market Sector Structure and Trends**

The Greek crisis created a completely new retail grocery environment, with conditions in which many retailers and suppliers have never operated. The effects of the recession were still evident in 2019, with low disposable incomes, low consumer confidence and high unemployment; yet the economy seemed to march towards stability, and this was mirrored in the retail sector as consumption increased gradually. Greece's retail grocery market was valued at \$19.4 billion in 2019, a 0.6 percent increase from 2018. In 2017, Greece's major supermarket chains began entering into strategic agreements with each other as a result the number of mergers and acquisitions is increasing in an attempt to maximize their profits in a recovering environment.

The bulk of food and drinks are bought via supermarkets in Greece. Greeks, however, still prefer to buy fish, meat and fresh vegetables from specialty retailers. Consumer perceptions are more favorable to specialty retailers. They form personal relationships with local shops and green groceries as they trust

that their products are fresher. Coffee is another product that in 2019, was increasingly purchased via specialty retailers instead of supermarkets as a growing consumer base is shifting to premium coffee.

The severity and lasting impact of the recession will continue to disrupt trends in retailing, leading consumers to safe and cheap options; scanning for the best deals and seeking alternative stores and channels in order to achieve this. The crisis and the ensuing fiscal adjustment measures have had a strong impact on demand, resulting in the vital restructuring of the sector. However, the retail sector is believed to have reached its lowest point; thus being ready to stabilize and even start rising again, should there be no further hits to the Greek economy. If there are obstacles to vaccinations and related COVID-19 measures, the economy will be in danger in 2021, the National Bank of Greece emphasized that the total decrease in the tourism industry is estimated at 75 percent and may suffer a loss of €15 billion.

- **Top Five Sectors**

### **Tree Nuts**

In 2019, the United States was the number one supplier of tree nuts (in value and quantity) to Greece. Most tree nuts are used as ingredients by the food processing sector (ingredient of most traditional pastries). Almonds are the most important commodity within this category. Greeks consume per capita more tree nuts than other nationalities. Other tree nuts with good sales potential include walnuts, pistachios, pecans, and hazelnuts.

### **Fish and Seafood Products**

The excellent reputation and reliability of U.S. lobster and salmon help to boost exports. In Greece, seasonal consumption increased due to record tourism in 2019, and religious traditions. Fish consumption is growing as consumers associate seafood products with a modern healthy diet. The best prospects for U.S. fish and seafood exports are squid, smoked and frozen salmon, lobster, shrimp, crab, catfish, scallops, and pollock.

### **Soybeans**

Greece is a net importer of soybean and soybean meal, which represent the main ingredients in animal feed. In 2019, Greece imported 301,256 MT (metric tons) of soybeans, a decrease of 9.5 percent from the previous year, mainly from Ukraine (147,147 MT), Paraguay (69,006 MT), and the United States (49,823 MT).

### **Whiskies (Bourbon)**

The United States is the fifth largest whisky supplier to Greece. While the United Kingdom dominates the market with 58 percent of all exports. Despite a negative growth rate for the sector, U.S. Bourbon remains a best product prospect.

## Forest Products

Greece's annual logging production is estimated at 756,000 m<sup>3</sup>, comprised of 634,000 m<sup>3</sup> of softwood and 122,000 m<sup>3</sup> of hardwood. Much of the harvested wood is used to manufacture particleboard or low-grade products, such as pallets. According to industry estimates, Greece produces around 900,000 m<sup>3</sup> of particleboard every year. In 2019, Greece imported approximately \$400 million worth of wood products. The main suppliers of the wood products are Bulgaria (\$90 million), Romania (\$37 million), and China (\$25 million). Greece imported \$6.4 million worth of wood products from the United States, mainly hardwood lumber (\$3.4 million), and hardwood veneer sheets (\$2 million).

- **Retailer Information**

For more information on Retail Foods in Greece, please refer to Post's [Retail Foods GAIN Report](#).

- **Market Opportunities for Consumer-Oriented Products in the Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional, Retail Food and Food Processing Sector**

In 2019, the Greek hotel and food service industry consisted of 9,873 hotels and more than 100,000 restaurants, cafeterias, bars, and entertainment centers. Seasonality is a key characteristic of the sector. Employment in the HRI industry is estimated at 690,000 (about 18 percent of the total labor force), an increase of 0.9 percent compared to the previous year. Although the HRI sector is one of the major sources of income for Greece, the Covid-19 economic crisis is severely impacting the profitability of both hotels and food-service businesses. In November 2020, most of the hotels and restaurants had to be closed for the second time in the calendar year, which dramatically impacted the food industry.

Greeks have continued to reduce the frequency of their visits to consumer foodservice outlets. The full-service restaurant sector has been the most severely affected by the economic downturn as consumers have increasingly shifted to more affordable dining options.

The EU is the main competitor for U.S. consumer-orientated food. EU food exporters have relatively low transportation costs and fast delivery times. Their products do not face import duties, nor do they face major ingredient or labeling changes. Products are sourced mainly from Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Bulgaria, Romania, and Spain.

The United States is the 6<sup>th</sup> largest non-EU exporter to Greece, representing about 1.2 percent of all Greek food and drink imports. Argentina, Ukraine, Russia, Turkey and Brazil are some of the other top non-EU suppliers.

## Section V. – Agricultural and Food Imports

- [BICO Table for last Five Years](#)

<b>GREECE IMPORTS OF AGRICULTURAL, FISH &amp; FORESTRY PRODUCTS FROM UNITED STATES</b>					
<b>CY 2015 - 2019 AND YEAR-TO-DATE COMPARISON</b>					
	<b>CALENDAR YEARS (JAN-DEC)</b>				
<b>PRODUCT</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
<b>CONSUMER-ORIENTED AGRICULTURAL TOTAL (in millions of dollars)</b>	41.6	35.1	38.7	42.5	51.1
Snack Foods NESOI	0.7	0.8	1.0	0.8	0.6
Beef & Beef Products	0.1	0.5	0.1	0.2	0.3
Poultry Meat	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.4	0.2
Prepared Food	2.1	2.1	3.3	2.9	2.4
Chocolate & Cocoa Products	0.4	0.3	0.7	0.4	0.2
Processed Fruit & Vegetables	2.6	3.7	3.2	3.6	4.2
Condiments & Sauces	0.6	1.2	1.1	1.4	1.5
Tree Nuts	33.9	25.2	27.6	31.9	40.7
Pet Foods (Dog & Cat Food)	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.4
Wine & Beer	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.2
<b>FISH AND SEAFOOD PRODUCTS AGRICULTURAL TOTAL (in thousands of dollars)</b>	7,398	5,298	6,221	4,695	3,768
Squid	1,508	2,622	4,381	2,583	1,081
Salmon	945	507	646	816	728
Lobster	319	597	549	543	510
Whiting/Hake	237	163	350	584	38
Other Fishery Products	4,338	1,273	268	25	1,177
<b>AGRICULTURAL PRODUCT TOTAL (\$ million)</b>	73.3	60.4	71.3	85.3	76.0
<b>AGRICULTURAL, FISH &amp; FORESTRY TOTAL (\$ million)</b>	86.5	80.3	92.7	102.8	88.5

Source: Trade Data Monitor

- **Best High-Value, Consumer-Oriented Product Prospects Categories**

Market opportunities for U.S. products include tree nuts, distilled spirits, soybeans and soybean meal, forest products, fish and seafood products, processed fruits and vegetables, snack foods, high quality beef, and hides and skins.

## **Section VI. – Key Contacts and Further Information**

### **FAS Rome, Italy covers Greece**

Office of Agricultural Affairs, American Embassy

Via Veneto 119a, Rome, 00187, Italy

Tel: +39 06 4674 2396

Web: <https://gr.usembassy.gov/business/foreign-agricultural-service/>

### **Ministry of Rural Development and Food**

2, Acharnon Street

GR-101 76 Athens, Greece

Tel: +30 210 212 5525

Fax: +30 210 524-0860

E-mail: [ggram@hq.minagric.gr](mailto:ggram@hq.minagric.gr)

Website: <http://www.minagric.gr/index.php/el/>

### **General Customs and Excise Department**

10, Kar. Serbias

GR-105 62 Athens, Greece

Tel: +30 210 3375 714; 210 3375 715

Fax: +30 210 3375 034

E-mail: [gdcustom@otenet.gr](mailto:gdcustom@otenet.gr)

Website: <http://www.minfin.gr>

### **Hellenic Food Safety Authority (EFET)**

124, Kifissias Avenue & 2 Iatridou Street

GR-115 26 Athens, Greece

Tel: +30 213 214 5800

Fax: +30 213 214 5860

E-mail: [info@efet.gr](mailto:info@efet.gr)

Website: [www.efet.gr](http://www.efet.gr)

### **Attachments:**

No Attachments.