

PRESS RELEASE

Agricultural exports: 2020 brings first ever positive foreign trade balance

AMA focuses on online measures and maintains hopes for ANUGA

(Vienna, 6 May 2021) Last year Austria succeeded in recording a positive foreign trade balance for agricultural goods and food for the first time since records began. This means that Austria exported more food than it imported.

Agricultural exports grew by 3.9 percent during the past year, whilst imports remained practically the same. With a total value of EUR 12.8 billion, exports exceeded imports by EUR 10.8 million. The trade balance is thus positive for the first time since records began (Chart 1). Looking at trade with Germany, the difference is even more pronounced. Exports grew by 6.2 percent, whilst imports fell by 3.5 percent. This results in a positive trade balance of EUR 270 million (Chart 2). This past year agricultural exports accounted for nine percent of all goods and services exported by Austria, more than ever before (Chart 3).

“Who would have thought that such growth would be possible in 2020, a year shaped by crisis? Agriculture and its downstream stages have, hand in hand, accomplished a tremendous feat and demonstrated their ability to withstand crises. One can only commend their performance,” states Michael Blass, Managing Director of AMA-Marketing.

Germany is and remains key

Accounting for a 36-percent share of all agricultural exports, Germany remains Austria’s top trading partner. Despite all the difficulties engendered by the pandemic, exports to Italy also increased slightly. The growth in the value of trade with the United States, which ranks third in the list of export countries (Chart 4), was very pleasing to see.

Agriculture showed its strength in the list of the highest-value agrarian exports: milk products take first place followed by processed fruit and vegetables, then sausage, ham and bacon products. Milk products, sausage, ham and bacon, as well as fresh fruit and vegetables achieved strong growth rates (Chart 5).

These agriculture-associated product groups accounted for the lion’s share, particularly in the context of trade with Germany. Accounting for EUR 661 million, milk products dominated the statistics, followed by meat products, which accounted for EUR 378 million (Chart 6). A detailed examination of these segments explains the positive trade balance. Far greater quantities of milk products and cheese made their way from Austria’s producers into the hands of German consumers than vice versa. This figure was even three times as great in the case of meat preparations (Chart 7).

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The fact that greater quantities are now being exported to our biggest neighbour is not the only positive development with respect to value creation. Most notably, the value per kilogram has increased, by 19 cents per kilo of cheese for instance (Chart 8).

The past year was challenging for the meat industry. The custom of the catering industry was lost for extended periods of time and cases of African swine fever in Germany brought further disruption to market and price structures. Exports have managed to hold up well under these conditions. Exports of beef to Germany even experienced a minor increase. Asia continues to grow in importance as an export market for pork (Chart 9).

Planned participation in ANUGA, new measures in Germany

Even if no guarantee can be given right now, Austrian exhibitors and AMA are planning to participate in this year's ANUGA trade fair in Cologne. "We very much hope that we will once again be able to make direct contact with buyers from all around the world. The 'land of the Alps', as AMA's adopted export slogan puts it, has so many stories to tell – stories which can be conveyed just as effectively through face-to-face interactions as they can through the media," says Blass.

Just as in all others sectors, AMA has also implemented marketing measures in the virtual realm. "We received very positive feedback in response to an information event with cheese accompaniments which we recently held via the internet. Serving staff were sent a package containing a selection of cheeses. A dairy worker provided information about the cheese and where it was made. The feedback was so positive that we now wish to incorporate this pilot project into our standard repertoire of measures. We've also had to change our key sales promotion measure, which involves tastings at the POS. In future we will focus on unaccompanied promotion in an infotainment style," explains AMA.

The "Europe Home of Cheese" export programme, which is co-financed by the EU, has been underway since 1 January 2020. It was submitted in partnership with France as a multi-country project and aims to position European cheese in new markets. AMA arranged for market and feasibility studies to be carried out for the potential export market in India for instance. These show that European cheese can score highly, especially on account of its quality. As imports of western goods such as wine grow, so too does the demand for cheese.

In addition, the ongoing EU programme also includes online measures, such as social media, online events and digital advertising. This made it possible to maintain a presence on the American and Canadian target markets throughout the pandemic, despite the restrictions.

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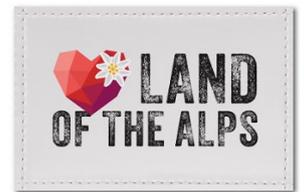
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AMA-Marketing GesmbH is the Austrian platform for quality, sales promotion and communication of agricultural products and food. It awards the AMA Quality Seal and the AMA Organic Seal in recognition of excellence in the food industry. Its duties are regulated by law. Financing is provided through agricultural marketing contributions from farmers, European Union funding and licence holder fees.

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