



MARKET GUIDE FOR B.C. AGRIFOOD AND SEAFOOD EXPORTERS

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES



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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this guide is to assist B.C. agrifood and seafood exporters targeting the United Arab Emirates (UAE) market by informing them about key topics such as: the UAE business environment; key regulatory agencies; finding and assessing buyers; distribution channel options; social and business customs; and the development and maintenance of relationships in the UAE. The following table summarizes the key information in this guide:

Introduction to the UAE market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a country in the Middle East. The cities of Dubai and Abu Dhabi are its best known and are both international trading hubs. • The UAE is highly reliant on imported agrifood and seafood products to satisfy domestic demand. Up to 90% of all food consumed in the country has been imported. Meanwhile, the country is also a major re-export market for other countries in the region with as much as half of all food products imported to the UAE being re-exported out of the country. • Consumers in the UAE are varied. In general, incomes are high. Approximately 80% of all residents are expatriate workers and tourism has become a major economic activity. As a result, the Hotel, Restaurant and Institution (HRI) sector is particularly active.
Market Readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market readiness means you have taken the steps to ensure that the product(s) you want to export to the UAE are fully compliant with local laws and import/export regulations. • The Federal Customs Authority and individual Emirate government agencies are involved in regulating and permitting imports of agrifood and seafood to the UAE. In Dubai, the Food Safety Department – Dubai Municipality and Dubai Customs are most involved; for imports to Abu Dhabi it is Abu Dhabi Customs and the Abu Dhabi Food Control Authority. • Requirements can vary considerably depending on your product. It is absolutely necessary to verify all requirements with your importer(s) before any goods are shipped, as well as with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA).
Selling to UAE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Companies importing agrifood or seafood products to the UAE must be registered with the government to do so. The best approach for most foreign agrifood and seafood companies is to engage a commercial agent/distributor to represent your products in the UAE market. • Although the UAE has one of the highest internet usages in the world the development of e-grocery services and subsequent uptake has been slow. • Attending food exhibition shows such as the Gulfood Show, SIAL Middle East, Seafex, Snacks and Sweets, or Gulfood Manufacturing is a potentially useful way to conduct market research, initiate and maintain relationships and even achieve sales. • Developing online content, visiting the country and utilizing in-market resources can also assist companies to generate consumer and importer demand. • Due diligence should be executed prior to signing contracts and establishing formal relationships.
Building Relationships in UAE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal relationships are a component of business relationships in the UAE. Ideally you can make introductions through a third-party or by engaging an intermediary or ‘contract-sponsor’. • The official language of the UAE is Arabic; however English is widely used and is a primary language for business. • Indirect communication and body language are important aspects of communication among Emirati. • The official religion is Islam. This impacts public and private life as well as business. For example, the work week is Sunday-Thursday with Friday reserved for prayer; alcohol is taboo and public intoxication is illegal; interactions between men are different than between men and women.
Export Support and Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canadian Trade Commissioners have representatives based in Abu Dhabi and Dubai to assist B.C. exporters. • Exporters should make themselves aware of cost-sharing programs and promotional support provided by provincial and federal agencies and organizations.

SECTION 2: INTRODUCTION TO THE UAE MARKET

2.1 – UNITED ARAB EMIRATES' ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The United Arab Emirates is a high-income country of approximately 9.2 million people comprised primarily of expatriate workers who account for over 80% of the total population. Located in the Middle East between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the UAE is a federation of seven distinct Emirates including Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah and Umm al-Quwain. Abu Dhabi is the largest district and controls 90% of the oil and gas reserves in the country, while Dubai is a global metropolis and a hub of international trade and tourism. The country has modernized rapidly over the past few decades and boasts some of the most modern air and seaport facilities and other trade-supporting infrastructure in the world. The country is positioned as a business-friendly jurisdiction by its government and was ranked 21ST in the latest World Bank [Ease of Doing Business Index](#).

2.2 – UNITED ARAB EMIRATES' AGRIFOOD AND SEAFOOD SECTOR

The United Arab Emirates has an extreme climate by global standards; annual precipitation is very low and summer temperatures regularly exceed 40 degrees Celsius. There are limited water resources available for agriculture and as the country is primarily comprised of desert, the soil is relatively infertile. However, there have been investments made to install modern irrigation systems and the country has an estimated 105,000 hectares devoted to agricultural production (equal to approximately 4% of the total farmland found in British Columbia). There is a relatively small commercial fishery based primarily in Abu Dhabi Emirate that is described by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations as being 'artisanal' in nature.

2.3 – UNITED ARAB EMIRATES' AGRIFOOD AND SEAFOOD IMPORTS

As a consequence of the limited production capacity described above, the UAE is highly reliant on imported agrifood and seafood products. In addition to imports for local consumption, firms in the UAE re-export products to countries throughout the Middle East and beyond; in fact, an estimated 50% of all food imported to the UAE is re-exported to other countries in the region. The total value of agrifood and seafood products imported by the UAE was 6% less in 2016 than it was in 2014. As shown in the following table, Canada was the 6th largest supplier of agrifood and seafood to the UAE in 2016, with exports totalling approximately \$774 million. The vast majority of Canada's exports were lentils and canola oil. Those two commodities also drove most of the 39% increase in value of exports from Canada to UAE achieved between 2014 and 2016. Over that time period, Canada increased UAE market share by 45%.

Table: Value of Agrifood and Seafood Exports to UAE, Top 10 Supplying Countries 2014-16

Country	Value of Exports (\$ Millions)			Market Share		
	2014	2016	%-Change	2014	2016	%-Change
India	2,329	2,641	13%	10%	12%	21%
US	1,692	1,559	-8%	7%	7%	-2%
Brazil	2,014	1,142	-43%	9%	5%	-39%
Saudi Arabia	872	1,133	30%	4%	5%	39%
Australia	893	960	7%	4%	4%	15%
Canada	556	774	39%	2%	4%	48%
Oman	401	707	76%	2%	3%	88%
Netherlands	633	648	2%	3%	3%	9%
China	584	544	-7%	3%	3%	-1%
France	676	517	-23%	3%	2%	-18%

Source: [International Trade Centre Trade Map](#). Accessed August 2018.

The following table describes the class (by 2-digit HS code) of agrifood and seafood products that, for each of the top supplying countries, achieved the highest rate of growth in value of exports to UAE between 2014 and 2016.

Table: Largest Percentage Increases in Exports, by 2-digit HS Code for Top 10 Supplying Countries, 2014-16

Country	Product (by HS Code), Growth Rate in Value of Exports 2014-16
India	Live trees and other plants; bulbs, roots and the like; cut flowers and ornamental foliage (80%) Edible vegetables and certain roots and tubers (67%) Preparations of cereals, flour, starch or milk; pastrycooks' products (50%)
US	Live animals (98%) Products of animal origin, not elsewhere specified or included (94%) Vegetable plaiting materials; vegetable products not elsewhere specified or included (76%)
Brazil	Edible vegetables and certain roots and tubers (3,059%) Live animals (2,990%) Fish and crustaceans, molluscs and other aquatic invertebrates (86%)
Saudi Arabia	Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits; miscellaneous grains, seeds and fruit (251%) Meat and edible meat offal (146%) Coffee, tea, maté and spices (123%)
Australia	Products of animal origin, not elsewhere specified or included (1,991%) Products of the milling industry; malt; starches; inulin; wheat gluten (453%) Preparations of meat, of fish or of crustaceans, molluscs or other aquatic invertebrates (213%)
Canada	Animal or vegetable fats and oils and their cleavage products; prepared edible fats (229%) Preparations of vegetables, fruit, nuts or other parts of plants (159%) Coffee, tea, maté and spices (102%)
Oman	Preparations of cereals, flour, starch or milk; pastrycooks' products (682%) Coffee, tea, maté and spices (242%) Preparations of meat, of fish or of crustaceans, molluscs or other aquatic invertebrates (242%)
Netherlands	Live animals (135%) Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits; miscellaneous grains, seeds and fruit (65%) Animal or vegetable fats and oils and their cleavage products; prepared edible fats (42%)
China	Live animals (133%) Live trees and other plants; bulbs, roots and the like; cut flowers and ornamental foliage (72%) Edible vegetables and certain roots and tubers (69%)
France	Sugars and sugar confectionery (109%) Live animals (38%) Lac; gums, resins and other vegetable saps and extracts (36%)

Source: [International Trade Centre Trade Map](#). Accessed August 2018.

2.4 – CULINARY CULTURE, CONSUMER LIFESTYLES AND CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

- **The UAE has among the highest per-capita incomes in the world and a large number of tourists and foreign business people.**
 - This helps to create a strong market for imported food including North American products
 - Tourism and busy work lives has created a vast Hotel, Restaurant and Institution (HRI) sector that foreign exporters can capitalize upon.
- **Despite high incomes, consumers are facing increasing costs of living.**
 - This has led many consumers to re-prioritize price competitiveness in food products as a way to cope with other increases.
- **The share of women that work outside of the home is increasing and more people are tending to live alone or in smaller family units.**
 - This has increased demand for smaller package sizes, convenience items and the retailing of prepared and semi-prepared meals.
- **The UAE is a trade hub for the entire region, with up to 50% of imported food products being re-exported to another country.**
 - For agrifood and seafood exporters this means that the UAE market is actually larger than the country itself. Finding an importer with re-export experience could help extend sales throughout the Middle East.
- **Many consumers have showed an increased interest in 'healthier' foods.**
 - Firms offering fresh fruits and vegetables, natural foods, organic foods, whole foods and dietary supplements will see a growing customer base.
- **E-grocery and e-commerce sales have been slow to materialize**
 - Consumers have expressed concern about the safety and security of online shipping such as fraudulent payments, non-delivery, and theft of personal data.

2.5 – MARKET INTELLIGENCE

You should undertake as much market research as possible given your budget and timeframe. In addition to answering any specific questions you might have, good market research allows you to:

- Determine if there is a potential market for your product;
- Understand the strategy, strengths and weaknesses of your major competitors;
- Strategize how best to position your product (e.g. price, packaging, value proposition) and leverage the highest potential competitive advantage;
- Minimize the risk of making a poor investment decision.

The following approaches and sources can be used to gather market information:

- **Consult with government agencies and industry and trade associations in your sector.**

- These could include: [Canadian Trade Commissioners](#), [Agriculture and Agrifood Canada](#), [Small Business B.C.](#), [Global Affairs Canada](#), [The Embassy of Canada to United Arab Emirates](#), and chambers of commerce including the [Canadian Business Council Dubai and Northern Emirates](#).
- **Conduct online research for available material.** Many of the following resources provide market-specific information free of charge, but there may be a fee to access larger quantities of intelligence or information that is particularly valuable or hard to come by:
- [Canada Business Network](#) is a hub for the Canadian export market that includes links to market and sector information, trade statistics and sources of trade leads and potential partners.
 - [CIA World Factbook](#) is a reference resource with almanac-style information about the countries of the world. It provides summaries of the demographics, geography, communications, government, economy, and military of most of the countries of the world.
 - [Economist Intelligence Unit](#) is the research and analysis division of The Economist Group and world leader in global business intelligence.
 - [Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nations \(Statistics Division\)](#) is a source of knowledge and information related to agriculture, forestry and fishery.
 - [Global Trade Tracker \(GTT\)](#) offers original trade statistics from the world's principal trading countries.
 - The [Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Authority](#) produces and makes available UAE national statistics.
 - [Santander Trade Portal](#) is a resource that provides access to 40+ worldwide databases, 10,000 pages of information on 185 countries, and more than 150,000 suppliers and importers.
 - [United States Department of Agriculture's Global Agriculture Information Network \(GAIN\)](#) provides information and reports about the agricultural economy, products and issues in foreign countries that are likely to have an impact on trade.
- **Access a global research firm that conducts regular market intelligence in the Middle East and the UAE.** The following are a sample of intelligence companies which are available to exporters, and it is possible you will find a suitable firm that is not listed below. Information from these sources will generally not be provided free of charge, but may be the only way to obtain certain information.
- [Development Bank Canada](#) provides industry experts to identify the right collection tools and to handle data mining and analysis.
 - [Euromonitor International](#) is a leading provider of global business intelligence and publishes industry, country and global reports.
 - [Global Research & Data Services](#) publishes reports from over 200 industries and 100 countries, providing difficult-to-find market data.
 - [Hoovers Research](#) provides reports across a range of industries including the food & beverage sector. Global reports by Hoovers Research provide regional and country-level market analysis.
 - [Nielsen](#) studies consumer trends and habits in more than 100 countries.
 - [Planet Retail](#) is a leading provider of global retail intelligence.
 - [Statistics Market Research Consulting](#) reports provide strategic recommendations, market forecasts, and competitive landscaping.
 - [VPG Market Research](#) publishes international market research for corporate executives and key decision-makers in the food & beverage industry, among others. VPG has clients in 70 countries and provides market intelligence and strategic insights.
- **Visit the market personally:**

- Do not underestimate the value in simply taking a trip to the United Arab Emirates yourself to gather first-hand insights and intelligence. It can be very powerful not only in terms of talking to potential buyers and distributors but also in terms of identifying competing products. Visiting different supermarkets and retailers can be invaluable as it allows you to get a sense of products and packaging in the UAE and allows you to assess the price range and market approach used by potential competitors.

SECTION 3: MARKET READINESS

The first step to achieving sales in the United Arab Emirates is ensuring that your business is market ready. This means that your product is eligible for export and you are compliant with all necessary requirements, standards and regulations, including importer and product registration, labelling compliance and registration, testing, inspection, and customs clearance preparations.

3.1 – UAE AGENCIES INVOLVED IN OVERSEEING IMPORTS

UAE government agencies involved in regulating and permitting imports of agrifood and seafood include Federal as well as individual Emirate departments. The following list includes key departments federally as well as those associated with Dubai and Abu Dhabi as they are the primary entry points for food products imported by the UAE.

➤ **Federal Customs Authority**

- The Federal Customs Authority draws the customs policies, supervises the execution of customs-related laws and legislation and represents the UAE inside and outside the state. Local customs departments do the executive work and draw the customs policies for each emirate in compliance with the Common Customs Law.

➤ **Food Safety Department – Dubai Municipality**

- Responsible for establishing regulations concerning food safety and inspections of imported food products into Dubai.
- Responsible for granting registration to food importers/re-exporters and maintaining the Dubai Municipality Food Import and Re-export System (FIRS).
- Conducts inspections alongside [Dubai Customs](#) officials to ensure imported agrifood and seafood products satisfy all entry requirements.

➤ **Abu Dhabi Food Control Authority**

- Responsible for developing policies and procedures concerning the safety of imported food products into Abu Dhabi.
- Conducts inspections alongside [Abu Dhabi Customs](#) officials to ensure imported agrifood and seafood products satisfy all entry requirements.
- The department has produced and made available a [Food Importers Guide](#) that describes in additional detail the requirements associated with imported food.

3.2 – REQUIREMENTS, STANDARDS & REGULATIONS

Requirements can vary considerably depending on your product. It is absolutely necessary to verify all requirements with your customer(s) before any goods are shipped, as well as with the [Canadian Food Inspection Agency \(CFIA\)](#) and [Canada Border Services Agency \(CBSA\)](#). However, at a minimum, the following requirements will apply when exporting agrifood or seafood products to the UAE:

➤ **Product registration and testing**

- Prior to importing any food product to Dubai, a registered importer must submit an electronic application to register a new food item and its label through the Food Import and Export system (FIRS). Imports to other Emirates (e.g. Abu Dhabi) will require registration with the relevant food control department in that jurisdiction.

- In addition to approving the food label, laboratory testing may be required before importing some products. This is particularly true of food items that are newly registered. If testing reveals any ingredient or additive that is not mentioned on the label the product, it will be denied market access.

➤ **Labelling requirements**

- Labels must be at least presented in the Arabic language and contain the following information: product name; ingredients list; additives; the source of any animal fats; notification of any products known to cause hypersensitivity and allergies; net content in metric units; production and expiry dates; country of origin; name and address of the manufacturer, producer, distributor, importer, exporter or vendor.
- Labels can be sent directly or through an importer to health officials for pre-shipment approval.

➤ **Prohibited and restricted items**

- The use of pork fat or any other pork related products as ingredients is prohibited unless they are retailed with all pork products in a specific, restricted area of the retail store that is clearly marked for non-Muslims. Food labels may not include pictures of pork but should state clearly that the product contains pork.
- Alcoholic beverages and alcohol containing products can be imported but only through authorized importers.
- Imported meat products must be accompanied by a Halal certificate.
- Poppy seeds, betel or paan leaves, and other items linked to narcotic use are prohibited.

➤ **Customs and logistics**

- The usual documentation procedure is for the in-market importer to collect the required paperwork and submit it to the Food Trade Section at the port of entry. Depending on the product, documents required for customs clearance include: commercial invoice; customs value declaration; freight documents (e.g. bill of lading); freight insurance; packing list; customs import declaration.
- After documentations are processed, the importer pays applicable tariffs and business taxes.
- The Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS) is an international goods classification system to categorize imported and exported goods in international trade, determine appropriate duty fees, identify goods and is used for freight documentation, etc. HS compliance is the mandatory classification and declaration of goods when entering or exiting a country. If you are unaware of the correct HS code(s) for your product(s), you can contact your importer, or they can be looked up using [Canada Post's online tool](#).

SECTION 4: SELLING TO UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

4.1 – ROUTES TO MARKET

Determining the most appropriate route for market entry requires thoughtful consideration of the intended scope of investment, the nature of business activities, available in-house resources and product type among other things. Given these factors, companies should be aware of the advantages and drawbacks of each route to market.

Regardless of the approach it is important to undertake due diligence prior to establishing a contractual relationship with any company in the UAE (see [Section 4.3: Due Diligence](#)).

4.1.1 Indirect exporting

- **Generally, exporters engage a commercial agent, who will likely perform the role of an agent or distributor – in the UAE both terms carry the same meaning.**
 - Make sure that the agent you partner with is licensed in each emirate it operates in and is registered federally with the Ministry of Economy and Commerce.
 - UAE legislation protects agents. As such, any contract should be in writing and should be clearly agreed upon by both sides.
 - Tasks and geographic territory to be covered should be explicitly detailed.
 - Know that automatic exclusivity is granted to the agent in the area covered by the agreement.
- **Entering the market with a local intermediary typically reduces time and costs, while also offering access to local knowledge and qualified staff.**
 - Additionally, agents help ensure regulatory compliance, handle customs documentation and other logistical affairs.
 - If you choose this route to market be sure to select an intermediary who has specific knowledge of the UAE agrifood market and import criteria.
 - Sourcing the right agent requires time, money and effort but it is worth the investment.
 - You may wish to partner with different agents in each emirate.

4.1.2 Direct exporting

- **You can also sell your product directly to the UAE market.**
 - With direct exports, you handle all the logistics of marketing, selling, customs and labelling yourself but typically yield higher returns.
 - While this route is increasingly possible thanks to advancements in e-commerce, many medium and small retailers and hotels still prefer to purchase from local importers. Direct imports are mostly reserved for large multinational organisations.
 - If this route is the best fit for your company, you must be able to consistently provide stock, quality, technical support and customer service.
- **If selling direct is a viable option for you, knowledge of the UAE's retail landscape is crucial.**
 - The market is characterised by a high number of players.
 - The top five retailers by sales are: LuLu group, Carrefour, Spinneys, Choithrams and Al Maya. Collectively, they account for about 15% of the total market share.

- Modern retailers, such as super and hypermarkets and convenience stores, are more prevalent than traditional grocers due to greater product variety, larger shopping areas and accessible locations.
- More recently, there has been a shift to smaller sized stores as the cost of land rises.
- Food products into the UAE are increasingly imported by retailers, representing potential opportunities for BC exporters.

4.1.3 E-commerce

- **The UAE has one of the highest internet usages in the world but the development of e-grocery services and subsequent uptake has been slow. Less than 1% of grocery sales are achieved online.**
 - Safety and security concerns of e-commerce platforms and delivery have been cited as barriers to its development.
 - Other obstacles include a preference for paying via cash on delivery and a lack of visibility of the final product to be delivered.
 - The top five retailers have not been highly active in this space, potentially allowing smaller entities to launch and gain a foothold in the market if they can find innovative ways to address the barriers to e-commerce uptake. In order to succeed online, retailers will have to prioritise building a secure and safe platform as well as producing and circulating educational advertising campaigns to overturn existing concerns.
 - A sample of local online grocers includes Choithrams, GroceryOnline.ae, SuperMart, Trolley.ae, Souq Planet and Géant online.
- **To begin your e-commerce strategy, you need to set up a website that clearly states your products and services offerings and how buyers can contact you.**
 - Ideally this is not simply a translation of your existing website but rather a build that is specific for the UAE market.
- **Be mindful not to undercut your in-market partners if you begin to sell online as a secondary route.**
 - Due to reduced costs, you will be able to afford lower prices when selling online. However, your price will be visible for anyone to see. You should consider this and be sure to account for it when designing your pricing strategy.

4.2 – DEVELOPING IMPORTER AND CONSUMER DEMAND

To help you sell into the UAE market, you will need to have some form of presence that enables you to attract buyers to your product or service offering. You can begin by participating in trade shows or you can establish your presence on the Internet using e-commerce as mentioned above and social media which is discussed below. Many exporters commonly start by employing both methods.

4.2.1 Food exhibition shows

Trade shows are a popular marketing component of business as they allow companies to: conduct market intelligence and research before you begin exporting; introduce your company and promote its products; show your sales prospects how they can benefit from your product or service; initiate relationships with potential customers or intermediaries; maintain relationships and contacts you already have; and demonstrate your long-term commitment to the market. Many businesses recognize

these advantages and incorporate trade show exhibitions as an important part of their company's export strategy.

Trade shows, however, can be costly investments, so you want to make sure that your approach to food exhibitions is designed to give you the best possible chance at turning interest developed at the show into actual business. Many businesses end up being disappointed that the large number of conversations and apparent interest at shows do not translate to real sales.

➤ **Preparing for the show.**

- The first step to trade show success is to find the most suitable exhibition in your target market. Understand your options, you may choose to simply attend to gather contacts and market intelligence if you have insufficient resources to host an exhibit.
- Acquire pre-show training. The effort and time dedicated to pre-show preparation may impact your success during and post-show. Pre-show training sessions are often offered on-site prior to the show and during the show.
- It is a good idea to book appointments with prospective buyers ahead of time and to inform current clients that you will be at the show.
- You will need to develop professional displays and promotional materials and should strongly consider bringing product samples to distribute. Begin trade show material development early. Incorporate potential delays and complications into your timeline.
- Determine customs and import regulations that pertain to your sample products.
- If the purpose of your trade show attendance is to begin selling be sure to have determined your price and sufficient stock to sell at the show and afterward.

➤ **Differentiate your products and brand from other exhibitors.**

- Where possible, consider a larger booth to create a bigger impact.
- Joining a delegation of Canadian firms to be part of a large presence will help your business to effectively trade on the Canadian brand. Joining an [AAFC Canada Pavilion](#) is a great approach to attending trade shows, especially for new or smaller exporters.

➤ **Develop a strategy for generating leads and converting inquiries into meetings and business.**

- Participating in trade shows can be relatively costly, so it is important to understand the show and the audience you will be interacting with and to be sure that your approach is designed to give you best possible chance at turning interest developed at the show into actual business.
- Your exhibit should target specific prospects that are interested in the products you are selling.
- The longer perspective leads are left unattended, the less likely they are to evolve into business opportunities. Do not rush to be on the first plane out as the event ends. Making yourself available for meetings with potential buyers the week after a show is a good strategy.

➤ **The UAE has a wide and changing calendar of shows and exhibitions.**

- [Gulfood Show](#): considered the world's largest annual food trade show, based in Dubai.
- [SIAL Middle East](#): food, beverage and hospitality exhibition, based in Abu Dhabi.
- [Seafex](#): the only major seafood event based in the Middle East/North Africa region.
- [Snacks and Sweets Middle East](#): the only confectionary trade show in the Middle East.
- [Gulfood Manufacturing](#): food and beverage production industry show.
- A complementary strategy is to attend the largest trade shows for your sector in Canada or other countries as these shows will likely have at least some UAE buyers present.

- Finally, Dubai will host Expo 2020. While it is not an agrifood exhibition, it may present networking opportunities or the potential to showcase your product. At a minimum, be aware that the UAE and Dubai will host this prestigious world event. As you explore the market, you may hear it referenced so being able to discuss it, even briefly, will help demonstrate your serious intent in the UAE market.

4.2.2 Websites and social media

You can use your website and social media to boost consumer demand by providing real-time client interaction and tailored content for your target audience.

- **Social media can be an effective method of building a network.**
 - Almost all residents of the UAE are connected to the internet.
 - Approximately three-quarters of the population have smartphones and social media use is very common. The most popular platforms include WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube; SnapChat and LinkedIn are far less subscribed than in Canada.
 - However, know that direct marketing by exporters to the local population is not typical. Instead, your efforts may be best served by liaising with your chosen agent to who already has a market presence.
- **When you are entering a new market, it is essential to update your website.**
 - A good website will act as your corporate brochure and prospects will usually go straight to it.
 - It's a good idea to have information customised to the local market. Consider setting up a local .ae domain.
 - Check out your competitor's approach to online content and how they articulate their unique selling proposition (USP).
 - Use customer endorsements where possible and photographs to show your products in use.
 - Ensure your site is equipped to accept different payment forms, bearing in mind that if consumers don't see the instrument they prefer to use, they may exit the sale.
 - Maintaining an up-to-date website allows you to make contact with potential customers, reach UAE customers cost-effectively and introduce, promote and demonstrate new products.
 - Pay close attention to the design and quality of your website.

4.2.3 Utilizing in-market resources to find buyers

- Connect with industry associations and other professional bodies in the UAE.
- Engage [B.C. Trade and Investment Representatives](#) and [Canadian Trade Commissioners](#) with connections and on-the-ground expertise.

4.3 – DUE DILIGENCE

Take reasonable precautions when conducting business in the UAE. You should conduct due diligence checks once you have chosen your method of entry into the market and have begun negotiations with potential importers and buyers. Doing so will help ensure that any potential partner has the specific permits, facilities, resources, capital, and other requirements necessary to meet their responsibilities.

- **Ask questions and avoid doing business with companies or agents that cannot provide you with necessary details.**

- You might consider asking to see a notarized and translated copy of their business licence to determine information such as the establishment date, registered capital, name of legal representative, business scope, etc.
 - You could ask for a description of the scale of the company, including audited or unaudited financial statements or records for the past few years.
 - You could ask for a list of their major customers including references.
- **Independently verify the information you have received.**
- Use external data from government agencies, other authorized bodies and local experts to verify information provided by your potential partner.
 - Use the internet to conduct additional research. There may be comments, positive or negative, about the company or individual you are investigating online.
 - The [Trade Commissioner Service](#) can assist with some basic due diligence.
- **Your own preparedness is also integral to successful due diligence.**
- Ensure you allow sufficient time to conduct your verification and due diligence.
 - Ensure that you have conducted the necessary market research.
 - Remain especially vigilant immediately after trade shows and similar events where your company details and contact information may have been widely displayed and or distributed.
 - Be sure to examine and trace the email address of any email that appears suspect. Avoid clicking on any links within unsolicited email.
 - One proven method of testing legitimacy and protecting your company is to request payment up front. If your buyer is truly interested this request will not be problematic as it is standard in many industries. You could also require a letter of credit.
 - Remember, common sense is your best defense. If the order appears “too good to be true” it probably is.
- **Transparency is an on-going process.**
- Rules and regulations, business environments and business partners are constantly changing. As such, due diligence is not a once off, standalone task. It is necessary throughout the exporting process but it particularly important in the initial and building relationship phase.

SECTION 5: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS IN THE UAE

5.1 – INITIATING RELATIONSHIPS

- **Business people in the UAE prefer to do business with people they know.**
 - As such, it can be beneficial to have a mutual contact to provide initial introductions.
 - If you lack a third-party introduction, engage an intermediary or a 'contact-sponsor'.
 - Alternatively, networking events and trade shows can lead to initial meetings.
 - You are unlikely to get far with e-introductions.
 - Finally, many businesspeople hold a weekly "majlis", which serve as open networking and meeting opportunities.
- **Once you secure an introduction, you must invest time in developing a personal relationship with your counterpart.**
 - If you don't prioritise this, your partners are unlikely to trust you and do business with you.
 - Therefore, you should get to know your partner on a personal level.
 - As this may take several meetings you ought to account for it in your business timeline.
 - Avoid rushing this stage as it may hinder the ultimate outcome. Patience is vital.
 - To aid the development of such relationships you should prioritise face-to-face meetings. It is unusual for any deals to be negotiated by phone or email.
 - Once you have established a good relationship, avoid losing contact even if business slows down.

5.2 – LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

- **Arabic is the official language; however, English is recognised as the language of business.**
 - As such, you will rarely be expected to converse in Arabic. However, integrating even a few pleasantries will be well received and will go a long way to indicating your intent in the market.
 - Depending on your counterpart, some documents may be written in Arabic. Where possible, ask your partner ahead of time if a translator will be necessary.
 - Some public sector organisations may prefer to interact in Arabic.
- **Indirect communication is preferred.**
 - As such, you may find yourself having to 'read between the lines'.
 - You will be expected to converse at length. Avoid being quiet as this could be taken as a sign that something is wrong. Speaking clearly symbolizes integrity.
 - Pay attention to the tone and delivery of a statement as it can often be as important as the content.
 - Avoid confrontation and criticism at all costs.
 - "Yes" usually means "possibly" or that your counterpart has simply understood what you have said as opposed to agreeing with you.
 - Emails ought to be concise with a clearly descriptive subject line.
- **Body language is an important aspect of communication.**
 - Emiratis tend to favour direct eye contact but avoid staring.
 - Pointing and the 'thumbs up' sign are considered rude. However, hand gestures and using emotion to portray a point is common.

- Always give, pass, and receive objects (including food) with your right hand.
- Cross your legs at the ankle and avoid showing the sole of your foot.
- You may observe frequent touching between men. This conduct does not extend to male-female interactions in public.
- The zone of personal space is smaller in the UAE than is typical in Canada. You may find that counterparts stand and sit very close to you.

➤ **Small talk is common and expected.**

- Conversations should be polite and you should recognise the importance of small talk in creating successful relationships.
- The topic of family is suitable for small talk. However, avoid asking specifically about the female family members of male Emiratis.
- Sports are also an appropriate topic but avoid religion and politics, especially concerning the topic of Israel.
- Avoid expressing extreme views or criticizing Islam as it is illegal to do so.

➤ **Be deliberate in your speech and body language if speaking through an interpreter.**

- During a meeting, interpreters will normally sit behind you. It is important that you always look at the person you are addressing, not the interpreter, and remain patient.
- Speak relatively slowly, avoiding jargon and long difficult sentences. If necessary, write down things like large numbers to ensure certain understanding.
- Do not stop in mid-sentence or interrupt the interpreter.

5.3 – SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETIQUETTE

Islam is the official religion of the UAE and influences many aspects of public life. Islamic customs their effects on business interactions must be respected.

➤ **The normal working week is Sunday to Thursday.**

- The official weekend is Friday and Saturday. Friday is reserved for praying.
- Government offices typically open Sunday to Thursday from 7:30 am until 2:30 pm.
- Private offices tend to open longer, employing either “straight shift” or “split shift.” As the name suggests, straight shift work typically involves eight consecutive hours of work beginning before 9:00 am and with a short break for lunch. Split shift starts around 9:00 am too but ends between 8:00 - 9:00 pm, with a 3-4 hour break in the middle of the day.

➤ **Visits during the month of Ramadan are not advised. If you must travel during Ramadan note the following:**

- The exact dates of Ramadan change every year.
- Greet those observing Ramadan with ‘Ramadan Kareem’.
- Working hours are shorter by at least two hours, with most business conducted in the early morning or after sunset.
- If you are in the UAE during Ramadan, you will also be publically expected to follow the strict fasting which starts at dawn and ends at sunset. Avoid eating in front of your counterparts but know that many international hotels will have specific areas for non-Muslims to dine during day light hours.

- **Punctuality is expected but don't be surprised if it isn't reciprocated.**
 - If your partner is late, wait at least 20 minutes before calling.
 - Meetings can start late, can run over time or be cancelled with little notice, so it is best to anticipate this and allocate additional time when booking meetings.
 - If you expect to be late make sure to call ahead and inform your counterparts.
- **Greet each person you are meeting individually.**
 - Greet the highest-ranking person or eldest person first. Then, the rest of the group in a counter-clockwise direction.
 - A long but steady handshake is common. Men and women are unlikely to shake hands with each other, so you should wait for a hand to be offered to you if you are unsure.
- **Despite the desert heat, modest and conservative attire is the standard for business.**
 - Make sure your arms, legs and shoulders are covered and avoid open-toed sandals.
 - For men, a suit and tie are acceptable. Darker colours are optimal.
 - Women should wear either a suit or a skirt with the hem below the knee. Avoid expensive accessories.
 - Avoid traditional clothing as it may be viewed as offensive. Women only need to wear a hijab or a headscarf when visiting a religious site such as a mosque.

5.4 – TYPICAL MEETING PROTOCOL

- **Prior to the meeting**
 - Appointments are necessary and should be made a month or two in advance. You should confirm the appointment a day or two beforehand. Note that it is not unusual to wait until the last minute for confirmation. Send relevant information in advance.
 - Morning meetings are preferred. The location for a meeting can be the office, a restaurant or even cafés.
 - Avoid scheduling meetings during prayer times, on Fridays, during Ramadan or in July or August.
 - Know that initial business meetings are a way to build relations with your prospective partners.
- **During the meeting**
 - At the beginning of the meeting, it is common to exchange business cards. Present the card with the right hand. It is a good idea to have the card in both English and Arabic. Wait to be seated as seating is typically arranged by rank.
 - Accept any offers of coffee, tea or appetizers. Note that Arabic coffee may be considerably stronger than what you are used to. Avoid drinking more coffee or tea than your host.
 - Be sure to devote ample time to small talk before diving into business. Your partner will be keen to get to know you, so you should not overlook an opportunity to engage on non-business matters.
 - Wait for your host to segue into business discussions. The most senior person in the room will usually introduce and lead the formal discussions. If there is a formal agenda, it won't necessarily be strictly followed.
 - Meetings may seem a little chaotic as interruptions are common. Don't be offended if your partner is on their phone during the meeting or makes and receives calls. This is not unusual in the UAE. However, you should avoid interrupting.
 - Discussions should calm and polite.

- Deadlines are largely met but less emphasis is placed on them as Emiratis are predominately concerned with getting to know you as a person and will, therefore, push back a timeline if necessary.

5.5 – DECISION MAKING AND NEGOTIATIONS

- **Decision-making can be slow as decisions are usually made by one individual at the top of the hierarchy.**
 - This means it is important to identify key decision makers and engage with them.
 - Similarly, bear in mind that the person with whom you are originally meeting with may not be the final decision-maker.
 - Know that the person at a meeting who asks the most questions is not necessarily the decision maker. Senior individuals or the decision maker are more likely to be silent observers.
- **You will likely deal with expert negotiators.**
 - Expect tough discussions.
 - Your approach ought to be clear, reliable and convincing. Defend your position calmly but avoid boasting about your credentials.
 - Negotiations can often be slow, so it is important to remain patient. Approach disagreements in a non-confrontational manner.
 - Flexibility is paramount. You may be expected to make concessions from the start.
 - Avoid high-pressure tactics but expect to haggle. Do not push your counterparts for a decision. This may impede any eventual deal.
 - A verbal commitment is considered binding. Be sure to also get it in writing and consider consulting a lawyer before signing.

5.6 – SOCIAL ENGAGEMENTS

Hospitality is a way of life with business frequently conducted over meals. Be sure to accept any invitation graciously and use such opportunities to nurture your relationship.

- **If you are dining with your local counterparts, remember the following points:**
 - Follow the lead of your host, particularly in terms of seating arrangements and when to begin eating.
 - Do not ask for pork, pork products or alcohol, particularly if it has not been served. Similarly, do not serve pork or alcohol if you are hosting.
 - Eat with your right hand only.
 - As in Canada, you will raise a glass and say "Cheers" to toast.
 - If you are uncertain about ordering, order simple food or let the host decide. Avoid expensive items.
 - Food is typically served in the middle of the floor or table with everyone helping themselves.
 - Be aware that some locals won't eat with people of the opposite sex.
 - Place your napkin to the left of the plate and leave your utensils facing upward in the middle of your plate once you have finished.
 - The person who extended the invitation usually pays the bill.
- **Entertaining at home is unusual. However, if you are invited into your counterparts' home, bear the following in mind:**

- Be sure to remove your shoes.
- Arabic coffee will usually be served on arrival as you are unlikely to eat immediately.
- Be prepared to sit on cushions on the floor.
- If cutlery is not provided with the meal it means that bread is used to serve and eat food.
- Compliment the food and the house in general but avoid complimenting individual objects.
- Coffee and fruit may be served before departure. Don't linger too long after the meal.

➤ **Gifts are not mandatory, but they are appreciated.**

- A good time to present a gift is either at the first meeting or when a deal is signed.
- If you are offered a gift, be sure to accept it with your right hand and only open it in private, not in front of the giver as this is considered rude.
- Acceptable gifts include books, a company memento or something related to your host's background or hobbies.
- Avoid perfumes on alcohol base, articles made from pork leather, objects representing dogs, knives or gold jewellery.

5.7 – MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

It is important to maintain the relationship as your counterpart will most definitely take a long-term view of business relationships. You should invest time and energy into nurturing the relationship by continuing to engage with your contacts. Avoid the temptation to focus on other activities and other deals once a contract is signed. You can demonstrate your long-term intent by some of the following examples:

➤ **Commit to regular contact.**

- An ongoing exchange of information helps each party understand the other, so they can build on their mutual interests. Even if there is nothing in particular to discuss continue to communicate frequently with your partners. Relationships maintained in this way tend to have fewer problems and raise fewer complaints.

➤ **Continue to make visits to the UAE.**

- Given the local preference for face-to-face business visits to the UAE will remain a regular feature of your export venture even after the relationship has been established. These trips help maintain your already established relationship. You should also try to bring the same team with you on each visit, so your buyers will be dealing with people they've already gotten to know.

➤ **Consider hosting your partners through reciprocal visits.**

- You may also like to consider reciprocal visits. Paying for your partners in the UAE to visit your Canadian operations is a good way of keeping them informed and motivated. About half of the trip should be devoted to rest and relaxation, leaving time for building the relationship and an affinity for Canada and Canadian products. When hosting UAE guests, remember the effort they put into hosting and looking after you in the UAE and reciprocate this.

➤ **Always keep your word.**

- You need to make sure that you always fulfill your promises. If you don't, your relationships will suffer as people lose trust in you.

SECTION 6: EXPORT SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

6.1 – B.C. TRADE AND INVESTMENT REPRESENTATIVES AND CANADIAN TRADE COMMISSIONERS

Both the Canadian and British Columbian governments support export market development by locating staff in priority markets in order to provide current and on-the-ground advice and guidance to B.C. companies. Making use of these individuals is highly recommended, particularly if you have limited on-the-ground experience in the UAE market.

B.C. Trade and Investment Representatives

- **B.C. Trade & Investment Representatives can assist current and potential B.C. exporters with a variety of services, including:**
 - Generating market intelligence and trade leads for specific B.C. products;
 - Advising on market entry and development strategies;
 - Providing contacts to an extensive network of international industry, government and community influencers and partners;
 - Supporting B.C. exporter participation in trade missions, tradeshow and related events; and,
 - Providing training to introduce B.C. exporters to world markets.

Canadian Trade Commissioner Service

The Canadian Trade Commissioner Service, with on-the-ground-intelligence and practical advice on foreign markets, helps Canadian companies make better, more timely and cost-effective decisions in order to achieve their goals abroad. As part of Canada's embassies and consulates, Trade Commissioners have privileged access to foreign governments, key business leaders and decision-makers. They have offices in Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

- **Whether doing business abroad for the first time, or looking to expand into new markets, Trade Commissioners can work with you to:**
 - Determine if you are internationally competitive; decide on a target market; collect market and industry information and improve your international business strategy;
 - Determine the level of opportunity that exists in a particular market, advise on appropriate approaches to the market and gauge the amount of effort and resources required;
 - Connect with industry associations, potential buyers and partners, professionals in financial and legal institutions, agents and other business representatives to support the execution of your export strategy; and,
 - Assist with due diligence by conducting basic preliminary research on a local company from public sources, and the resolution of business problems and issues that you face in foreign markets.

Please note that conducting thorough background checks on local companies or providing translation or interpretation services is not part of the mandate of either the [B.C. Trade and Investment Representatives](#) or the [Canadian Trade Commissioners](#). These services should be acquired directly by private sector service providers operating in foreign markets.

6.2 – LOAN AND COST SHARING PROGRAMS AND PROMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Provincial and federal governments (and other agencies) offer several programs and engage in promotional activities aimed at supporting and developing exporters.

➤ **BC Ministry of Agriculture – Market Development**

- The Ministry offers the BC Agrifood and Seafood Market Development Program aimed at further enabling B.C.'s agriculture, food and seafood sectors to increase export sales. This includes support for marketing skills training, market research and strategic planning, as well as participation in international market development activities.

➤ **Canada Pavilion Program**

- The AAFC Canada Pavilion Program, a key component of markets and trade development, is aimed at making trade show participation easier at the world's premier food and beverage events 'where the world shops'. Trade shows continue to be integral in taking advantage of opportunities arising from market access gains.

➤ **Canada Brand**

- Agriculture and Agri-food Canada has developed a suite of free tools to help Canadian Agri-food and seafood companies gain a marketing advantage by linking Canada's positive image to their products. These include Canada Brand graphics and a photo library of high-quality images for use in marketing and promotional materials.

➤ **Export Guarantee Program**

- Export Development Canada (EDC) will provide a risk-sharing guarantee on behalf of program participants to their financial institutions in order to provide firms with access to increased working capital and term financing.

➤ **Xpansion Loan Program**

- A loan program offered by the Business Development Bank of Canada aimed at companies wishing to expand their market, including export markets. Eligible activities include launching new marketing campaigns, developing new products, obtaining a certification, expanding foreign or domestic markets, and others.

SECTION 7: APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – KEY CONTACT INFORMATION

BC Trade and Investment Representatives – Vancouver

Website: <https://www.britishcolumbia.ca/global/trade-and-investment-representatives/vancouver/>

Canadian Trade Commissioner Service

Website: <http://tradecommissioner.gc.ca/united-arab-emirates-emirats-arabes-unis/index.aspx?lang=eng>

Dubai Office

19th Floor, Emirates Towers
Sheik Zayed Road
Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Tel: +(011-971) 4 404 8444

Abu Dhabi Office

Abu Dhabi Mall, 2nd Street
9th Floor, West Trade Tower
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
Tel: +971 (0) 2 6940 300

Key UAE Government Agencies

Federal Customs Authority

Ministry of Finance Building , 2nd Floor,
Fatima Bint Mubarak Street - Abu
Dhabi - United Arab Emirates
Tel: +971 (2) 6979 700
www.fca.gov.ae/en/Home/Pages/default.aspx

Food Safety Department – Dubai Municipality

Food Safety Department
Dubai Municipality Karama Centre,
Kuwait St, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Tel: +971 4 337 4800
www.dm.gov.ae/en/Business/FoodSafetyDepartment/Pages/default.aspx

Abu Dhabi Food Control Authority

Mohamed bin Zayed City opposite
Mezyed Mall; P.O Box 52150, Abu
Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
Tel: +971 2 588 7777
www.adfca.ae/english/Pages/default.aspx

APPENDIX 2 – KEY PHRASES IN ARABIC

English	Arabic Pronunciation
Hello	<i>marhaba</i>
Good morning	<i>sabaah il- khair</i>
Good evening	<i>masa il-khair</i>
Good night	<i>tisbih ala khair</i>
Goodbye	<i>ma-a is-salaama</i>
Pleased to meet you	<i>fursa saaiyda</i>
How are you?	<i>kayf haalak? (male); kayf haalik? (female)</i>
Fine, thanks. And you?	<i>bi-khair, shukran, wa-anta?</i>
I understand	<i>fahamt</i>
I don't understand	<i>Laa afham</i>
Could you repeat that, please?	<i>aiyd laww samaht</i>
Please speak more slowly	<i>laww samaht tahadith ala mahil</i>
Do you speak English?	<i>hal tatakallam al ingliziyya?</i>
I don't speak Arabic	<i>ana laa atahadith al-arabiya</i>
Pardon?	<i>afwan?</i>
Excuse me	<i>laww samaht</i>
How much does it cost?	<i>Kam et-taklefa?</i>
I'm sorry	<i>ana aasiff</i>
Please	<i>min faddlak</i>
Thank you	<i>shukran</i>
You're welcome	<i>marhaba</i>
What's your name?	<i>maa ismak?</i>
My name is....	<i>ismii..</i>
Where from?	<i>min ayn?</i>
Yes	<i>na-am</i>
No	<i>laa</i>
Where is the bathroom?	<i>ayn il-hammaam?</i>
Can you help me?	<i>mumkin tasaaidniy?</i>
I'm lost	<i>ana dhaaye-a</i>