



# MARKET GUIDE FOR B.C. AGRIFOOD AND SEAFOOD EXPORTERS

## THAILAND



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## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

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

<b>Introduction to the Thailand market</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Among Southeast Asian national economies, Thailand is second in size only to Indonesia.</li><li>• Thailand is one of the world's leading agricultural suppliers; leading exports include frozen shrimp, canned tuna, canned pineapple, cooked poultry, cassava, sugar and rice. Leading exports from BC to Thailand in 2017 included cherries, food preparations for manufacturing and natural health products, pink salmon, shrimp, prawns, and beef products.</li><li>• Thai consumers have a growing interest in imported foods and western products. Meanwhile, supermarkets are displacing traditional wet markets and improving distribution and market access for importers.</li></ul>
<b>Market Readiness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Market readiness means you have taken the steps to ensure that the product(s) you want to export to Thailand are fully compliant with Thai laws and import/export regulations.</li><li>• The <a href="#">Ministry of Public Health's Food and Drug Administration (FDA)</a> and the <a href="#">Thai Customs Department</a> are the key government agencies involved in regulating and permitting agrifood and seafood imports.</li><li>• Requirements can vary considerably depending on your product. It is absolutely necessary to verify all requirements with your Thai customer(s) before any goods are shipped, as well as with the <a href="#">Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA)</a> and <a href="#">Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA)</a>.</li></ul>
<b>Selling to Thailand</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Partnering with a local agent or distributor is an effective way to enter the Thai market because it reduces time and gains access to local knowledge and qualified staff.</li><li>• Some exporters will be prepared to undertake the additional work required to sell directly to customers such as convenience or retail grocery chains.</li><li>• Attending food exhibition shows such as <a href="#">Food and Hotel Thailand</a> or <a href="#">Food Pack Asia</a> is a potentially useful way to conduct market research, initiate and maintain relationships and even achieve sales.</li><li>• Developing online content, visiting the country and utilizing in-market resources can also assist companies to generate consumer and importer demand.</li><li>• Corruption is uncommon but standard due diligence should be executed prior to signing contracts and establishing formal relationships.</li></ul>
<b>Building Relationships in Thailand</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• While you may be successful in contacting companies directly, personal introductions can increase your reputation as Thai's prefer to do business with those they know and respect.</li><li>• Business ventures can often fail because exporters fail to grasp the importance of personal relationships and underestimate the time it takes to solidify relations.</li><li>• Thai is the official language. Chinese, Lao, Malay and Mon-Khmer are also spoken by some communities.</li><li>• Thai communication is polite and often indirect. Emotional restraint is held in high esteem and body language is an important component of non-verbal communication among Thai people.</li></ul>
<b>Export Support and Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Canadian Trade Commissioners</a> and <a href="#">BC Trade and Investment Representatives</a> have representatives based in Thailand and Southeast Asia to assist B.C. exporters.</li><li>• Exporters should make themselves aware of cost-sharing programs and promotional support provided by provincial and federal agencies and organizations.</li></ul>

## SECTION 2: INTRODUCTION TO THE THAILAND MARKET

### 2.1 – THAILAND’S ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

Thailand has one of the largest economies among Southeast Asian countries, second only to Indonesia. With just over half of the land mass of British Columbia the country is home to approximately 68 million people. The population is broadly distributed; the capital city, Bangkok, is home to around 5 million people, but no other city has more than 300,000 residents. Adequate distribution channels do exist, but B.C. exporters of agrifood and seafood products can reasonably expect to sell into Bangkok and to have goods distributed onwards from there using domestic channels. Consistent economic growth has occurred over past years and the country was ranked 26<sup>th</sup> in the latest World Bank [Ease of Doing Business Index](#) making Thailand a market an attractive market for many global agrifood and seafood suppliers.

### 2.2 – THAILAND’S AGRIFOOD AND SEAFOOD SECTOR

Thailand’s agrifood and seafood sector is substantial in terms of domestic production and international export. Nearly 50% of the labour force is employed in agriculture accounting for nearly one-quarter of Thailand’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The favourable climate, arable land and extensive food processing industry has positioned Thailand as one of the world’s leading agricultural suppliers; in fact, Thailand is the world’s largest exporter of natural rubber, frozen shrimp, canned tuna, canned pineapples, cooked poultry and cassava.

### 2.3 – THAILAND’S AGRIFOOD AND SEAFOOD IMPORTS

The value of agrifood and seafood imported by Thailand increased 45% between 2014 and 2017. In 2017, Canada was the 26<sup>th</sup> largest supplier of agrifood and seafood to Thailand, with exports totalling approximately \$156 million. Contrary to the large increases in export values achieved by Vietnam (73%), India (57%), China (45%) and Indonesia (45%), Canadian exports to Thailand grew by just 1% between 2014 and 2017, causing Canadian market share to fall by 22%.

*Table: Value of Agrifood and Seafood Exports to Thailand, Top 10 Supplying Countries 2014-17*

Country	Value of Exports (\$ Millions)			Market Share		
	2014	2017	%-Change	2014	2017	%-Change
China	1,632	2,364	45%	11%	13%	11%
US	1,863	2,154	16%	13%	12%	-11%
Brazil	1,585	1,986	25%	11%	11%	-4%
Indonesia	678	982	45%	5%	5%	11%
Vietnam	519	901	73%	4%	5%	33%
India	455	717	57%	3%	4%	21%
Australia	698	669	-4%	5%	4%	-27%
Malaysia	485	607	25%	3%	3%	-4%
New Zealand	580	603	4%	4%	3%	-20%
Argentina	641	529	-17%	5%	3%	-37%
Canada (26 <sup>th</sup> )	154	156	1%	1%	1%	-22%

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 Thailand between 2014 and 2017.

*Table: Largest Percentage Increases in Exports,  
by 2-digit HS Code for Top 10 Supplying Countries, 2014-17*

Country	Product (by HS Code), Growth Rate in Value of Exports 2014-17
<b>China</b>	Beverages, spirits and vinegar (545%) Live animals (518%) Coffee, tea, maté and spices (139%)
<b>US</b>	Cocoa and cocoa preparations (199%) Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits; miscellaneous grains, seeds and fruit (77%) Lac; gums, resins and other vegetable saps and extracts (54%)
<b>Brazil</b>	Meat and edible meat offal (314%) Coffee, tea, maté and spices (281%) Sugars and sugar confectionery (212%)
<b>Indonesia</b>	Edible fruit and nuts; peel of citrus fruit or melons (582%) Preparations of vegetables, fruit, nuts or other parts of plants (329%) Cereals (166%)
<b>Vietnam</b>	Tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes (284%) Residues and waste from the food industries; prepared animal fodder (253%) Miscellaneous edible preparations (156%)
<b>India</b>	Cocoa and cocoa preparations (322,625%) Sugars and sugar confectionery (1,231%) Preparations of vegetables, fruit, nuts or other parts of plants (649%)
<b>Australia</b>	Sugars and sugar confectionery (648%) Live animals (243%) Preparations of meat, of fish or of crustaceans, molluscs or other aquatic invertebrates (214%)
<b>Malaysia</b>	Edible fruit and nuts; peel of citrus fruit or melons Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits; miscellaneous grains, seeds and fruit Dairy produce; birds' eggs; natural honey; edible products of animal origin
<b>New Zealand</b>	Products of the milling industry; malt; starches; inulin; wheat gluten (342%) Live animals (321%) Preparations of vegetables, fruit, nuts or other parts of plants (299%)
<b>Argentina</b>	Cereals (43,498%) Products of animal origin, not elsewhere specified or included (29,057%) Meat and edible meat offal (331%)
<b>Canada (26<sup>th</sup>)</b>	Live animals (11,067%) Preparations of meat, of fish or of crustaceans, molluscs or other aquatic invertebrates (3,283%) Live trees and other plants; bulbs, roots and the like; cut flowers and ornamental foliage (788%)

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

Agrifood and seafood exports from BC to Thailand fell by 58% in 2017 compared to 2016, primarily because of a significant decrease in the value of cherries and pink salmon exported.

Table: Top 5 BC Agrifood and Seafood Exports to Thailand, 2015-17

Commodity	Value of Exports (\$ Millions)			2016-2017 %-Change
	2015	2016	2017	
Cherries	2.90	3.60	1.32	-64%
Food Preparations for Manufacturing and Natural Health Products	0.53	0.44	0.33	-24%
Pink Salmon	0.33	1.70	0.31	-82%
Shrimp and Prawns	0.03	-	0.23	na
Beef Products	-	-	0.22	na
<b>Subtotal Top 5</b>	<b>3.79</b>	<b>5.74</b>	<b>2.41</b>	<b>-58%</b>
Rest of Products	2.91	2.56	1.07	-58%
<b>Total BC Agrifood and Seafood Exports to Thailand</b>	<b>6.70</b>	<b>8.30</b>	<b>3.47</b>	<b>-58%</b>

Source: Statistics Canada, CATSNET Analytics. March 2018.

## 2.4 – CULINARY CULTURE, CONSUMER LIFESTYLES AND CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

- **Thailand has a youthful population which is urbanizing quickly, leading to new consumption patterns and household composition.**
  - This has corresponded with an increasing interest in “farang” or western food
  - Urban lifestyles and smaller households have increased the demand for smaller package sizes, convenience foods and ready-to-eat options.
- **The food processing industry in Thailand is well developed which presents opportunities for suppliers of inputs and items that can be value added by the processing industry.**
  - There are an estimated 10,000 food and beverage processing factories in Thailand. Most are SMEs serving the domestic market, but other medium-to-large firms produce products in Thailand for global export.
- **Tourism is a major component of the economy and the restaurant supply and other tourism-supported food and beverage industries present opportunities for agrifood and seafood suppliers.**
  - While Thai food is a draw for many tourists to the country, “expats” often desire foods that remind them of home.
- **The increase in the number of middle class consumers has led to the development of a market for premium food and beverage products.**
  - For this consumer segment, eating imported and premium food products signals modernity and status.
  - Still, Thai people are very proud of and committed to their local and national cuisine.
- **Supermarkets/hypermarkets and conveniences stores are expanding throughout the country.**
  - This is at the expense of traditional wet markets. While wet markets are still very popular, a growing share of agrifood and seafood grocery purchases are made at retail chains and convenience stores.
  - Due to the larger scale, multiple locations and established distribution channels available to retail chains, the shift represents a growing opportunity for international exporters to Thailand.

## 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: [B.C. Trade & Investment Representative](#), [Canadian Trade Commissioners](#), [Agriculture and AgriFood Canada](#), [Small Business B.C.](#), [Global Affairs Canada](#), [The Embassy of Canada to Thailand](#), and chambers of commerce including the [Thai-Canadian Chamber of Commerce \(CanCham\)](#).
- **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 in 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 [National Statistical Office of Thailand](#) produces and makes available Thai 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 Thailand.** 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 Thailand 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 Thailand and allows you to assess the price range and market approach used by potential competitors.



## SECTION 3: MARKET READINESS

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

### 3.1 – THAI AGENCIES INVOLVED IN OVERSEEING IMPORTS

The key Thai government agencies involved in regulating and permitting imports of agrifood and seafood products are:

- **Ministry of Public Health’s Food and Drug Administration (FDA)**
  - The Food and Drug Administration has the authority to implement and administer the Food Act.
  - The FDA’s Food Bureau is responsible for: establishing food standards and manufacturing requirements; issuing licences to Thai food manufacturers; issuing licences to importers of food for sale in Thailand; registration of products deemed to be specifically-controlled; regulating labelling of imported food products.
  - The Thai FDA’s Advertisement Control and Public Relations Division is responsible for approving statements and visual images used in food advertising.
- **Thai Customs Department**
  - The Thai Customs Department is responsible for processing and determining legal entry of agrifood and seafood imports to Thailand.
  - Animal quarantine officers, plant quarantine officers and others are stationed at the port of entry to ensure imported items conform to regulations.
  - For most products and with proper documentation, the entire customs clearance process usually takes 2-3 days.

### 3.2 – REQUIREMENTS, STANDARDS & REGULATIONS

Requirements can vary considerably depending on your product. It is absolutely necessary to verify all requirements with your Thai 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 Thailand:

- **Registration with the Thai FDA**
  - Most agrifood and seafood products must be registered with the Thai FDA prior to import. If you rely on an in-market importer or agent they will assist with this necessary process.
  - Registration requirements will differ based on the type of product being registered, but could include: product registration application form; food import licence; lab analysis reports; analysis of packaging quality; ingredients list and manufacturing flowchart; a unit of product sample (if testing from Thai lab is required).
- **Customs and logistics**
  - The usual documentation procedure is for the in-market importer to collect the required paperwork and submit it to the relevant agencies. 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](#).

➤ **Labelling requirements:**

- Imported agrifood and seafood products must have a Thai label or risk seizure by the Thai FDA. In some instance the Thai FDA will require labels to be submitted for pre-approval prior to shipment.
- In general, food products are required to have labels in the Thai language that includes the name of the product, the main ingredients, name and address of the manufacturer. Most processed foods as well as any food product making a specific nutritional claim require nutritional labelling. Health claims are not allowed on any food products in Thailand, nor is wording or statements that imply or mark a product as a quality product, such as "grade A".

## SECTION 4: SELLING TO THAILAND

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### 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 Thailand (see [Section 4.3: Due Diligence and Avoiding Scams](#)).

#### **4.1.1 Indirect Exporting**

- **Partnering with a local agent or distributor is an effective way to enter the Thai market.**
  - An agent sells a foreign supplier's goods in exchange for commission while a distributor generally purchases goods from the foreign supplier for resale.
  - The specific responsibilities of a third party depend on your agreement but can include market intelligence, identification and pursuit of sales leads, sales promotions and after-sales services among other things.
- **Entering the market with a local intermediary typically reduces time and costs, while also offering access to local knowledge and qualified staff.**
  - Additionally, they 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 Thai agrifood market and import regulations.
  - It is crucial to invest ample time in selecting a qualified local partner.

#### **4.1.2 Direct Exporting**

- **You can also sell your product directly to the Thai 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 Thailand's retail landscape is crucial.**
  - In 2016, the retail sector expanded by 3-5% and is expected to continue to grow.
  - There has been a shift from shopping at wet markets and grocery stores to hypermarkets and supermarkets while convenience stores also rise in popularity.

- Despite the growth of convenience stores, it is the hypermarkets, supermarkets, and cash and carry establishments that offer the most opportunity for foreign exporters. The convenience sector is not considered to be as attractive due to pricing disadvantages.
- The leading retailer is CP All, in terms of both the number of outlets and retail value share.
- Other significant retailers include MaxValu, Gourmet Market, Home Fresh Mart, Tesco Lotus, Villa Market, Tops Marketplace, Foodland Supermarket, Big C Supercenter and the cash and carry retailer Siam Makro.
- It is common for large retailers to have hypermarkets, supermarkets and convenience stores in their portfolio.

#### **4.1.3 E-commerce**

- **E-commerce is expanding quickly in Thailand as a result of increased internet and mobile phone access as well as improved infrastructure and logistic services and e-payment systems.**
  - PromptPay (the national e-payment scheme) is a key growth factor because it provides greater confidence among consumers shopping online.
  - Popular online sites include Amazon, eBay, and Agoda while WeLoveShopping and Pantipmarket, local C2C marketplaces and online communities, prove strong contenders that cater to local tastes.
- **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.**
  - Ensure you have a Thai landing page with customized information.
- **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 Thai 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 converting inquiries into meetings and business after all trade shows are about generating qualified leads.**

- 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 the 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.

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

- [Food and Hotel Thailand](#) (International Food and Drink, Hotel, Restaurant, Bakery and Foodservice Exhibition) is held once a year in Bangkok.
- [Food Pack Asia](#) (features Food Processing & Drink Technologies, Packaging Technology, Confectionery machinery & Bakery Equipment, Hotel & Restaurant Equipment and Food & Beverage) is also held once a year in Bangkok.
- 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 Thai buyers present.

#### **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.**
  - In Thailand more than 80% of digital customers use social platforms to search for products or connections with sellers, 92% used Facebook for product research while 51% of have already made purchases using social media.
  - Out of 51 million internet users in Thailand, 48 million use Facebook, 41 million use LINE, 13 million use Instagram while 9 million use Twitter.
  - The national e-payment system will continue to facilitate the rise of social media purchasing.
- **It seems obvious, but 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 a Thai-language landing page and information customised for a Thai audience. Consider setting up a local .th domain.
  - Keep in mind that it might not be sufficient just to translate your English-language site directly into Thai: it will need to be tailored for the local market.
  - Check out your competitor's approach to online content and how they articulate their 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 Thai 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 Thailand.**
- **Engage [B.C. Trade and Investment Representatives](#) and [Canadian Trade Commissioners](#) with connections and on-the-ground expertise.**

### **4.3 – DUE DILIGENCE**

Thai business people are professional and trustworthy, but corruption still exists. As such, reasonable precautions should be taken when conducting business in Thailand. 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 one off, standalone task. It is necessary throughout the exporting process but it is particularly important in the initial building relationship phase.

## SECTION 5: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS IN THAILAND

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### 5.1 – INITIATING RELATIONSHIPS

- **It can be beneficial to engage a local representative or mutual contact who can make initial introductions.**
  - While you may be successful in contacting companies directly, personal introductions can increase your reputation as Thai's prefer to do business with those they know and respect.
  - A third party introduction can establish trust more quickly resulting in business advancing at a faster pace.
  - Your contact can also help overcome any cultural or communication issues.
  - In the absence of a mutual contact or local representative, participating in trade shows can be an alternative strategy for initiating relations.
- **Meetings, at least initially, are expected to be face-to-face.**
  - Videoconferencing or a one-off visit will not suffice. Your presence will be required as relationship building takes time and is ultimately necessary for success.
  - Business ventures can often fail because exporters fail to grasp the importance of personal relationships and underestimate the time it takes to solidify relations.
  - Many trips to the market may be required before a successful partnership is established.
  - Be sure you are willing and able to commit adequate time to develop relations in Thailand.

Only proceed with business discussions after you are comfortable with your Thai partners.

### 5.2 – LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

- **Thai is the official language.**
  - Other languages you'll hear are Chinese, Lao, Malay and Mon-Khmer.
  - The use of English is concentrated in larger businesses in cities. Fluency is low across most of the population, including many smaller companies and in rural areas.
  - Even if your counterpart does speak some English, they may not understand everything at a business level.
  - As such, you will likely require an interpreter. Although, confirm in advance with your counterpart to avoid insulting them.
  - Be sure to speak slowing and in concise sentences while avoiding jargon. Recap major points with regular breaks to aid comprehension.
- **Communication will be indirect.**
  - Thai's may use vague responses instead of saying something explicitly hurtful. It is beneficial to echo this approach.
  - You will rarely receive a direct yes/no response so avoid asking questions that require such an answer.
  - Use a friendly, quiet, gentle tone when conversing. Raising one's voice is frowned upon.
  - Avoid emotional displays. Emotional restraint is held in high esteem.



- Periods of silence do not necessarily convey a negative message, nor do they need to be filled.
- **Body language is important when the predominant style of communication is indirect.**
  - Maintaining eye contact is important.
  - Avoid elaborate hand gesturing when talking.
  - Never touch or pass anything over anyone's head or point with a single finger or your feet.
  - Only your right hand should be used for passing, eating and touching.
  - Refrain from putting your hands in your pockets or your arm over the back of the chair.
  - A smile may indicate an apology, a thank-you or even a greeting.
  - Avoid crossing your legs if you are with the elderly or monks.
  - At least initially, avoid physical contact (even shaking hands) with the opposite sex.
- **The art of conversation.**
  - Occupation, where one is from, food and international football and tennis are all acceptable icebreakers. Avoid asking about income or questions of personal nature.
  - Criticism of the royal family is against the law. To be safe, avoid this topic altogether.
- **If you do need an interpreter:**
  - Use them regularly and expect to make them part of the team. This means that they will be fully briefed before important meetings or negotiations and should be trained to a high level so that they know your business and product line and will know the right questions to ask.
  - After the meeting, debrief your interpreter on what he or she saw or understood during the meeting. An experienced professional can give you a cultural interpretation.
- **Be deliberate in your speech and body language when speaking through your 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

While mistakes will likely be overlooked, it remains good practice to observe Thai social customs. Doing so will go a long way in demonstrating your intent for doing business in Thailand.

- **Face is an important concept.**
  - Face can be lost, saved or maintained and concerns an individual's or group's reputation.
  - You can give face by increasing another's self-esteem, however, face will be lost if you openly criticize another or raise your voice.
  - A lot of Thai behaviour is dictated by this concept and often Thais will go out of their way to ensure face is maintained.
- **For introductions, men say Sawatdee-krap and women say Sawatdee-kah.**
  - Wait for your host to initiate an introduction.

- Be sure to introduce the most senior people in your team first.
  - Introduce everyone by their first name.
  - 'Khun' (pronounced 'Koon'), which translates as Mrs or Mr, precedes first names.
  - When you first meet your Thai counterparts, be mindful that they may ask a series of personal questions. This helps them determine where you fit within the hierarchy.
- **Greetings are accompanied by the gesture known as a 'wai'.**
- In order to wai, one raises their hands as if in prayer and the head is bowed. The higher the hands are placed and the lower the bow; the more respect is shown.
  - One can wai while sitting, walking, or standing and it can mean "Hello," "Thank you," "I'm sorry," or "Goodbye."
  - You should wait until a wai is initiated. If a wai is not offered, shaking hands with men and smiling and nodding to women is the next best alternative.
- **Business dress is conservative and formal.**
- Dark suits, white shirts and a tie is the typical attire for men. A light suit or jacket adds status.
  - Plain dresses (not sleeveless) or suits are suitable choices for women. Skirts should be below the knee while shoulders should always be covered. Avoid all black as this is worn to funerals.
  - Proper footwear is paramount. Smart shoes and socks without holes are essential.
- **Arrive on time. However, be prepared that your Thai counterparts may not.**
- If you do find yourself running late for meetings be sure to inform your business partner.
  - Leave plenty of time for traffic when departing for your meeting.
  - Schedule meetings after 10 am and before 4 pm.
  - As significant Thai holidays fall in April and early May it is best to avoid business during these months.
- **Note that Thailand uses two main calendar systems.**
- One is based on the Gregorian calendar and the other is a form of the Buddhist calendar.
  - While the Gregorian calendar has come to govern most aspects of life over time, it is still common for the date, particularly the year, to be expressed according to the Buddhist calendar which is 543 years ahead of the Gregorian calendar.
  - The year 2018, for example, is indicated as 2561 BE in Thailand.
  - Be vigilant for this format, particularly when reading and signing documents or during written correspondence with your counterparts.
- **Helpful Hints**
- The utmost respect ought to be shown towards elders as high value is placed on the hierarchy.
  - All images of the royal family and Buddha should also be shown great respect.
  - Do not touch any statue or image of a Buddha or monk and avoid standing above a figure of Buddha or an image of the king.
  - The Thai people are distinct from their Southeast Asian neighbours. Do not assume all customs and norms are the same across neighbouring countries.

## 5.4 – TYPICAL MEETING PROTOCOL

The following points are common characteristics of Thai meetings.

- **Prior to the meeting**
  - Make appointments one month in advance.
  - Face-to-face meetings are expected.
  - Confirm the meeting's details several days before the agreed date.
  - Send an agenda and information regarding your team ahead of time.
  - Appoint senior members to your Thai team.
  - Written material, including business cards, should be provided in both English and Thai.
- **During the meeting**
  - Initial meetings are concerned with building a rapport and are unlikely to yield any decisions.
  - Meetings begin with small talk.
  - Wait to be told where to sit as the hierarchy will dictate the seating arrangement.
  - Throughout the meeting address the most senior person.
  - Periods of silence do not need to be filled. While they may feel awkward to you they are often used to carefully consider the issue at hand.
  - Presentations should be factual and easily understood.
  - Avoid exaggerated claims.
- **Business cards are exchanged regularly and follow a particular ritual.**
  - Business cards are given out after the initial greeting.
  - They should be offered with the right hand, with the Thai side facing the recipient, and received with two hands.
  - Wait for the eldest person to give you their business card first. Then distribute your business card in order of seniority.

Briefly examine the card before placing it on the table or in a business card case.

## 5.5 – DECISION MAKING AND NEGOTIATIONS

- **Decision making can be very slow in Thailand.**
  - Proposals may be discussed at all levels before final decisions are made by senior executives.
  - Therefore, try to identify the key decision makers and arrange meetings with them.
  - Usually, the specific situation will be given more weight than universal principles.
- **When negotiating the importance of emotional restraint cannot be overestimated.**
  - Remain calm and patient throughout and never become angry or upset.
  - You should avoid confrontation and high-pressure sales tactics.
  - Misunderstandings are common. The Thai's may publicly agree with something to simply save face or they may not admit that they do not understand something.
  - To ensure full comprehension on both sides, be sure to ask lots of questions.
  - Highlight the benefits your company can offer throughout the negotiations.

- Information is closely guarded as it can create bargaining advantages.
  - Bargaining is part of the process as prices can move by more than 40%.
  - Be aware that deceptive tactics may be used against you in the course of negotiations. Avoid making a final offer too early.
  - Follow-up promptly in writing after the meeting with any agreement you feel was reached.
- **Oral agreements are legally binding but difficult to enforce.**
- It is therefore recommended to create a formal, written contract.
  - Consult a legal expert before signing. However, do not bring them to the negotiation.
  - Signed contracts may not always be honoured and change depending on circumstances.

## 5.6 – SOCIAL ENGAGEMENTS

Invitations to social activities should always be accepted as these are used as a means of getting to know each other. Business won't always be discussed at social engagements, particularly when the relationship is only forming. Take your cue from your Thai associates.

- **Table manners are very important.**
- Wait to be seated and refrain from eating or drinking until the oldest man has begun.
  - Buffet style is common so don't order one dish for yourself.
  - Chopsticks are not frequently used. If they are provided, use them to eat noodles, otherwise, don't ask for them.
  - Spoons and forks are typical. Hold the spoon in the right hand and the fork in the left with the fork ushering food on to the spoon. Use the side of your spoon first, if you need to cut food.
  - Use the serving spoon provided to take small portions to ensure there's enough to go around.
  - The rice bowl should be held by your mouth, as you take food and sauce from the plate below.
  - Eating slowly is important as the Thais like to spend a lot of time socializing, talking and laughing over meals.
  - Never pour your own drink. Your neighbour is responsible for refilling your glass and you theirs. If it is less than half full, it needs refilling. If your neighbour hasn't noticed yours need refilling, indicate your need by pouring a little more drink into their glass.
  - The honoured guest is expected to make a toast, usually after the host does or at the end.
  - Usually, the one who does the inviting pays the bill, although the guest is expected to try to pay. Be sure to thank the host for the meal.
  - Tipping is not common.
- **If you are invited to a Thai person's home, arrive close to the agreed time.**
- If the host is not wearing shoes, remove yours before entering.
  - Step over the threshold rather than on it.
  - Allow the more senior members of your party to enter rooms ahead of you.
  - In the home, people often sit on the floor. Women typically tuck their legs to the side and behind them and men sit cross-legged.
- **Gift giving is less formal than elsewhere in Asia.**

- Gifts should be given and accepted with both hands while offering a wai.
- Open the gift at a later point, away from the giver unless they open your gift in front of you first.
- Do not buy expensive gifts. It may be misinterpreted as a bribe.
- In the event you are invited to a Thai house bring flowers, cakes, liquors and candy as a gift. However, avoid carnations and marigolds when gifting flowers.
- In business, brandy, liquors, Canadian crafts, books or desk attire are suitable items.
- Gifts should be wrapped attractively. Red and gold are suitable colours while black, green and blue should be avoided.

## 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. Often there is nothing, in particular, to discuss yet your partners will continue to communicate frequently. Relationships maintained in this way tend to have fewer problems and raise fewer complaints.
- **Continue to make visits to Thailand.**
  - Given the Thai preference for face-to-face business visits to Thailand 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 Thailand 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 Thai guests, remember the effort they put into hosting and looking after you in Thailand 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. Honesty and transparency are much sought after when it comes to forming bonds with businesses, so you will become a much more attractive connection if you can nurture these traits through your existing relationships.

## SECTION 6: EXPORT SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

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### 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 Thai market.

#### [B.C. Trade and Investment Representatives](#)

British Columbia's Southeast Asia trade and investment team is based in Manila (the Philippines) and Jakarta (Indonesia).

- **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 are based in Bangkok.

- **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, 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

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### **APPENDIX 1 – KEY CONTACT INFORMATION**

#### **BC Trade and Investment Representatives – South East Asia**

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

Email: [asia.pacific@gov.bc.ca](mailto:asia.pacific@gov.bc.ca)

#### **Canadian Trade Commissioner Service**

Website: [www.tradecommissioner.gc.ca/th](http://www.tradecommissioner.gc.ca/th)

Email: [bngkk-td@international.gc.ca](mailto:bngkk-td@international.gc.ca)

#### *Bangkok Office*

Abdulrahim Place, 15<sup>th</sup> Floor

990 Rama 4 Road

Bangkok, 10500

Thailand

Tel: (011-66-2) 646-4300

#### **Key Thai Government Agencies**

##### *Food and Drug Administration*

Food Bureau

Tivanont Road, Muang

Nonthaburi 11000

Thailand

Tel: (662) 590-7178

Website: <http://www.fda.moph.go.th>

##### *Thai Customs Department*

Import Formalities Division

Customs Department

Klong Toey, Bangkok 10110

Thailand

Tel: (662) 249-4266

Website: <http://en.customs.go.th/>



## APPENDIX 2 – KEY PHRASES IN THAI

English	Thai	Pronunciation
Hello (informal)	สวัสดี	<i>sa-wat-dii</i>
Good Morning	สวัสดีครับ	<i>sà-wàt-dee kráp</i>
Good Evening	สวัสดีครับ	<i>sà-wàt-dee kráp</i>
Good night (to sleep)	ราตรีสวัสดิ์	<i>raa-dtree sà-wàt</i>
Goodbye	ลาก่อน	<i>laa kon</i>
Pleased to meet you	ยินดีที่ได้รู้จัก	<i>yin dee têe dài róa jàk</i>
How are you?	คุณสบายดีไหม/หรือ	<i>sabaai-dii mái/rue?</i>
Fine, and you?	สบายดี แล้วคุณล่ะ[ครับ/ค่ะ]	<i>sabaai-dii láe khun lá, kh ráp/khâ</i>
I understand	เข้าใจแล้ว	<i>káo jai láew</i>
I don't know	ฉันไม่รู้	<i>chăn mâi róa</i>
I don't understand	ไม่เข้าใจ	<i>mâi kháo jai</i>
Could you repeat that, please?	พูดอีกที	<i>phûut iik thii</i>
Please speak more slowly	พูดช้าๆ หน่อย	<i>phûut cháa cháa nòi</i>
Please write it down	เขียนลงบนกระดาษได้ไหม?	<i>khân long bon grà-dàat dài mái?</i>
Do you speak English?	คุณพูดภาษาอังกฤษได้ไหม	<i>khun phuut phaasaa ang-krit dai mai?</i>
What does this mean?	อันนี้แปลว่าอะไร?	<i>an née bplae wâa à-rai?</i>
I don't speak Thai	ฉันพูดไทยไม่เป็น	<i>chăn pôot tai mâi bpen</i>
Excuse me	ขอโทษ	<i>kho thot</i>
How much is this?	ราคาเท่าไหร่	<i>raa-kaa tâo rài?</i>
Cheap	ถูก	<i>thùuk</i>
Expensive	แพง	<i>phaeng</i>
I'm sorry	ขอโทษ	<i>kho thot</i>
Please	ขอ	<i>kho</i>
Thank you	ขอบคุณ[มาก]	<i>khop khun</i>
You're welcome	ไม่เป็นไร	<i>mai pen rai</i>
What's your name?	คุณชื่ออะไร	<i>khun chue arai?</i>
My name is....	ผม/ดิฉันชื่อ	<i>phôm/di-chăn cheu _____</i>
Where are you from?	คุณมาจากไหน	<i>kun maa jàak nãi</i>
Yes	ใช่	<i>chai</i>
No	ไม่ใช่	<i>mai chai</i>
Where are the bathrooms?	ห้องน้ำอยู่ที่ไหน?	<i>hông náam yòo têe nãi?</i>
I'm lost	ผม/ฉัน หลงทาง	<i>phom/chan long thaang</i>