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Report Highlights:

The Republic of Korea (ROK) offers excellent opportunities for U.S. exporters and suppliers of agricultural and food products. The ROK heavily depends on imports, importing over \$45 billion in agricultural and related products in 2024, of which the United States supplies about 21 percent, making it the largest supplier. The United States exported \$8.9 billion worth of agricultural and related products to the ROK in 2024, resulting in the ROK being the fifth-largest country export market for the United States in this category. The ROK's ongoing demographic changes such as a declining birth rate, reduced scales of households, and an ageing population are reshaping the market. Consumers increasingly value convenience, nutrition, value-for-money products, among others. U.S. companies are encouraged to tap into the market by noting these trends and utilizing the country's open trade environment.

MARKET FACT SHEET: REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Executive Summary

The Republic of Korea (ROK) had the 12th largest economy in the world with a GDP of \$1.87 trillion and a per capita GNI of \$36,624 in 2024. It is about the size of Indiana, with a population of 51.8 million. Over 80 percent of Koreans live in urban areas. Domestic production meets only 46 percent of food demand. The United States exported \$8.9 billion in agricultural and related products to the ROK in 2024, making it our fifth largest country export market. The United States supplies around 21 percent of the ROK's agricultural imports.

Consumer-Oriented Agricultural Imports

In 2024, the ROK imported consumer-oriented agricultural products totaling around \$20.6 billion. There are many opportunities for U.S. export growth in this segment, including for beef, pork, fruits, tree nuts, dairy products, confectioneries, beverages, and further prepared foods.

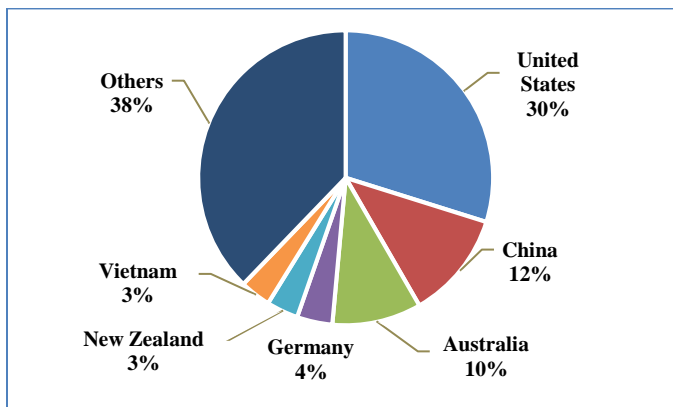


Chart 1: Top Exporting Countries to South Korea

Food Retail Industry

Korean retail food sales totaled \$132 billion in 2024, accounting for 31 percent of total retail sales (excluding automobiles). Among grocery retailers except e-commerce, convenience stores were the leading retail channel, followed by grocery supermarkets, hypermarket discount stores, and warehouse clubs.

Food Processing Industry

In 2023, Korea had over 31,075 food processing companies, which generated \$65.0 billion in sales. Korean food processing companies rely heavily on imported commodities and ingredients. Imports of basic and intermediate agricultural products totaled \$16.9 billion in 2024. Eighteen percent (\$3.2 billion) of these imports came from the United States.

Food Service Industry

The Korean HRI sector reached \$147 billion in 2023 (the latest official data available), an 8.3% increase from the previous year. The industry faced challenges due to economic uncertainties and weakening consumer confidence in 2024. However, industry is expected to see gradual growth as businesses evolve to meet growing consumer demand for convenience and new experiences.

Quick Facts CY 2024

Imports of Consumer-Oriented Products

US \$20.6 billion (\$6.1 billion from the United States)*

* Based on Korean import data

Top 10 Import Growth (%) Products in the ROK, by value (BICO, 2023-2024)

- 1) Fruit & Vegetable Juices (25%)
- 2) Fresh Fruit (21%)
- 3) Chocolate & Cocoa Products (18%)
- 4) Tree Nuts (18%)
- 5) Processed Fruits (17%)
- 6) Spices (12%)
- 7) Condiments & Sauces (12%)
- 8) Bakery Goods, Cereals, & Pasta (10%)
- 9) Dog & Cat Food (10%)
- 10) Fresh Vegetables (9%)

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

Retail Food Industry (2024)	\$132
Food Service-HRI (2023)	\$147
Food Processing (2023)	\$65
Food and Agriculture Exports (2024)	\$12

Top 10 Korean Retailers

Coupang LLC, Shinsegae Co Ltd, Naver Corp, Lotte Group, GS Holdings Corp, SK Telecom Co Ltd, Hyundai Department Store Co Ltd, BGF Retail Co Ltd, Alphabet Inc, Homeplus Co Ltd

GDP/Population (2024)

Population: 51.8 million

GDP: US\$ 1.87 trillion

GDP per capita: US\$ 36,113

Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats

Strengths	Weaknesses
Well established market with modern distribution channels	High logistics cost to ship American products
Consumer income level continues to increase	Complex import regulations including food safety and labeling standards
Opportunities	Threats
Strong consumer demand for value, quality, and variety	Elevated competition from export-oriented competitors
KORUS FTA reduces tariff barriers for American products.	Discrepancies in food safety and labeling regulations

Data and Information Sources: Latest available statistics are used in this publication and will continue to be updated throughout the year as new data is available. Global Agricultural Trade System (GATS), Korea Ministry of Food & Drug Safety, Korea National Statistics Office, CIA Factbook, Int'l Monetary Fund (IMF), Korea Int'l Trade Association, Euromonitor Int'l.

Contact: U.S. Agricultural Trade Office Seoul
(atoseoul@usda.gov)

SECTION I. MARKET OVERVIEW

Key Demographic Trends

As of July 2025, Republic of Korea (hereafter referred to as ROK), which is roughly the size of the state of Indiana in the U.S., has a population of 51.7 million. The median age is 45, and 20 percent of the population is over 64, making the country’s official entry into a super-aged society for the first time.

In 2024, the ROK recorded a birth rate of 0.75, which is the lowest among the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (the average OCED rate was 1.51 in 2022). The government projects that by 2050, over 40 percent of the population will be aged over 64, with the median age rising to 58. The working age population (15-64 years old) is predicted to decline to 51.9 percent from the current 69.5 percent. Such demographic shifts have impacted all aspects of the ROK, and the food and agriculture sectors are no exception.

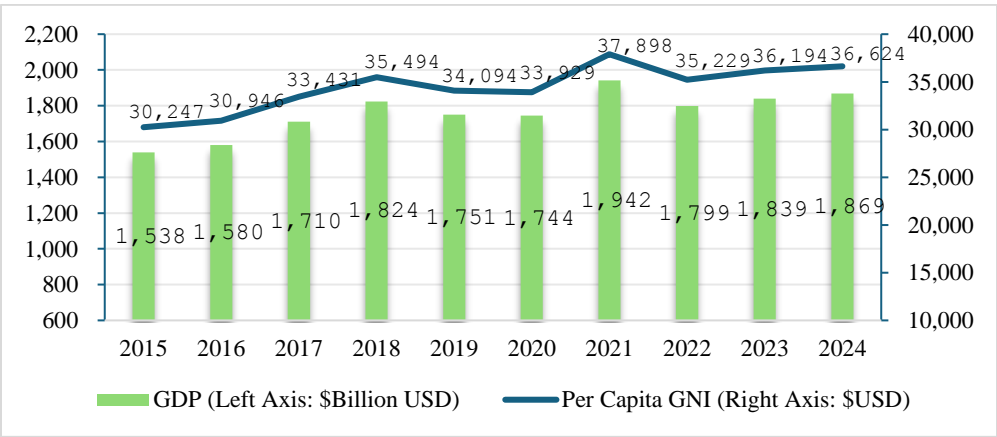
National Economy

The ROK is the world’s 12th largest economy and a global leader in high-tech industries, with an export-driven structure of economy. In 2024, the country’s nominal Gross Domestic Production (GDP) reached \$1.87 trillion, up 1.6 percent¹ from the previous year while per capita GNI increased by 1.2 percent to \$36,624.

Despite the increased figures, overall domestic consumption remained weak in 2024, mainly due to high inflation and high interest rates. In addition to consumer’s weak confidence in economy, demographic factors such as low birthrates and an ageing population appear to have contributed to slow consumption and economic stagnation. On the other hand, 2024 exports remained strong. The ROK exported a record high of \$683.8 billion dollars, mainly led by solid performance in semiconductors, shipbuilding and automobiles, despite relatively weak results in the steel sector.

Historical trends of the ROK’s nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross National Income (GNI) for the past decade are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1_ROK’s Economy Trend



Source: The Bank of Korea (www.ecos.bok.or.kr)

¹ Press release by the Bank of Korea (Based on figures in US\$)

International Agricultural Trade

The ROK heavily relies on imports to meet its agricultural and food demand, despite government's efforts to boost domestic production. According to Agricultural, Forestry and Food Statistics 2024, the ROK's food self-sufficiency rates were 38% based on calories and 58% based on production value in 2022². Over 90 percent of the population lives in urban areas which occupies only 17 percent of the land, with about half the total population living in the greater metropolitan Seoul area.

Although agriculture has traditionally been considered a vital sector with cultural and historical importance and it used to strictly be protected from international trade, there have been changes over time. The country has adopted an open market policy and has opened the market in most sectors including agriculture. As of December 2024, the ROK has 22 Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with 59 countries and continues FTA negotiations with emerging countries. Even with that, the ROK still seeks to protect some sensitive sectors such as rice and fresh produce.

In 2024, the ROK imported about \$45.3 billion agricultural and related products globally and the United States is the largest supplier with a market share of over 21 percent. Other key suppliers included China, Australia, Brazil, Vietnam, and Thailand.

The ROK is the United States' fifth largest agricultural and related products' country export market, and according to the Trade Data Monitor, the total export value reached \$8.9 billion in 2024, up 11 percent from the previous year. The United States is the ROK's largest supplier of agricultural imports with over 21 percent market share. Korean consumers and traders generally recognize the United States as a trusted origin for imported agricultural products with good quality and value. Strong business and social connections between the two countries help boost consumer interest and awareness of new U.S. products and trends. Since 2012, the Korea-United States Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA) has increased export opportunities for U.S. products by reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers.

It normally takes a minimum of two weeks for a container ship from a western U.S. port, and three weeks from an eastern port, to arrive in a port in Korea. Most imported consumer ready products enter through the port of Busan. The port of Incheon, about an hour drive from Seoul, is another important entry point, where small-volume-high-value products, such as premium wine, fresh cherries, and chilled beef, often enter via air cargo through the Incheon International Airport (ICN) in Incheon.

While there is plenty of opportunity for U.S. exporters, there are also some challenges that come with doing business in the Korean market, as illustrated in Table 1.

² Latest data optionable from 'Agricultural, Forestry and Food Statistics 2024', release by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

Table 1_Advantages and Challenges for U.S. Products in the Korean Market

Advantages	Challenges
Korean consumers' openness to new tastes, coupled with rising food consumption levels, creates demand for quality new-to-market products and international cuisines.	U.S. products face competition with low-priced products sourced from other countries, and price remains as a main factor for Korean consumers' purchasing decision with the sluggish economy situation.
The country's heavy dependence on imports of food and agricultural products, coming from its limited production capacity, creates market opportunities for products sourced abroad.	Korean consumers are generally biased towards locally produced food and agricultural products, especially fresh produce, believing the quality and food safety are superior.
Korean consumers highly value food safety, and the U.S.' positive image as a trusted origin helps its products well positioned in the market.	Food imports face regulatory barriers. Food safety and labeling standards are frequently modified, and some regulations such as food additives rules differ between the United States and Korea.
KORUS FTA improves market access to ROK by eliminating many import barriers.	ROK is signing trade agreements with multiple partners which intensifies competition between the United States and export-oriented countries.
An increasing number of international brand restaurants, including well-known American food service chains, are opening stores in Korea.	American cuisine is perceived relatively less healthy compared to other international cuisines.

SECTION II. EXPORTER BUSINESS TIPS

Market Research

U.S. suppliers seeking entry into the ROK should first conduct preliminary research to determine if there is a potential market for their products in Korea. The research should cover key marketing and regulatory issues including consumption trends, size of the market and competition, major distribution channels, import tariffs and local taxes, and labeling and food additive restrictions. For assistance in reaching out to established Korean import distributors and retail buyers, please contact the Agricultural Trade Office (ATO) Seoul. ATO Seoul offers various marketing tools and trade facilitation supports to U.S. suppliers. ATO Seoul also offers information about the Korean market on [its website](#) including:

- [GAIN Reports](#): Routine and voluntary reports on key products, industries, and regulatory issues published by FAS Seoul.
- [Food News Clipping](#): Weekly highlights of FAS Seoul monitoring of media reporting on food and agricultural issues in Korea.

Suppliers need to check if their products meet Korean food regulations and standards. For assistance in identifying or resolving regulatory issues, please refer to [the Office of Agricultural Affairs \(OAA\) Seoul](#). The U.S. Department of Commerce's [Country Commercial Guide](#) also contains useful information on the Korean market. Socio-economic data can be found in the [CIA Factbook](#).

Developing Contacts with Potential Business Partners

Korean importers are actively seeking business opportunities with new foreign suppliers, and highly value face-to-face meetings when building new business partnerships. Therefore, exhibiting at food-focused trade shows is one of the most effective ways to showcase products and to develop contacts with potential business partners. There are many trade shows held in Korea, and the U.S. Agricultural Trade Office (ATO) in Seoul can provide relevant information upon request. A few local trade shows that U.S. food exporters may consider participating in include [Seoul Food and Hotel Show](#), [the Korea International Beer Expo \(KIBEX\)](#), and the [Busan International Seafood and Fishery Expo \(BISFE\)](#). At each of these shows, the ATO organizes a U.S. pavilion, which helps U.S. companies effectively engage with Korean buyers and potential consumers while gaining hands-on knowledge about the market. Additionally, the Seoul Food and Hotel Show is the only USDA-endorsed and the largest food-focused industry show in Korea. Another recommended tool is joining reverse trade missions to ROK organized by U.S. agricultural export promotion organizations, such as [U.S. State Regional Trade Groups \(SRTG\)](#), and of [USDA Cooperators](#). Many of those have representative offices or marketing contractors in the ROK and provide market entry assistance for new-to-market suppliers.

SECTION III. IMPORT FOOD STANDARDS, REGULATIONS AND PROCEDURES

The ROK has well-established and relatively strict food standards and regulations. Imported products must meet all local rules to enter the market. [The Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards \(FAIRS\) Country Report](#) and [FAIRS Export Certificate Report](#) provide an overview of relevant standards and regulations.

Exporters of meat products should also check export requirements on the [Food Safety Inspection Service Export Library](#). Sanitary and phytosanitary requirements can be found on [the Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service \(APHIS\)](#) https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/export/iregs-for-animal-exports/ct_iregs_animal_exports_home. Exporters should also consult closely with their Korean importers to ensure they meet the latest regulations.

The 2012 KORUS Free Trade Agreement significantly reduced tariffs on many U.S. products imported into Korea. Information about the KORUS FTA and import tariffs is available on the [USTR website](#).

SECTION IV. MARKET SECTOR STRUCTURE AND TRENDS

The ROK's agriculture and food market structure consists of specialized food importers, intermediary distributors, and various scales of retailers, including small stores and large retail conglomerates. In recent years, e-commerce retail platforms have notably expanded as well. Major players include hypermarkets, convenience stores, traditional markets and e-commerce platforms.

When purchasing food products, Korean consumers increasingly place importance on high quality and food safety, along with new flavors, value for money, and convenience. Following the pandemic and

partially due to the ageing population, consumers' interest in health has risen significantly. This has naturally driven higher demand for food safety and nutrition management.

Along with these health-related interests, the growing number of smaller scale households and dual income families has increased demand for small portion packaging and convenience-oriented products such as ready-to-cook and ready-to-eat meals, often referred to as home-meal-replacements (HMRs). Market players, regardless of their business scales, offer various types of products, not only ordinary meals but also snacks and premium meals to meet consumer needs.

The rapid expansion of online shipping in the ROK has also affected the food retail sector. According to the National Statistics Office, total e-commerce transactions in retail sector reached 224 trillion won in 2024, showing an upward trend following a notable increase of 21 percent in 2021. Agricultural and food products make up over 30 percent of total online transactions, and for many Korean consumers, mobile grocery shopping has become a daily habit, accounting for about 76 percent of total e-commerce transactions in 2024. To maintain competitiveness, many online commerce platforms are showcasing new features such as a twice-a-week auto delivery service, a larger selection of fresh produce and high-end products.

Consumer interest in ethical consumption is also on the steady rise. Eggs, a typical product representing ethical consumption and animal welfare, saw a 36.6 percent sales increase in their animal welfare product category in 2024 compared to the previous year. Other products such as livestock items labeled as antibiotic-free or animal welfare-certified, have also seen gradual sales growth. These suggest that consumer interest in ethical and value-based consumption is expanding.

Despite an overall slowdown in consumption, which is in part due to low consumer confidence in the economy, a trend of consumption polarization has emerged. Demand for both economic and high-end food products has risen simultaneously, showing that consumers are spending more selectively. While some consumers, especially younger generations, focus on necessary purchases, some others seek luxuries. In response, market players are introducing ultra-low-price products such as snacks lower than ₩1,000, while also strengthening premium offerings such as imported high-end desserts and expensive cakes from luxury hotels.

Trends by Sector

Retail Food Sector

The United States is the leading supplier of imported consumer-oriented agricultural products for Korean retail industry, shipping \$5.4 billion in 2024. The outlook for U.S. products in the Korean retail industry is excellent for a wide range of products, including pork, dairy, processed fruit, fruit and vegetable juice, food preparations under HS2106, non-alcoholic beverage, and wine. For further information about the retail food sector in Korea, please refer to the [ROK Retail Foods Report 2024](#).

Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional (HRI) Food Service Sector

In 2023, monthly per capita spending on the HRI food service rose to ₩179,648 (\$139.1), up 10.66 percent from 2022 and 30.65 percent from 2021. This growth reflects not only people returning to pre-pandemic lifestyles but also rising menu prices coming from increased costs. Despite challenges such as inflation and changing market conditions, the ROK's HRI food service sector is expected to maintain

slow but steady growth through menu diversification and new food technology to meet consumers’ evolving needs. For further information about the HRI food service sector in Korea, please refer to the [ROK HRI Foodservice Sector Report 2024](#).

Food Processing Sector

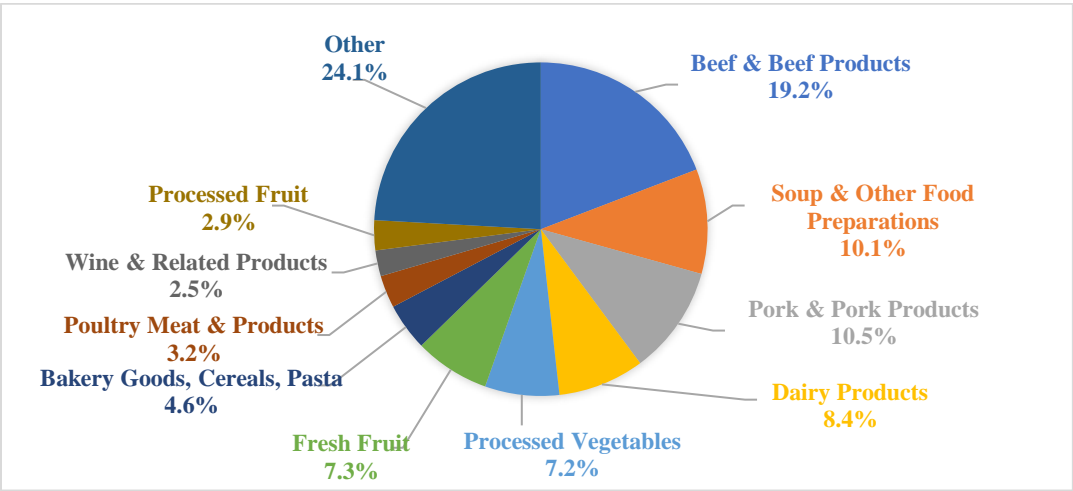
The ROK’s food processing industry relies heavily on imports to fulfill its food and agricultural needs to manufacture a wide variety of food and beverage products. Given this demand, there is ample opportunity for imported agricultural products for processing use including bulk commodities such as wheat, intermediate ingredients such as fruit juice concentrates, and many other products, such as flavors and coloring agents. In 2023, the food processing industry generated over 85 trillion Korean Won (approximately \$65.0 billion) in sales. For more information on the food processing sector, please refer to please refer to the [ROK Food Processing Ingredients Market Report 2025](#).

SECTION V. AGRICULTURAL & FOOD IMPORTS

Agricultural and Food Import Statistics

In 2024, the ROK imported \$45.3 billion of food and agricultural products from the world and the largest category was consumer-oriented products (\$20.6 billion) with a 45.4 percent share, followed by intermediate products (\$8.8 billion, 19.4 percent share) and bulk products (\$7.3 billion, 16.1 percent share). The top 10 selling imported consumer-ready food products accounted for 75.9 percent of the total category and a breakout of those items can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2_ROK’s Imports of Top 10 Consumer-Ready Products (2024)



Source: Trade Data Monitor, South Korea Imports from World, BICO Consumer Ready Products

For more detailed information on the country’s import data, please refer to the Appendix I and ATO Seoul’s [Agricultural Statistics](#) - monthly spreadsheet updates on Korean agricultural imports by four-digit HS product classification. Both the ROK government import statistics (KOTIS data, CIF value) and U.S. export statistics (U.S. Customs data, FOB value) are included for more accurate trade analysis.

Best High-Value, Consumer-Oriented Product Prospects

The category of consumer-oriented foods including beef and pork products, dairy products, food preparations, fresh fruit, processed vegetables, bakery goods, cereals, pasta, tree nuts, poultry meat products was the largest category of products ROK imported most from the world in 2024, and the United States was the largest supplier for this category as well. High value imports from the United States include beef products, food preparations, pork products, fresh fruit, dairy products, tree nuts, processed vegetables among many others. Table 3 shows the top 10 Korean imports of consumer-ready products in 6-digit HS Code and leading suppliers for each.

Table 3_Top 10 Korean Imports of Consumer-Oriented Products and Competition

Product Category/HS Code	Gross Imports 2024 (\$ million)	1st Supplier (Share)	2nd Supplier (Share)	U.S. Ranking (Share)
Food Preparations Nesoi/HS210690	2069	U.S. (49%)	Germany (11%)	1st (49%)
Meat of Swine, Frozen/HS020329	1872	U.S. (33%)	Spain (19%)	1st (33%)
Meat of Bovine, Boneless, Frozen/HS020230	1486	Australia (54%)	U.S. (39%)	2nd (39%)
Meat of Bovine, Fresh/HS020130	1123	U.S. (71%)	Australia (29%)	1st (71%)
Meat of Bovine, Cuts with Bone In, Frozen/HS020220	963	U.S. (69%)	Australia (21%)	1st (69%)
Chicken Cuts & Offal, Frozen/HS020714	450	Brazil (79%)	Thailand (18%)	4th (1%)
Bread, Pastry, Cakes/H190590	390	China (23%)	Malaysia (17%)	3rd (13%)
Bananas, Fresh or Dried/HS080390	382	Philippines (62%)	Vietnam (18%)	16th (0%)
Cheese, Fresh/HS040610	375	U.S. (45%)	Denmark (15%)	1st (45%)
Wine of Fresh Grapes/HS220421	351	France (29%)	U.S. (20%)	2nd (20%)

Source: Trade Data Monitor (TDM), South Korea Imports from World, BICO Consumer-Oriented Products. (CIF value)

Table 4 shows 10 items that recorded the highest year-on-year growth in import value in 2024. Cabbages and Chinese cabbages imported from China increased sharply due to low domestic production and the price competitiveness of imported products. Welsh onions and green onions also saw similar growth due to the same reasons. Other products with notable growth include American pistachios, which account for over 98 percent of the market share. The growing demand for snacks using pistachios appears to be the main reason for this increase. Also, as consumer interest in healthy beverages has grown, imports of related American products, including juice, have increased significantly. Additionally, in recent years, there has been steady interest in vinegar, including apple cider vinegar, in the market. While U.S. import volume remained modest, the ROK's overall imports of these products from the world grew much, indicating continued growth.

Table 4_Top 10 Fastest Growing Korean Imports of Consumer-Oriented Products³

Product Category/HS Code	Gross Imports 2024 (\$ million)	Growth from 2023	Imports from U.S. (\$1,000)	U.S. Growth
Edible Brassicas/HS070490	11	408%	0	0%
Fruit Juice, Not Exceeding 20 Brix/HS200931	36	205%	5025	76%
Leeks, Fresh/HS070390	16	202%	0	0%
Pistachios, Fresh/HS080252	15	142%	14,896	140%
Cocoa Paste/HS180310	46	142%	1	-83%
Pasta/HS190220	24	131%	0	0%
Cocoa Butter/HS180400	13	125%	7	310%
Pepper/HS090411	43	89%	58	-1%
Fruit Juice of Any Other Single Citrus/HS200939	10	88%	1,725	772%
Vinegar/HS220900	37	53%	6,163	-1%

Source: Trade Data Monitor (TDM), South Korea Imports from World, Consumer-Oriented Products. (CIF value)

³ Listing is limited to top 10 growth products that Korean imports were \$10 million or larger.

SECTION VI. KEY CONTACTS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

Host Country Government

[Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs \(MAFRA\)](#)

[Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(MOFA\)](#)

[Ministry of Food and Drug Safety \(MFDS\)](#)

[Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy \(MOTIE\)](#)

USDA Cooperators, SRTG, State Offices and AMCHAM in Korea

[USDA Cooperators in Korea](#)

[U.S. State Regional Trade Groups \(SRTG\)](#)

[U.S. State Offices in Korea](#)

[American Chamber of Commerce \(AMCHAM\)](#)

Agricultural Trade Office (ATO)

Address: Room 303, Leema Building, 42 Jongro
1-gil, Jongro-gu, Seoul, Korea

Phone: +82-2 6951-6848

Email: atoseoul@usda.gov

<https://www.atoseoul.com>

Agricultural Affairs Office (AAO)

Address: U.S. Embassy, 188 Sejong-daero
Jongro-gu, Seoul, Korea

Phone: +82-2 397-4297

Email: agseoul@usda.gov

<https://kr.usembassy.gov/agricultural-affairs/>

Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

Address: Room 303, Leema Building, 42 Jongro
1-gil, Jongro-gu, Seoul, Korea

Phone: +82-2 725-5495

Email: yunhee.kim@usda.gov

<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/>

Attachments: [2024 BICO - U.S. Exports of Ag & Related Products to Korea, South.pdf](#)