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Costa Rica

Exporter Guide

Costa Rica 2018 Exporter Guide

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Report Highlights:

Tourism, services and high technology continue to drive Costa Rica's economy. In 2018, the leading prospects for consumer-oriented products include U.S. prime beef cuts, pork, dairy, processed fruit, chocolate products, snack foods, prepared foods, pet food, bakery ingredients, precooked frozen products, condiments, sauces and other high value products.

Costa Rican consumers recognize U.S. quality and innovative characteristics. According to data from the Central Bank of Costa Rica, per capita GDP reached \$11,635 in 2017. However, inflation is expected to increase to 3 percent by the end of 2018, up from 2.6 percent in 2017, and unemployment remains high at 10.3 percent.

To top it off, Costa Rica recently approved a fiscal reform package that will include higher taxes, which could negatively affect its GDP in the near term. Its growing debt and high deficit may weaken the local currency (the Colon) against the U.S. dollar, which may stagnate U.S. agricultural exports to Costa Rica in the short term. In contrast, U.S. exports of U.S. agricultural products to Costa Rica are expected to increase by nearly 10 percent to \$775 million in 2018.

Market Fact Sheet: COSTA RICA



\$ 737 million
U.S. Agricultural Exports 2018

33
Among U.S.
Agricultural Export
Markets, 2018

\$ 737 million

Export Growth (69%)
2007-2018

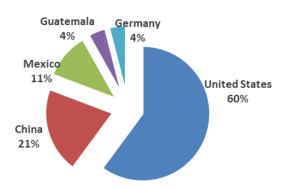
\$ 737 million

Source: FAS Global Agricultural Trade System (GATS) Bico HS-10

Executive Summary

The United Sates is Costa Rica's largest trading partner and Costa Rica's largest foreign direct investor. Market prospects for U.S. consumer-oriented products such as beef, pork, poultry, dairy, wine and beer, snack foods, ready-to-eat meals, frozen food products, condiments, and pet food continue to increase with impressive growth, reaching \$291.4 million in exports to Costa Rica 2018. Costa Rican consumers trust and enjoy the excellent reputation of U.S. food, beverage and ingredients products, and demand has increased since the implementation of the Dominican Republic -Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) in 2009. Proximity with the United States is a major advantage for shipping time and for U.S. exporters who wish to visit or communicate with potential customers. In 2018, U.S. agricultural exports to Costa Rica reached a \$737 million and Costa Rican agricultural exports to the United States were valued at US\$1.7 billion. Costa Rican agricultural exports are made up of tropical products (bananas, pineapple, cassava, ornamental plants, coffee, and sugar) typically not produced in the United States.

Agricultural Imports by Country (percentage share)



Source: Ministerio de Hacienda de Costa Rica

Food Processing Industry

Most of Costa Rican food processors import their food ingredient needs directly from exporters and a few rely on importers and distributors. They have their own distribution channels to wholesalers, distributors and retailers, as well as hotels, restaurants and institutional industries nationwide. Distribution channels can be different between local and imported products and are constantly changing.

Food Retail Industry

Costa Rica's retail sector is made up of supermarkets, hypermarkets, mini-marts, and *mom-and-pop* shops. Many consumers prefer to buy their groceries in smaller quantities from independent grocers. At the

same time, many consumers buy bulk products. In addition, consumers are price sensitive.

Food Service Industry

According to the Chamber of Restaurants, the Costa Rican food service industry is made up of an estimated 4,325 food service businesses (consisting of hotel restaurants, restaurant chains and franchises).

QUICK FACTS CY 2017

U.S. Food and Beverage (F&B) Exports to Costa Rica \$694 million

List of Top 10 Growth Products in Costa Rica

1) Beef, pork, poultry 6) Ingredients for food/beverage mfg.

2) Wine and beer3) Prepared/frozen Foods8) Dairy9) Juices

4) Pet Food
5) Chocolate and cocoa
products
10) Tree Nuts and Snack products
11) Processed fruit and vegetable

Food Industry by Channels in 2017

U.S. F&B Exports to Costa Rica \$720 million Costa Rican F&B Imports from the US \$1.7 billion

Top Costa Rican Retailers:

1. Walmart4. Saretto7. PriceSmart2. AutoMercado5. Mayca8. Muñoz y Nane3. Fresh Market6. Gessa9. MegaSuper

GDP/Population*

Population of Costa Rica 5 million

GDP (billions USD) 57.5* (preliminary data)

Per capita GDP \$11,635

Exchange rate 610 colones per 1 US\$

*Sources: Central Bank of Costa Rica

Opportunities	Challenges
Local processors are slowly	Countries such as Mexico,
increasing their production capacity	Argentina and Colombia can
and level of food quality to export	offer competitively priced food
to the United States.	ingredients.
Costa Rican consumers are	Costa Rica's strategy is to
becoming sophisticated in their	continue negotiating free trade
food preferences.	agreements with other countries.
The United States is Costa Rica's	Business culture in Costa Rica
main trading partner. U.S. food	can be slow paced than in the
ingredients are well-known and	United States and those wishing
considered of high quality and	to do business in the country
reliable.	should be prepared for this
	possible difference.
Since 2013, Costa Rica initiated a	U.S. exporters must be patient
new on-line product registration	with export procedures and
system, which eventually will	processes. Costa Rica has many
reduce registration times for new	levels of bureaucracy that can at
imported products.	times slow the importation of
	food products.

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Post:

San Jose

Executive Summary:
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SECTION I. MARKET OVERVIEW

The current population of Costa Rica is 5 million people. The population density in Costa Rica is 251 people per square mile. The total land area is 19,714 sq. miles, and is nearly the size of West Virginia. As of 2018, 82.9 % of the population live in urban areas. The median age in Costa Rica is 31.8 years.

When the new government took office on May 8, 2018, it inherited a large and growing national debt and high fiscal deficit estimated at 7.1 percent of GDP. As result, the new government has signaled its intent to address the fiscal problems through economic reforms, including higher taxes, which will ultimately lead to lower disposable income. If implemented, GDP growth may decline in the near term. The growing debt and high deficit may weaken the local currency (the colon) against the U.S. dollar. These factors may undercut demand for U.S. products in Costa Rica.

The United States remains Costa Rica's largest trading partner and Costa Rica's largest foreign direct investor with \$10.8 billion in bilateral goods trade in 2017. With such a high degree of trade with the United States, Costa Rican importers are well accustomed to working with foreign partners in this market. Trade surplus with Costa Rica grew nearly 9% in 2017 to \$1.7 billion. U.S. exports by major product category reached: bulk, \$349.6 million; intermediate, \$91.4 million; consumer-oriented, \$278.6 million; agricultural related products \$11.2 million. Costa Rica's most important exports of agricultural products to the United States include pineapple, banana, coffee, fruit juice, ornamental plants, cacao and sugar.

Costa Rica has achieved a high level of economic development, the highest in Central America, in part because it abolished its military in 1948 and invested in health, education and infrastructure.

The Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR, or the Agreement) entered into force for the United States, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua in 2006; the Dominican Republic in 2007; and Costa Rica in 2009. The CAFTA-DR significantly liberalized trade in goods and services, and includes important disciplines relating to customs administration and trade facilitation, technical barriers to trade, government procurement, investment, telecommunications, electronic commerce, intellectual property rights, transparency, labor, and environment.

Under the CAFTA-DR, Costa Rica may not adopt new duty waivers or expand existing duty waivers that are conditioned on the fulfillment of a performance requirement (e.g., the export of a given level or percentage of goods). Costa Rica has modified its free trade zone regime in order to conform to this requirement. Tax holidays are available for investors in free trade zones. Costa Rica's tax incentives and benefits are standardized. They apply to all companies equally, so that there is no need for individual negotiations.

Table 1. U.S. Exports of Consumer Oriented Products

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau Trade Data www.fas.usda.gov/GATS

Costa Rica also seeks to improve market access for tropical products and a Special Safeguard Mechanism (SSM) that would be used only in qualified exceptional occasions, an argument supportive of the U.S. position on the controversial modality. Credit is available to producers primarily from commercial banks both public and private. Costa Rica does not produce bulk commodities, with the exception of rice and black beans. It relies upon imports to satisfy 100 percent of the consumption of wheat, yellow corn, and soybeans for milling and crushing, chicken, pork, and dairy industries. Significant imports of rice and dried beans are necessary to meet local demand as well.

Table 2. Costa Rica: Advantages and Challenges for U.S. Exporters

Advantages	Weaknesses/ Challenges
The United States is geographically close	U.S. products from the Western United States and the
to Costa Rica, which gives logistical	upper Midwest face higher transportation costs relative to
advantages for marketing and trade.	alternate suppliers from the rest of Central America.
U.S. exporters can supply different	Low volume shipments of high-value products face
volumes according to local demand and	additional costs since they must go through freight
maintain reliable supply throughout the	consolidators in Miami or other ports.
year.	
I.	U.S. food exporters are not geared to meet the needs of
in	the "traditional" market (13,000 mom & pop's), which
almost every agricultural product as a	sell items packaged in small sizes.
result of	
CAFTA-DR. Tariffs on nearly all U.S.	
agricultural products will be phased out by	
2020.	No. 110
Food processing industry requiring a wide	Many U.S. exporters are unaware that an Apostille can
range of ingredients, high value consumer	serve to validate the Certificate of Free Sale.
oriented and processed foods.	T
U.S. food products are competitive in	Importers of rice still concerned about chalky kernels in U.S. rice.
terms of price and quality.	
Costa Rica initiated a new on-line product	Costa Rica's often slow and cumbersome bureaucracy
registration system, which eventually will reduce registration times for new imported	poses a challenge to doing business in the country.
products.	
With CAFTA, Costa Rica recognized the	A vocal anti-GMO lobby threatens consumer acceptance
equivalence of the U.S. meat and poultry	of foods made with GM events.
inspection systems, eliminating the need	of foods made with GW events.
for approval of individual plants.	
A strong tourism sector (residential and	Strong competition.
traditional) provides opportunity for U.S.	Strong competition.
exporters and for development.	
Retailers are interested in stocking more	The Ministry of Health has specific requirements for the

1 1 01	wording of Certificates of Free Sale. Failure to meet these requirements slows down product registration.
The Ministry of Agriculture will build new cold chain facilities in tourist areas to facilitate imports of perishables, chilled and frozen foods.	
Costa Rica is not self-sufficient in basic commodities and depends on imported grains and legumes.	South American grain competes aggressively with U.S. grain on price and quality.
	Chinese black beans compete with U.S. beans in price because of a Chinese TRQ.
Costa Ricans are beginning to consume higher quantities of frozen and prepared foods.	Local producers are increasing in the sector.

II. EXPORTER BUSINESS TIPS

Generally, the Costa Rian market offers good opportunities for U.S. exporters of consumer-oriented agricultural products. Negotiations in Costa Rica tend to proceed slower than in the United States. Below are some important characteristics that should be noted:

- Credit terms: 3 to 4 months can pass between the time the importer places an order to an exporter to the time they collect payment from retailers.
- Spanish language in printed materials is preferred, although most Costa Ricans in the business sector are bilingual.
- A personalized approach to business with consistent attention to service and delivery, frequent visits, and follow-ups, goes far in Costa Rica.
- Navigation of Costa Rica's import procedures can be tricky. It is best to work with experienced representatives, agents, and importers -- there are many in the country.
- Trademark registration and protection is important.
- Contracts should be in writing and made through consulting top decision-makers.
- Display samples, marketing and volume flexibility in purchase orders support business contract dealings.
- Participating in food trade shows.

Key market drivers and consumption trends

Traditional foods such as rice and beans remain staples in the Costa Rican diet, though new foods are readily accepted by the population. Costa Rica, for example, is the only country in the region where prepared foods account for a significant portion of household food budgets. Beef, rice, breads, and vegetables are typically the largest food expenditures for Costa Rican consumers. Soft drinks and dairy products follow these items in household purchases, with milk being consumed more than cheese. In general, all meat poultry and pork products are consumed. Fish is consumed less than other protein sources. Wheat and corn products are widely consumed by the general population but are consumed in greater quantities by urban residents than other populations.

A new trend in relation to environmentally friendly packaging alternatives is expected to increase in the future, mainly as the result of heightened awareness about material sourcing and the impact this has on the environment. A broader base of players is likely to promote recycling and reutilization campaigns.

Table 3. Costa Rica Overall Agricultural Bilateral Trade 2012-2017 in millions of dollars Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau Trade Data: BICO-HS10

	2014	2015	2016	2017
U.S Exports of Agricultural	619	659	713.2*	720
and Related products to				
Costa Rica.				
U.S, Imports of Agricultural	1,642	1,584	1,666	1,674
and Related Products from				
Costa Rica.				

III. FOOD STANDARDS AND REGULATIONS

US exporters may want to consult the lasted Costa Rican Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards – Narrative

https://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Food%20and%20Agricultural%20Import%20Regulations%20and%20Standards%20-%20Narrative San%20Jose Costa%20Rica 12-19-2017.pdf

Ministry of Health's Registration and Control Department (Ministerio de Salud, Dirección de Registros y Controles) – handles processed foods and beverages. https://www.ministeriodesalud.go.cr/

Plant and Animal Health Service (Servicio Fitosanitario y Direccion de Salud Animal) – handles bulk agriculture, fresh fruits and vegetables and other products of fresh fruit/vegetable origin, ornamental plants, fresh, chilled or frozen meat products. http://www.mag.go.cr/acerca_del_mag/adscritas/sfe.html

National Animal Health Service (Servicio Nacional de Salud Animal) – handles live animals, products of animal origin - fresh meat and meat products, milk, cheese, eggs etc., pet food, animal feed, and ingredients for pet/animal food. http://www.senasa.go.cr/

Customs Office (Dirección General de Aduanas) – handles procedures for taxation purposes. https://www.hacienda.go.cr/contenido/284-servicio-nacional-de-aduanas

IV. MARKET SECTOR STRUCTURE AND TRENDS

Retail Food Sector

Costa Rican supermarkets chains have an optimistic outlook for 2019 and are interested in continuing expanding their investments in the future. The Business Group of Supermarkets (Gessa), Walmart and Automercado, are some of the fimrs that wil increase their coverage in spite of the increasingly competitive nature of the Costa Rican market.

Approximately 40 percent of food purchases made within the country take place in modern supermarket formats. Convenience stores and "mini-supers" (also known locally as "pulperias"), which are small local stores offering a limited selection of basic goods, are also commonly frequented by local consumers, especially to supplement weekly purchases. Traditional outdoor markets, of which there are estimated to be around 13,000 in the country, remain popular in Costa Rica as well.

The supermarket format has been gaining prominence in recent years and there are now more than 350

supermarkets in Costa Rica. As retail supermarkets expand their reach and consumer base, they present an excellent opportunity for U.S. exporters of food, beverages and agricultural products. Market analysts inform that already 55 percent of all food products sold in supermarkets are imported from abroad with 32 percent of these imports being from the United States. There are five major supermarket chains in Costa Rica including Wal-Mart (United States), Gessa (Costa Rica), AutoMercado (Costa Rica), Price Smart (United States), and Megasuper (Colombia). Wal-Mart has 185 stores and owns more than 80 percent of all the supermarkets (under what names of Pali, and Maxi Pali in Costa Rica.

Due to increased competition between supermarket chains created from the growing number and format of supermarkets, retailers strive to offer high-quality products, diversify their product range, and offer in-store services. In particular, this has resulted in the growth of prepared foods sold in stores. This trend has coincided with a rise in demand for convenience foods, including healthy convenient food options, which are now popular with consumers. High-end and budget supermarkets and mini-supers alike are looking to target this niche. Some food distributors can provide entry into both retail outlets and to the food service sector. Entry into smaller retailers is best accomplished through working with local distributors.

Hotels and Resorts: Hotels and resorts in Costa Rica offer a wide range of accommodations for the growing business and tourist industries. The government is developing a comprehensive travel and tourism plan with a special emphasis on cultural and eco-tourism. From the 9.6 million tourists who visited Costa Rica over the past five years, almost 700,000 preferred lodging options available through platforms such as Airbnb or HomeAway instead of hotels, especially in the Pacific Northwest (Guanacaste) region. Projections made by the Central Bank of Costa Rica generated \$4 billion in revenue from tourism in 2016 and goal for 2021 is to increase to \$6 billion. The 26 percent increase is due to new airline options that are new flying to Costa Rica.

Restaurants: In general, most of the finest restaurants are located in the San Jose metropolitan area. In recent years, neighborhoods east of San Jose have become attractive places for gourmet cooking establishments such as in old neighborhoods of Amon, Otoya, Aranjuez, Dent, Los Yoses and Escalante. More than eighty restaurants are located within the 2 square kilometers represented by the neighborhoods mentioned.

Restaurants in Costa Rica can be broken down in the following segments:

- Fine-Dining/ Full service restaurants: higher priced
- Casual Dining: higher to medium priced dining
- Fast food casual dining: cafes, bars affordable and fast food
- Mobile fast food kiosks and trucks: this type of fast casual food is being more and more common in local trade shows and events.

In the Pacific Northwest tourist hub of Guanacaste, restaurants offer various gastronomic options. Costa Rican cuisine generally includes lightly seasoned fresh fish, chicken or beef, grilled plantains and a combination of black beans and rice called *Gallo Pinto*.

The growth in restaurant operations in Costa Rica offers U.S. exporters the opportunity to supply the many international franchises in the San Jose area.

Fast Food/Franchises: The fast food market is very competitive in Costa Rica. Approximately 244 new fast food locations were opened from 2010-2014, totaling 679 such restaurants since 1962. Costa Rica's franchising regime grew by 85 percent in the last five years according to the National Franchise

Center. A total of 34 new franchises launched operations last year with 22 of them representing international chains. Almost 64 percent of the restaurants are located in the San Jose metropolitan area.

V. BEST CONSUMER-ORIENTED PRODUCT PROSPECTS

Many promising export opportunities exist for high-value consumer oriented products from the United States. The economic outlook in Costa Rica is promising as well; economic growth is steady and a solid base of middle to upper-class consumers is expanding in the country.

U.S. food products and food companies continue to permeate the market in Costa Rica, as local consumers are both receptive and accustomed to U.S. food products. U.S. food companies, restaurants and supermarket chains, have been highly successful in Costa Rica and have a strong presence in the country. Bakery and confectionary products are showing impressive levels of growth, as are savory condiments and sausages. Gourmet products and prepare foods are widely distributed throughout the country but are consumed principally by high and medium-income consumers.

Please review current and historical data on international trade and best consumer-oriented products in the following database https://apps.fas.usda.gov/gats/detectscreen.aspx?returnpage=default.aspx

Demand for healthy, and/or gourmet snack items is increasing as well. Gluten free snacks and organic products and ingredients, dried fruits, whole wheat/grains, and high-quality ingredients are gaining ground with health conscious consumers. This trend for healthy products is not limited to snack foods either. Demand for niche food items such as organic shelf products or gluten-free goods, non-dairy, vegetarian/vegan products etc. is expanding, which bodes well for U.S. exporters wishing to capitalize on this trend.

There is a wide variability in the kinds of ingredients of animal and vegetable origin used in food and beverage products in Costa Rica. The simplest ingredients used are egg albumin, cocoa, milk powder, natural sweeteners substituting sucrose (such as fructose), soy protein, corn, corn starches and corn flour, whey protein, among others. Costa Rican consumption of herbs, herb extracts and fruit pulps has increased significantly as a result of expansion in the beverage and the confectionary industries in teas, jellies and juices. The use of spices has increased following a gourmet trend in the preparation of home-made meals and desserts, as well as in restaurant menus and industry formulations.

Meat exports to Costa Rica demonstrate excellent new opportunities for U.S. exporters as well. Pork products stand out as having great export potential; bacon, ham, and pork leg (especially during the winter months) are all popular imports from the United States. Exports of processed meats, prepared meats, and preserved meats between 2012 and 2017 expanded significantly, and consumption of prepared meats continues to grow. Meat and poultry imports accounted for 62 million of total imports in 2017, representing 1 percent increase.

Regarding dairy products, the local company Cooperativa de Productos de Leche Dos Pinos, RL continues to retain its leading position in cheese. In addition, Dos Pinos's presence holds a retail market share of 46 percent. However, the Mexican owned dairy company known as Grupo Lala has been building a presence in Costa Rica since 2017. I recently announced its strategic agreement with the Costa Rican company Florida Bebidas, S.A. Grupo LaLa'sagreement will provide access to a platform to strengthen its regional presence. Additional synergies will include, increased distribution capacity through Florida's logistics network to serve points of sale in the Costa Rican traditional trade

channel. Furthermore, it will provide raw milk supply assurance, with the support of the Regional Farming Cooperative of Dairy Farmers (Coopeleche R.L.), which will enable LaLa to manufacture its products under high-quality standards. In addition, it will increase its production capacity, through the acquisition of a dairy production facility, located at San Ramón Alajuela. Consumers of dairy products continue to look for new dairy varieties, quality and new nutritional options.

Remaining export sectors with impressive levels of growth include snack foods; non-alcoholic/juice beverages; nuts; processed vegetable; chocolate & cocoa products, meats and pet food. With a low increase, fish products are starting to growth.

Table 5. Costa Rica: Highest Export Levels for U.S. Exporters by Sector (Millions of dollars)

Product Category	2017 Imports In Million USD	1-yr. Avg. Annual Import Growth	Market attractiveness for USA
Beef & Meat products	13.8	34%	HRI industry is growing and consumers are searching for more U.S. cuts in the local market.
Poultry Meat & Prods. (ex. eggs)	31.3*	8%	Costa Rican consumer prefer poultry HRI industry is also influencing this market too with good quality poultry options.
Nuts	9.8*	15%	Supermarket and retail food service always have demand for new products. Nuts are considered a trendy healthy snack.
Condiments and Sauces	9.6	20%	Costa Rican buyers continued to become familiar with different sauces and condiments that have a greater presence in modern grocery retailers throughout the country. Ethnic flavors and natural products are becoming more popular with consumers. The demand for mature mass products such as stock cubes, ketchup, mayonnaise, and spicy sauces continues. Consumers continue to find more innovation within more specialized products including other table and cooking sauces as well as in trendy herbs and spices (including turmeric and multicolor peppercorns) given the functional and flavor profile features they can offer to home cooking.
Dairy Products	19.8	60%	Demand for cheese is mature as there is increasing price-based competition amongst the most popular products (which includes processed cheese and unpackaged hard cheese), while the availability of products targeted to wealthier buyers has seen the development of gourmet options.
Juices Non- Alcoholic	12*	3%	Demand for new flavors and consumers will continue to demand more convenient and healthier products over the coming years.

Trade Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau Trade Data Bico Report Denote Highest Export Levels Since at Least CY 1970

https://apps.fas.usda.gov/gats/detectscreen.aspx?returnpage=default.aspx

VI. KEY CONTACTS, AND OTHER RELEVANT REPORTS

U.S. Embassy Commercial, Agricultural and Trade-Related Contacts

Department of Agriculture Foreign Agricultural Services (FAS)

Phone: (506) 2519-2285 Fax: (506) 2519-2097

Email: AgSanJose@fas.usda.gov Website: www.fas.usda.gov

Department of Commerce – U.S. Foreign Commercial Service

Phone: (506) 2220-2454 Fax: (506) 2231-4783

Email: san.josecr.officebox@mail.doc.gov Website: www.export.gov www.buyusa.gov

Ministerio de Salud (Ministry of Health)

Dirección Atención al Cliente Phone: (506) 2222-5749 Website: www.netsalud.sa.cr

Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería (Ministry of Agriculture)

Phone: (506) 2290-5463 Fax: (506) 2231-2062 Website: www.mag.go.cr

Servicio Fitosanitario (Plant and Animal Health Services)

Phone: (506) 2260-8300

Website: http://www.sfe.go.cr/

Servicio Nacional de Salud Animal (National Animal Health Service)

Phone: (506) 2260-8300 Email: info@senasa.go.cr

Website: http://www.senasa.go.cr/senasa/sitio/

APPENDIX - STATISTICS Year 2018

1/ USDA Gain Reports by country https://gain.fas.usda.gov/Pages/Default.aspx

- 2/ Report by Crecex https://www.crecex.com/costaricaimporta2017.html
- 2/ Report by the World Bank http://data.worldbank.org/country/costa-rica
- 3/ Report by the National Statistics Census http://www.inec.go.cr
- 4/ Report Central Bank: http://indicadoreseconomicos.bccr.fi.cr/indicadoreseconomicos
- 5/ Report Procomer http://sistemas.procomer.go.cr/estadisticas/inicio.aspx

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