

**Alliance**

(<https://www.aquaculturealliance.org>).

**Global  
Aquaculture  
Advocate**<sup>™</sup>

[MARKETPLACE \(/ADVOCATE/CATEGORY/MARKETPLACE\)](#)

# Market, trade flows of frozen tilapia in EU

Sunday, 2 November 2014

By José Fernández Polanco, Ph.D. , Ignacio Llorente, Ph.D. and María Odriozola

## A limited market in Europe for the affordable whitefish



Despite being one of the most popular farmed

China is the main source for the relatively low volume of tilapia imported to the European Union.

freshwater fish around the world, tilapia is an almost unknown product in the displays of European shops. Within the European market of frozen fish fillets, tilapia play a minor role, with average yearly import quantities below 20,000 metric tons (MT). These amounts represented less than 0.003 percent of a market of 5.5 million metric tons (MT) of fish fillets in 2013, and only 11.4 percent of an aggregate of other tropical farmed species that include pangasius and Nile perch. The latter are much better known by European consumers.

## Tilapia supply in EU

With very limited contributions from other continents, tilapia fillets in the European Union are mainly imported from Asia (Table 1). Tilapia imports from Asia have remained fairly stable, with a minor increase of about 400 MT between 2010 and 2013. While not a majorly significant increase, the quantities in 2013 represented an important recovery from a fall to less than 16,0000 MT in 2012.

## Polanco, Regional sources for frozen tilapia, Table 1

Year	Import Volume (mt) Africa	Import Volume (mt) Latin America	Import Volume (mt) Asia
2010	1.4	93.7	18,886.4
2011	64.7	81.0	18,776.4
2012	78.0	93.3	15,750.9
2013	0	31.0	19,290.7

Table 1. Regional sources for frozen tilapia fillets imported to the European Union.

Within Asia, China is the most important exporter, providing more than 80 percent of the total imported quantities of tilapia (Table 2). Indonesia is the second-largest exporter to the EU, with annual amounts under 2,000 MT. The quantities from these two countries remained relatively stable since 2010, except for a decrease in 2012. Vietnam is a fast-growing newcomer whose exports of frozen tilapia fillets to the EU rose from 163 MT in 2010 to almost 1,000 MT in 2013 – a huge increase.

## Polanco, Main Asian sources for frozen tilapia, Table 2

Year	Import Volume (mt) China	Import Volume (mt) Vietnam	Import Volume (mt) Indonesia	Import Volume (mt) Thailand
2010	16,738.3	163.2	1,522.3	421.9
2011	16,308.9	425.3	1,700.0	315.0
2012	13,964.2	134.7	1,340.4	175.0
2013	16,014.1	980.0	1,901.1	214.9

Table 2. Main Asian sources for frozen tilapia fillets imported to the European Union.

On average, Asian tilapia is cheaper than other imports from Africa or Latin America (Table 3). China is not only the leader in quantity, but also in price. The average import price was 2.53 euro/kg (U.S. \$3.22/kg) for frozen fillets, including transport costs and insurances. This price is about half of the recorded prices for Latin American imports – and even cheaper than for other Asian exporters.

## Polanco, Transportation and insurance costs for frozen tilapia , Table 3

Year	Price (euro/kg) (U.S. \$/kg) China	Price (euro/kg) (U.S. \$/kg) Vietnam	Price (euro/kg) (U.S. \$/kg) Indonesia	Price (euro/kg) (U.S. \$/kg) Thailand
2010	2.42 (\$3.08)	2.35 (\$2.99)	3.85 (\$4.90)	3.08 (\$3.92)
2011	2.69 (\$3.43)	2.84 (\$3.62)	4.18 (\$5.32)	4.99 (\$6.35)
2012	2.58 (\$3.29)	3.03 (\$3.86)	4.66 (\$5.93)	6.65 (\$8.47)
2013	2.53 (\$3.22)	2.86 (\$3.64)	4.65 (\$5.92)	4.91 (\$6.25)

Table 3. Prices including transportation and insurance costs for frozen tilapia fillets imported to the European Union.

Vietnamese prices are closer to the Chinese levels than those of Indonesia and Thailand. It is assumed that the differences in price also refer to differences in quality. In such a case, Thailand would be the quality leader, along with Indonesia. Vietnam may be attempting to directly compete with China for the price leadership.

## Importers, intra-E.U. trade

With more than 5,000 MT of tilapia fillets imported in 2013, Poland and Spain were the main importers of frozen tilapia fillets in the EU (Table 4). The countries also reported the lowest import prices of the top five importers and the total EU. Germany, with 2,000 MT of imports, and the Netherlands and Belgium, between 1,500 and 2,000 MT, completed the top five markets for tilapia fillets. They accounted for 81 percent of the total EU imports.

## Polanco, Top tilapia-importing countries, Table 4

Country	Volume (mt)	Price (euro/kg) (U.S. \$/kg)	Market Share (%)
Poland	5,400	2.26 (\$2.88)	28.06
Spain	5,222	2.47 (\$3.15)	27.14
Germany	2,016	3.29 (\$4.19)	10.48
Netherlands	1,778	3.49 (\$4.44)	9.24
Belgium	1,354	3.59 (\$4.57)	7.04

Table 4. Top tilapia-importing countries in the European Union in 2013.

The destination of the imported tilapia varies across countries (Table 5). The majority is consumed in local markets in Spain, Poland and Germany, whether as a final product or incorporated into processed fish meals. The Netherlands and Belgium have a clear focus on re-exporting this commodity to other EU countries.

## Polanco, Intra-European Union trade in frozen tilapia fillets, Table 5

Country	Tilapia Exports (mt)	Price (euro/kg) (U.S. \$/kg)	Internal Consumption (mt)	Gross Profit (%)	Export Value (1,000 euro) (1,000 U.S. \$)
Netherlands	1,246.1	3.94 (\$4.99)	532.4	13.01	5,551 (\$7,039)
Belgium	1,165.9	5.35 (\$6.77)	189.0	48.92	9,291 (\$11,782)
Poland	697.6	2.96 (\$3.75)	4,702.2	30.84	2,698 (\$3,421)
Germany	462.8	3.88 (\$4.91)	1,553.1	17.85	2,114 (\$2,681)
Spain	72.7	2.69 (\$3.41)	5,149.4	9.18	214 (\$271)

Table 5. Intra-European Union trade in frozen tilapia fillets.

Tilapia trade within the EU is an interesting business that results in very interesting margins, depending on the final destination country. Belgium and Poland report the highest gross margins for these trade operations, which assume they are exporting to higher-income markets like Germany and Scandinavia, or incorporating added value by means of packaging and branding.

*(Editor's Note: This article was originally published in the November/December 2014 print edition of the Global Aquaculture Advocate.)*

## Authors



### JOSÉ FERNÁNDEZ POLANCO, PH.D.

Departamento de Administración de Empresas  
Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Empresariales  
Universidad de Cantabria  
39005 Santander, Cantabria, Spain

[jm.fernandez@unican.es](mailto:jm.fernandez@unican.es) (mailto:jm.fernandez@unican.es)



**IGNACIO LLORENTE, PH.D.**

Universidad de Cantabria  
39005 Santander, Cantabria, Spain



**MARÍA ODRIUZOLA**

Universidad de Cantabria  
39005 Santander, Cantabria, Spain

Copyright © 2016–2019 Global Aquaculture Alliance

All rights reserved.