

Commodity Highlight: Fresh-market Cucumbers

Originating in India, cucumbers were brought to North America by Columbus and have been grown in the United States for several centuries. Cucumbers are members of the cucurbit family and are related to gourds, gherkins, pumpkins, squash, and watermelon.

The U.S. produces 3 percent of the world's cucumbers, ranking fourth behind China (62 percent), Turkey, and Iran. Produced year-round, U.S. fresh-market cucumber production reached a record-high in 1999 but has trended lower since. Florida and Georgia are the leading fresh-market cucumber States, each with about 25 percent of the Nation's output during 2001-03.

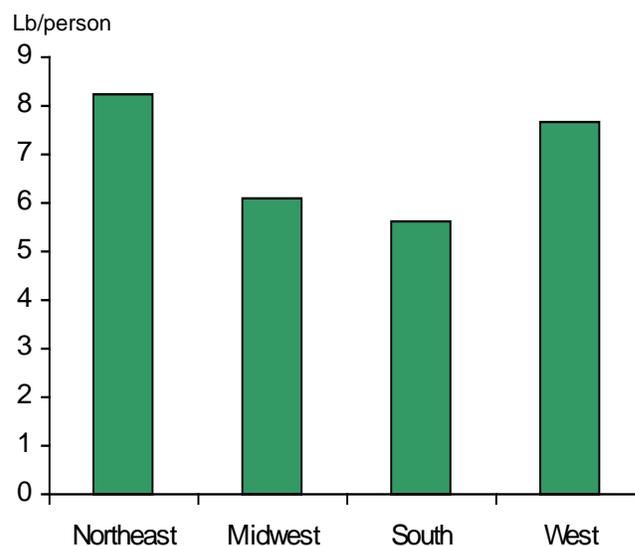
There is limited overlap between the U.S. fresh and processing cucumber industries because of differences in varieties and methods of production and marketing. Fresh-market cucumbers are hand harvested, while many pickling cucumbers are harvested by machine.

Fresh prices are generally higher January through April (because of limited domestic supplies and higher production costs) and lowest in June when supplies are available from many areas. The farm price (f.o.b. shipping-point) generally accounts for about 25 percent of the retail value for fresh cucumbers.

Imports are strongest January and February when U.S. production is limited by cool weather and weakest in summer during the height of the domestic season. Imports accounted for 45 percent of U.S. fresh cucumber consumption during 2001-03, up from 38 percent in the 1990s and 37 percent in the 1980s. In 2003, the majority of imports came from Mexico (86 percent) and Canada (9 percent). During 2001-03, about 3 percent of fresh export volume was exported, compared with about 5 percent in both the 1980s and 1990s. Canada takes 98 percent of U.S. fresh cucumber exports.

About 60 percent of cucumber consumption is in fresh form, with the remainder in processed (largely pickled)

Figure 5
U.S. fresh-market cucumbers: Use by region, 2002



Source: Economic Research Service, USDA.

products. Per capita use of all cucumbers has risen during each of the past four decades. Per capita use averaged 10.9 pounds during 2000-03, up from 10.2 in the 1990s, 9.8 in the 1980s, and 8.9 pounds in the 1970s. Fresh-market use has accounted for all the growth over the past 20 years, because pickling use has been on a slow decline since peaking in 1976 at 6.1 pounds. Fresh use reached a record-high 6.8 pounds in 1999, 44 percent higher than 1989. This level was nearly matched in 2002 (6.7 pounds).

According to the USDA 1994-1996 Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals, 85 percent of fresh cucumbers are consumed at home. This may reflect limited uses for fresh cucumbers in fast food establishments and on mainstream restaurant menus.

For the most recent information on cucumbers, see: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/vgs/>

Table 13--U.S. fresh-market cucumbers: Supply, utilization, and price

Period	Supply			Utilization			Season-average price		
	Production 1/	Imports 2/	Total	Exports 2/	Domestic	Per capita use	Current dollars 1/	Constant dollars 3/	
	-- Million pounds --						Pounds	-- \$/cwt --	
1970-79	499.7	205.1	704.8	29.6	675.2	3.13	9.88	25.07	
1980-89	735.7	394.1	1,129.8	60.8	1,069.0	4.49	14.30	20.03	
1990-99	996.2	566.0	1,562.2	72.7	1,489.5	5.60	18.02	18.69	
2000-02	1,104.0	806.9	1,910.9	58.0	1,852.9	6.49	19.43	17.84	
2003	1,011.3	866.0	1,877.3	47.6	1,829.7	6.27	19.50	17.19	
2004 f	1,080.0	885.0	1,965.0	57.0	1,908.0	6.47	--	--	

-- = Not available. f = ERS forecast. 1/ Source: National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA. 2/ Source: Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce. For 1978-89, exports were adjusted by ERS using Canadian import data. 3/ Constant dollar prices were calculated using the GDP deflator, 1996=100.