Global fresh sweet cherry update 2026

Production adapts as the global cherry market enters a transition phase

May 2026

Rabobank

Executive summary

Global supply adjustment

The global sweet cherry market entered a clear adjustment phase in 2025/26. Severe weather events in Turkey and parts of Europe sharply reduced Northern Hemisphere production, tightening summer availability and shifting global supply balances. At the same time, Southern Hemisphere exports declined for the first time in eight seasons, mainly due to lower shipments from Chile. These disruptions highlighted the growing impact of climate volatility on production reliability and reinforced the need to build greater resilience across producing regions.

Chilean production

Chile, the world's leading sweet cherry exporter, is transitioning from a period of rapid expansion to one of slower growth and operational optimization. For the second consecutive season, grower returns failed to recover despite lower volumes, intensifying concerns about profitability. Planted area has likely peaked, with higher rates of orchard removal expected going forward. While total production is likely to continue rising in the short term as young orchards mature, the industry is entering a transition phase centered on improving yields, consolidating varieties, controlling costs, and increasing operational efficiency.

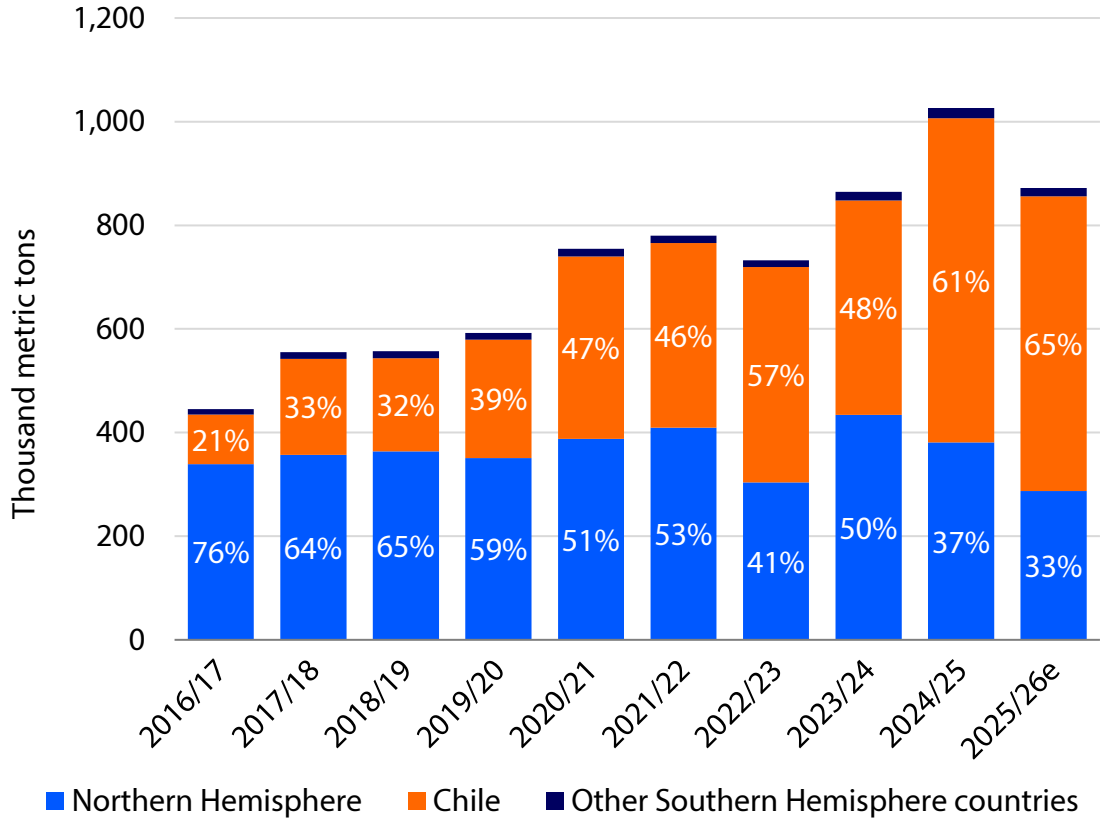
China and demand

China has become a more mature and demand-driven cherry market, with structurally higher price sensitivity. Earlier arrivals, higher maritime volumes, and shifting consumer behavior weakened the traditional Chinese New Year price premium in the 2025/26 season. Consumption is increasingly driven by personal use rather than gifting, with a stronger emphasis on value for money and consistent quality. Premium segments still exist, but they are limited to top-quality fruit, larger sizes, and well-timed arrivals. This puts greater importance on operational execution (processing and logistics) and market diversification for exporters. The demand in the rest of the world is concentrated at the northern hemisphere summer season, providing opportunities for the Chilean supply to continue its market diversification, mainly at the US and Europe. As the price premium offered by China in the previous winter seasons is no longer there, we can expect further efforts by Chile in these markets.

Global trade

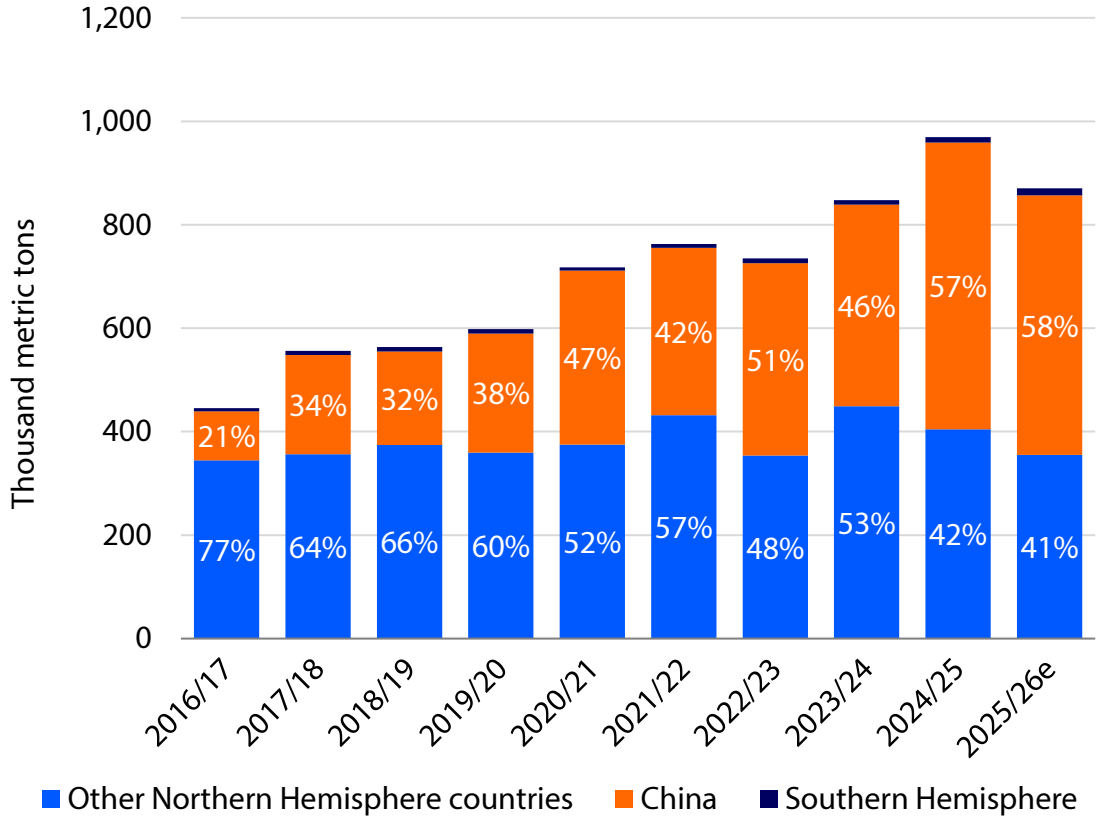
Significant adjustment in 2025/26 due to reduced production in Chile and Turkey

Figure 1: Global sweet cherry exports, 2016/17-2025/26e



Note: *Northern Hemisphere seasons are labeled by their starting year on the x-axis.*
Source: *Trade Map, UN Comtrade, GATS USDA, ODEPA, Senasa, Eurostat, RaboResearch 2026*

Figure 2: Global sweet cherry imports, 2016/17-2025/26e



Note: *Northern Hemisphere seasons are labeled by their starting year on the x-axis.*
Source: *Trade Map, GACC, UN Comtrade, Eurostat, RaboResearch 2026*

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Northern Hemisphere

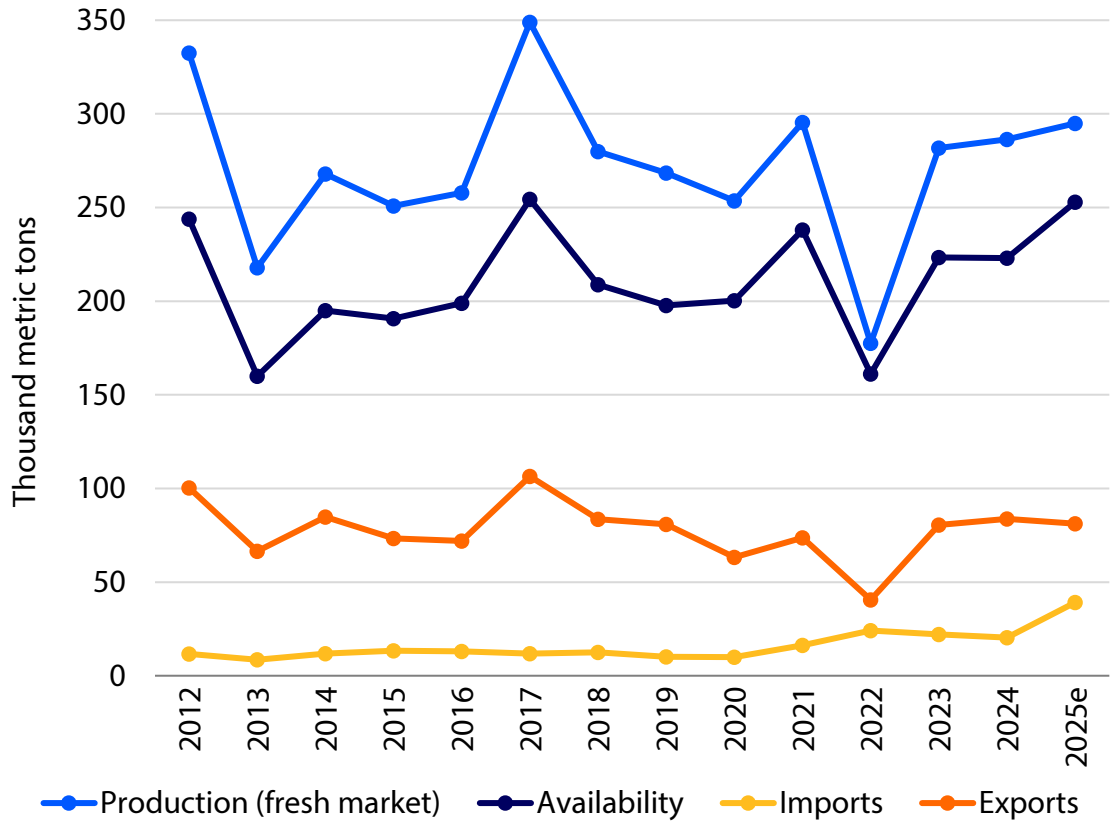
Strong campaign in the US, driven by a surge in imports

In 2025, the US recorded the second-highest availability level of the decade (see figure 3), supported by higher domestic production and a 93% surge in imports. Exports remained stable for the third consecutive year, although their composition shifted significantly compared to 2024. We expect higher but controlled imports in the coming seasons.

Frosts in Poland, Greece, Bulgaria, and Italy led to the lowest production in the EU since 2013. Combined with reduced imports from Turkey, this resulted in the lowest availability in 13 years (see figure 4).

Turkey experienced one of the worst weather events in history. Pre-harvest frosts affected not only cherries but a wide range of fruit crops. According to USDA data, sweet and sour cherry production fell by 57% (see figure 5), while exports were down 90%. The sharp decline in Turkish cherry production allowed China to become the world's largest cherry producer in 2025, reaching 850,000 metric tons.

Figure 3: Main US sweet cherry statistics, 2012-2025e



Source: USDA, RaboResearch 2026

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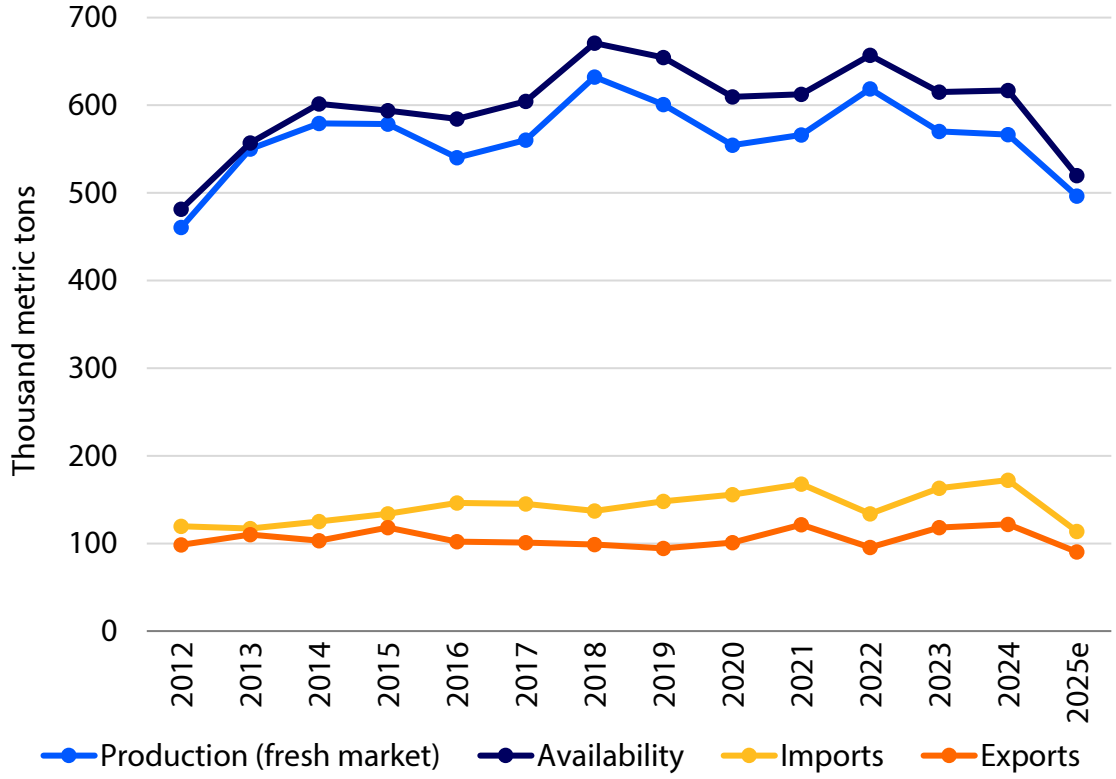
Northern Hemisphere

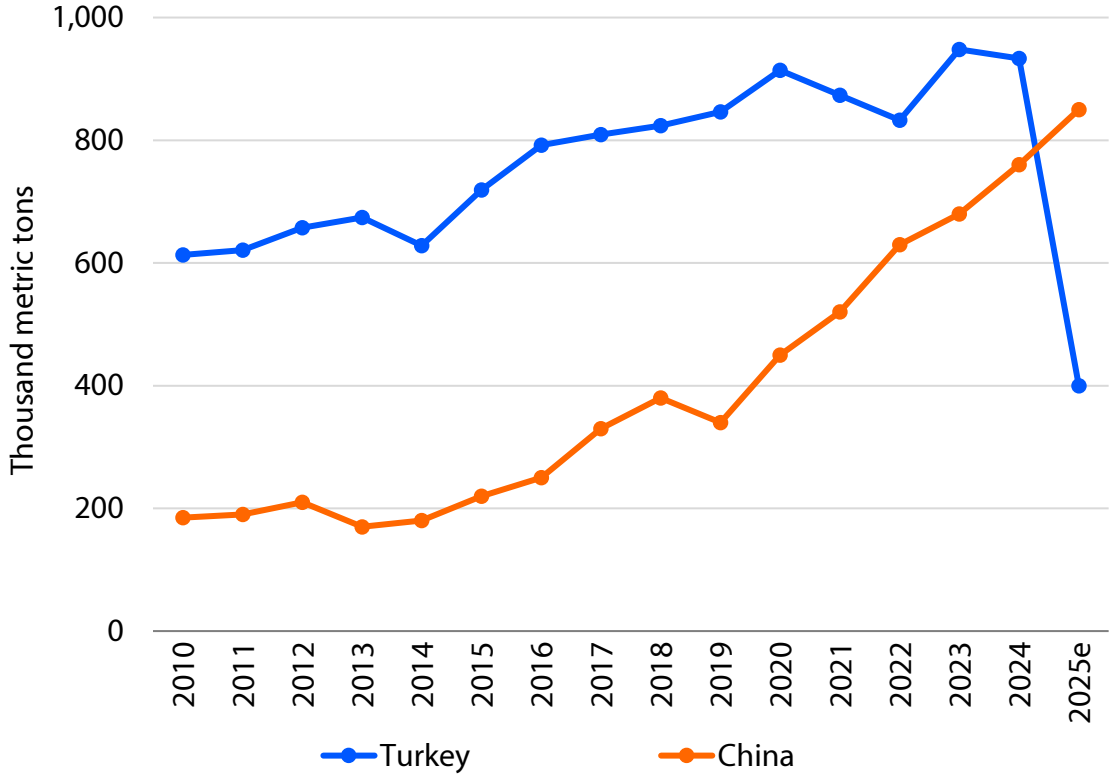
Weather events affected the production in Turkey and Europe

Figure 4: Main EU-27+UK sweet cherry statistics, 2012-2025e



Source: Eurostat, Defra, HM Revenue & Customs, RaboResearch 2026

Figure 5: Sweet and sour cherry production in Turkey and China, 2010-2025e



Source: USDA, Tüik, RaboResearch 2026

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Southern Hemisphere

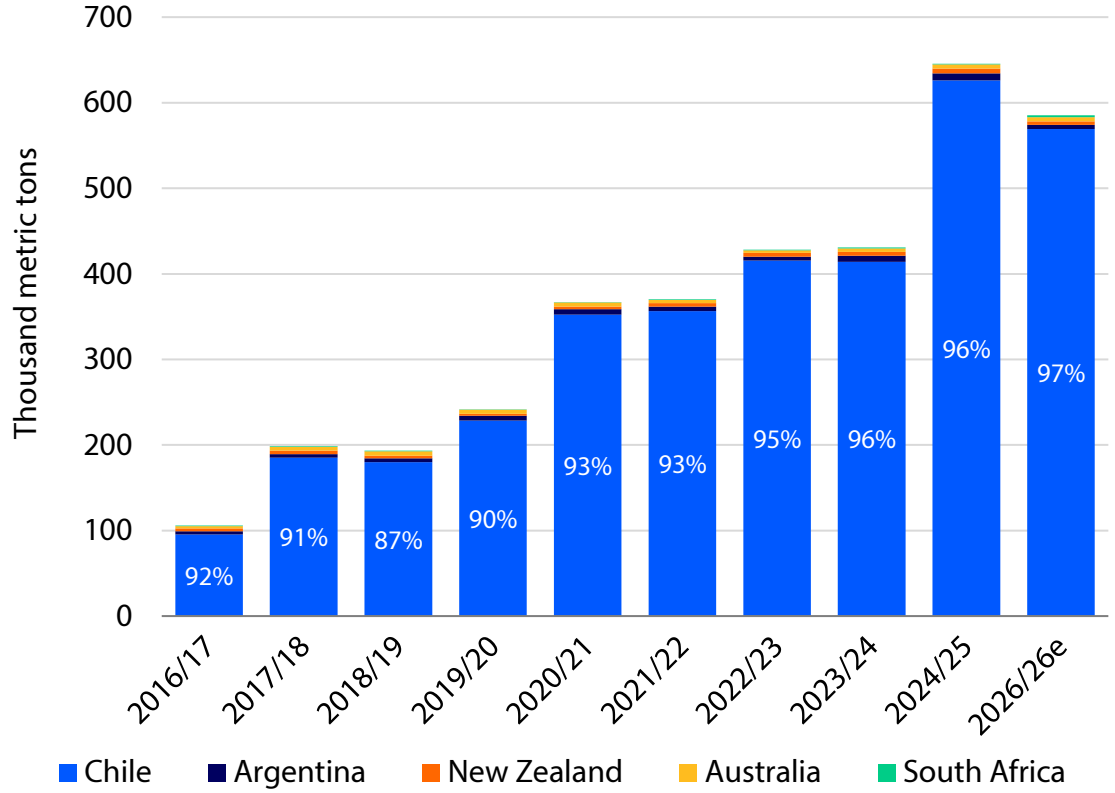
A stable outlook for counter-seasonal supply

In the 2025/26 season, Southern Hemisphere sweet cherry exports declined for the first time in eight seasons (-9%). This drop was driven by significantly lower shipments from Chile (-9%), Argentina (-39%), and New Zealand (-32%) (see figure 6). In contrast, exports from Australia increased moderately (+11%), while South Africa reached record export volumes, rising from 730 metric tons to over 2,000 metric tons.

Chile is expected to remain the leading supplier in the Southern Hemisphere, with export volumes projected to grow in the coming seasons as newly planted areas reach the productive stage. In other countries, however, different constraints (such as weather and rising input and labor costs) will limit growth.

Despite ongoing efforts in recent years to trial different varieties and growing locations, there is still no official confirmation that Peru will enter the sweet cherry export business in the short term.

Figure 6: Southern Hemisphere sweet cherry exports, 2016/17–2025/26e



Source: *ODEPA, Senasa, SARS, Trade Map, RaboResearch 2026*

Chile

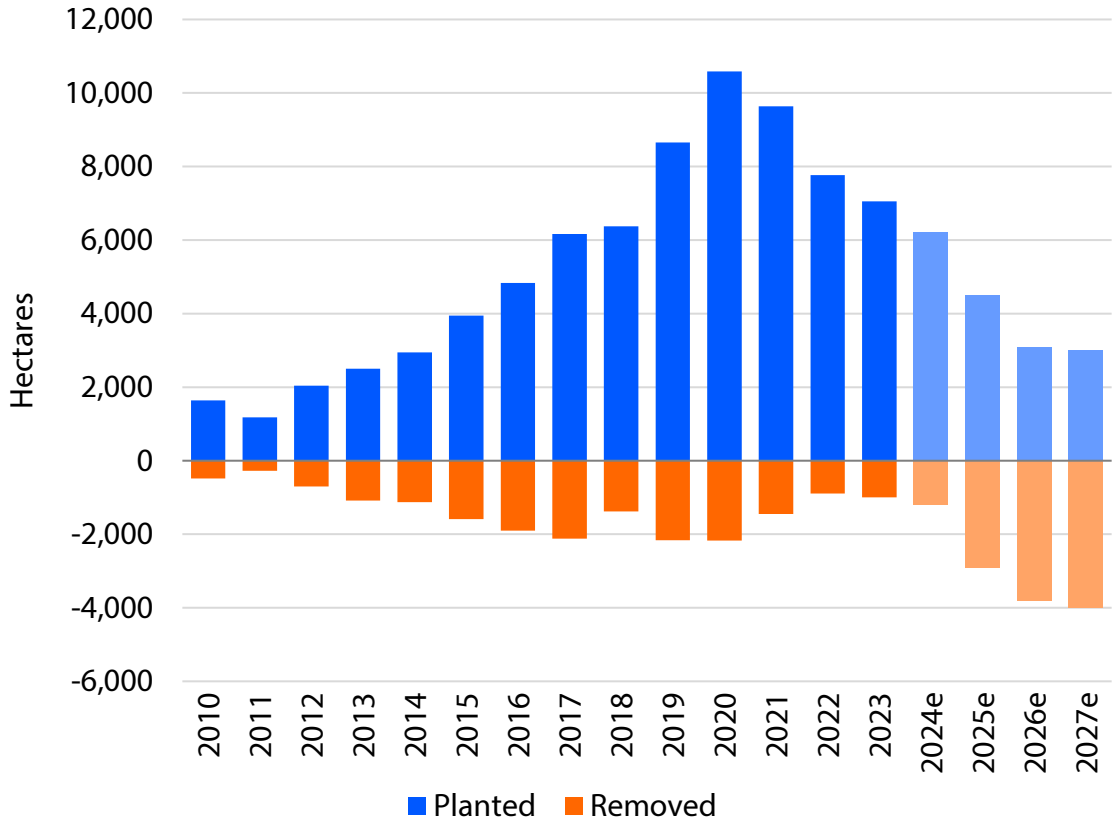
The start of a new lower-growth phase

Chile closed the 2025/26 cherry season with more questions than answers. For the second consecutive year, wholesale prices in China, and therefore grower returns, remained well below the average of the previous ten seasons, raising concerns about the profitability of the business for many producers.

After peaking in 2020, new plantings have steadily declined (see figure 7). The poor results of the 2025/26 season are likely to further slow investment in new projects and increase the uprooting of less productive orchards, suggesting that Chile's total planted area may have peaked in 2025 (see figure 8).

Production and exports are expected to continue growing in the short term as new orchards enter the productive stage. However, this growth will be concentrated in the early and mid-season window, largely driven by the Santina and Lapins varieties (see figure 9).

Figure 7: Chile sweet cherry area dynamics, 2010-2026e

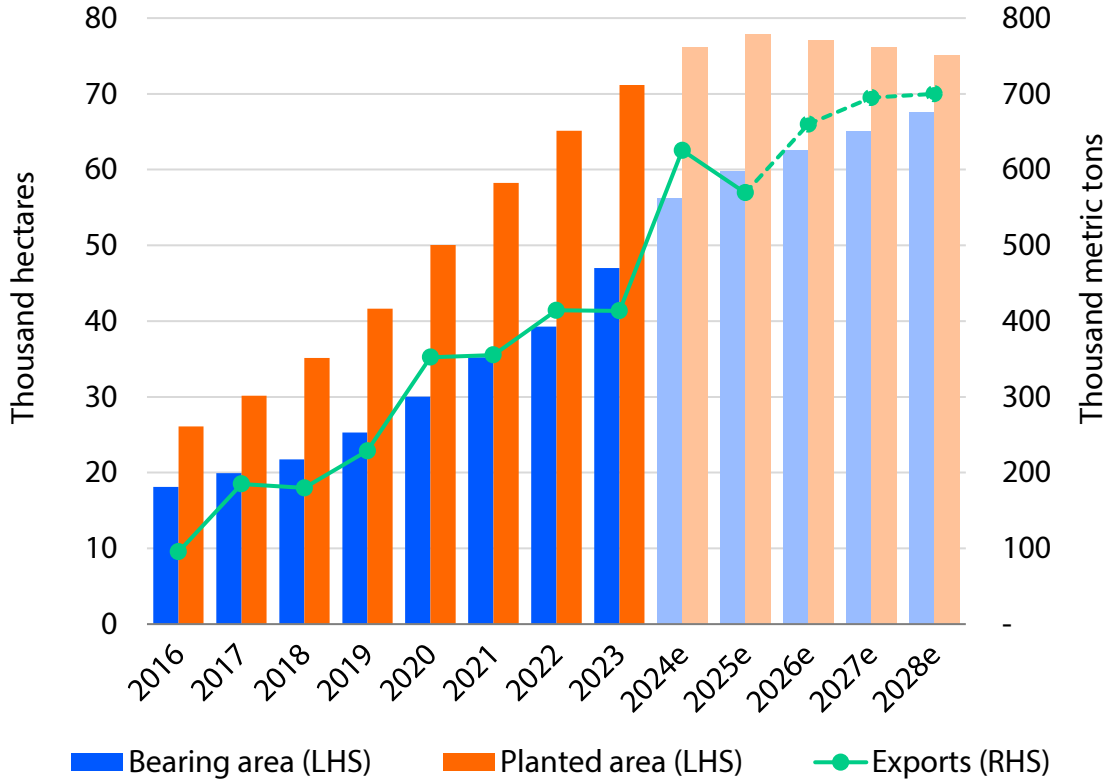


Source: *Estimated by RaboResearch based on data of CIREN-ODEPA, 2026*

Chile

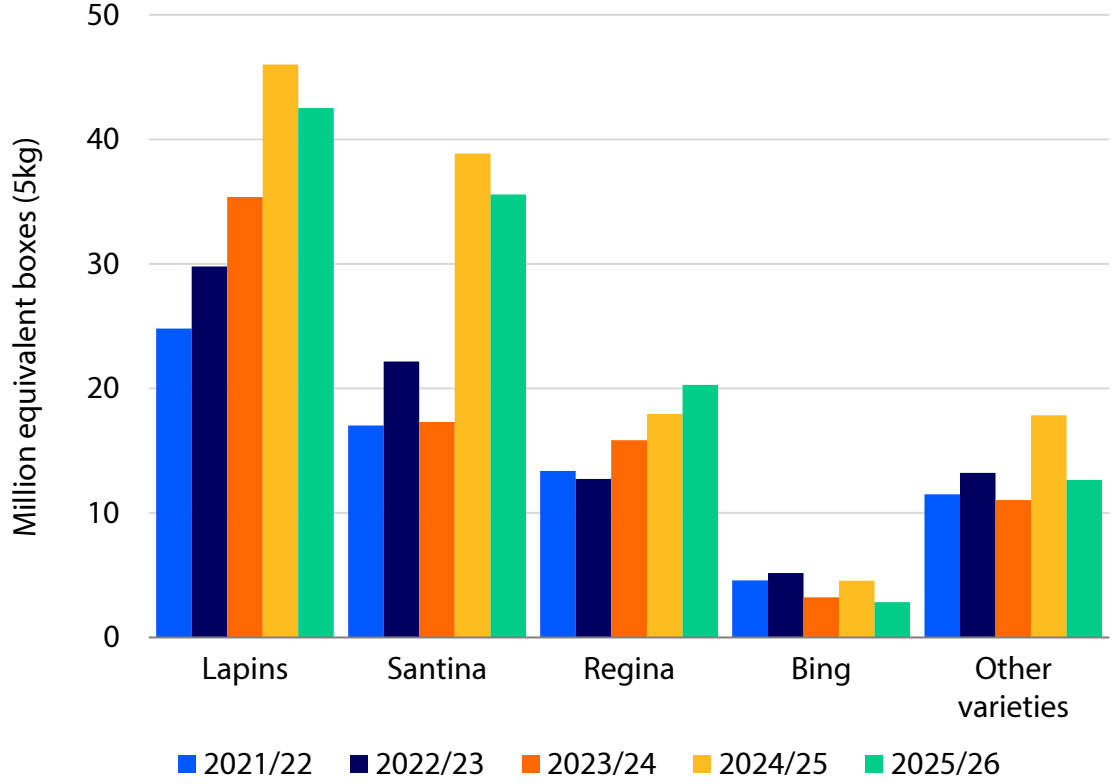
Sweet cherry exports to stabilize before the end of the decade

Figure 8: Main Chilean sweet cherry production statistics, 2016-2028e



Source: CIREN-ODEPA, RaboResearch 2026

Figure 9: Chilean sweet cherry exports by variety, 2021/22-2025/26



Source: Chile Customs, RaboResearch 2026

A breaking point for the Chilean cherry industry?

Production adjustments

- The Chilean sweet cherry industry is entering a transition period, as it rebalances the key drivers of profitability, including yields, quality, packing formats, and cost management. At the same time, the industry is expected to accelerate the removal of less productive orchards and shift production toward more reliable, consolidated varieties.
- Chilean sweet cherry production is projected to continue growing through the end of the decade, driven by new plantings coming into maturity. However, the pace of growth will depend on the balance between the rate of uprooting and the addition of new plantings to the production base.
- We expect increased competition in the early season. Santina will remain the dominant early variety, but new proprietary varieties are also entering this window, adding to the early-season volumes. This increase in early-season supply is expected to put more pressure on sales in the weeks leading up to the Chinese New Year.

Industry reconfiguration

- The transition period expected in the cherry sector is not new to Chile's fresh fruit export industry. Other products, including kiwifruit, apples, grapes, peaches, and walnuts, are undergoing similar reconfigurations, although each is at a different stage. The industry is shifting from a focus on "producing more" (in some cases becoming global export leaders), to "producing more with less," and ultimately to "producing better with less."
- The reconfiguration in the Chilean sweet cherry industry is likely to require continued investment to improve productivity, in the field but also in packing facilities and logistic operations. Opportunities for improvement will vary across industry participants.
- According to customs data, there were up to 334 export companies in the 2025/26 season, with one-third shipping less than 100 metric tons. We expect the number of exporters to decline in the coming seasons, particularly among smaller players, but also within the mid-sized segment.

What comes next in the Chinese market?

Demand and pricing dynamics

- China's low pricing environment for sweet cherries has become structural. As consumers become more familiar with product quality, and more focused on value for money, their expectations make it harder to sustain historical price premiums for imported fruit. Since early 2025, intensified competition among e-commerce platforms and subsidies in food delivery have further reinforced this trend.
- Chinese consumers – now more accustomed to high-quality products at low prices – are becoming more sceptical of premium pricing, especially when supply is abundant and/or quality is inconsistent, as seen in recent seasons in the blueberry and grape categories. At the same time, e-commerce platforms have expanded direct sourcing from origin, reducing intermediaries and placing additional downward pressure on prices for Chilean cherries.

Structural shifts in consumption

- Consumer behavior is also undergoing a structural shift. Demand has gradually shifted from gifting toward personal consumption, particularly among younger consumers. While consumers now show a preference for mid-tier cherries, premium segments still remain, but are limited to the highest-quality fruit – typically premium varieties shipped by air. More broadly, China's market has shifted from supply-driven to demand-driven, with consumers prioritizing quality, health benefits, convenience, and experience over brand origin.
- At the same time, cherry consumption occasions are expanding to include products such as beverages, desserts, and processed foods. However, these applications rely mainly on lower-grade fruit, supporting volumes but offering limited upside for prices. In addition, improvement in the quality and availability of domestic cherries, and broader spending across fruit categories, are further eroding the price premiums for imported cherries.

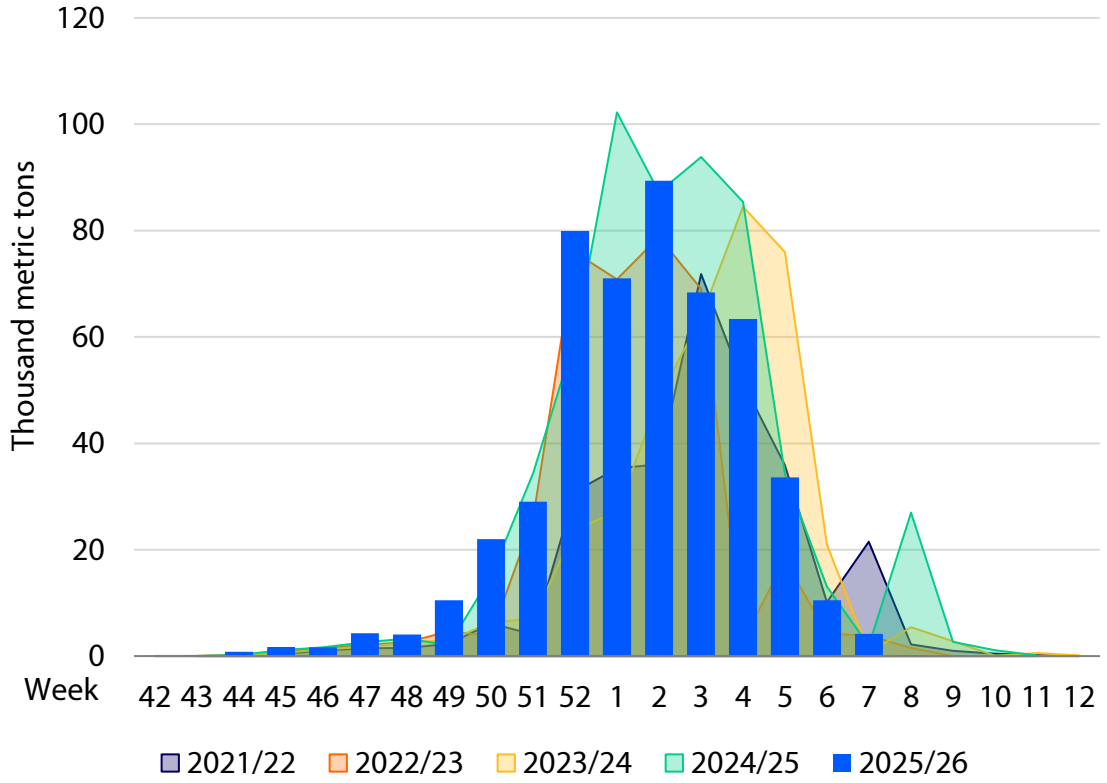
China

A more mature market, with increased early-season supply putting pressure on prices

Despite a 9% lower total volume, the 2025/26 season was one of the earliest on record. Arrivals accelerated sharply in the opening weeks and reached levels similar to – or even higher than –previous seasons by early December (see figure 10).

- The early arrivals, combined with one of the latest Chinese New Year dates in recent years, severely affected the "exclusivity" factor that had supported high prices in past seasons. Airfreight shipments arrived one week early (see figure 11), affecting the initial phase of the season, while total arrivals led to an oversupplied market early on (see figure 12).
- Prices toward the end of the 2025/26 season were affected by volumes that had been stored longer than usual (at the expense of quality) in anticipation of a price recovery that only materialized in the final week of the season (see figure 13).
- The three main varieties (Santina, Lapins and Regina) are now well consolidated across different stages of the season, with clear difference in pricing. A similar pattern is observed in terms of size (see figures 14 and 15).

Figure 10: Weekly arrivals of Chilean sweet cherries in China, last five seasons

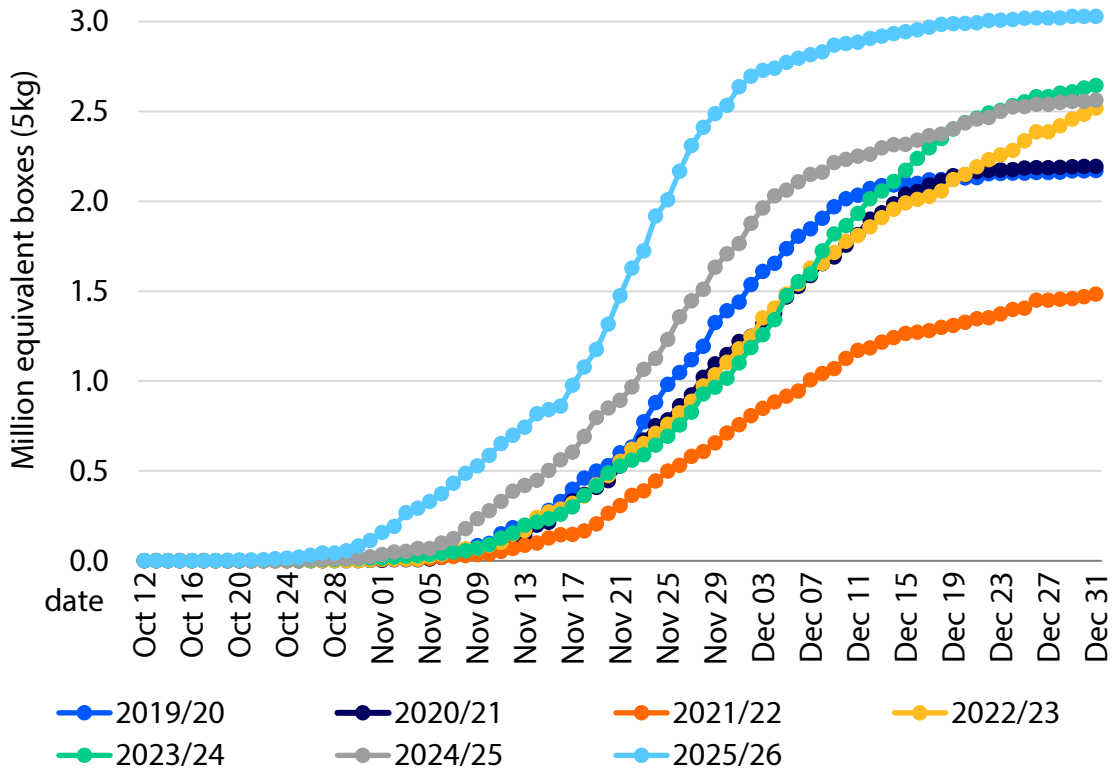


Source: *Chile Customs, RaboResearch 2026*

China

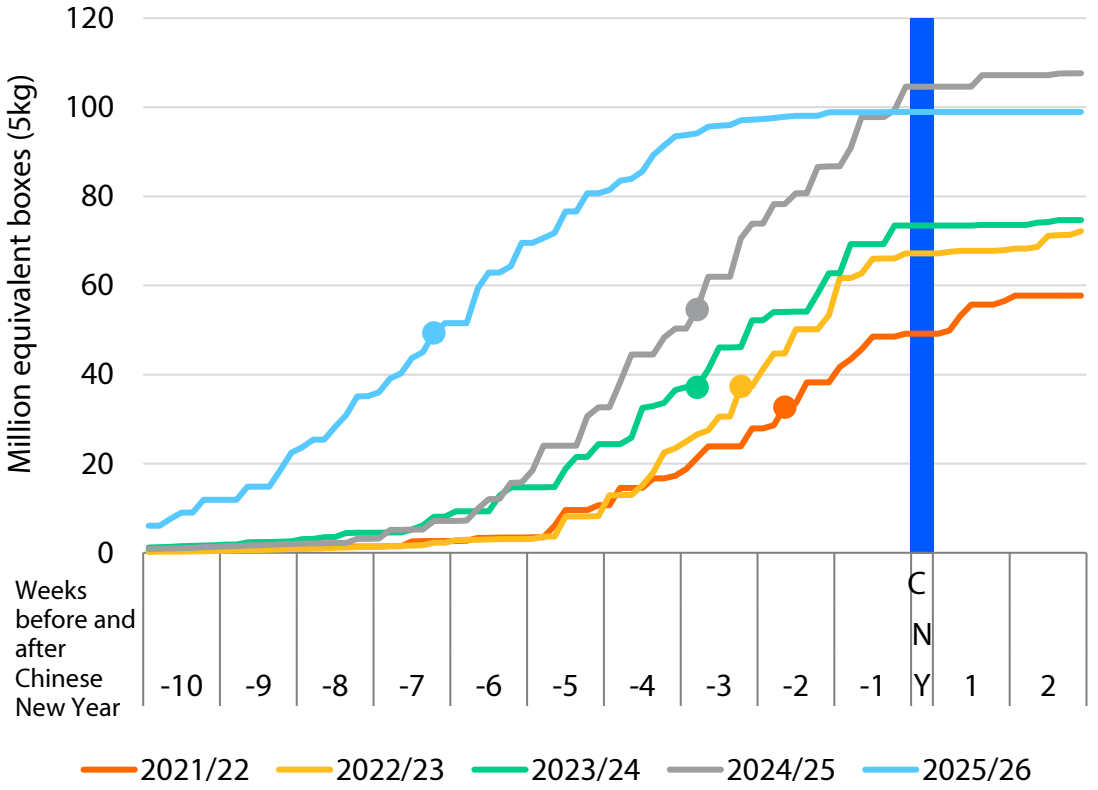
Early arrivals erased the exclusivity of cherries before the Chinese New Year

Figure 11: Cumulative daily airfreight arrivals of Chilean sweet cherries in China (through December 31)



Note: Airfreight arrivals are estimated as the reported shipping date plus two days.
Source: Chile Customs, RaboResearch 2026.

Figure 12: Cumulative arrivals of Chilean sweet cherries in China, last five seasons



Note: The dot indicates when more than 50% of total volume had arrived. CNY: Chinese new year.
Source: Chile Customs, RaboResearch 2026

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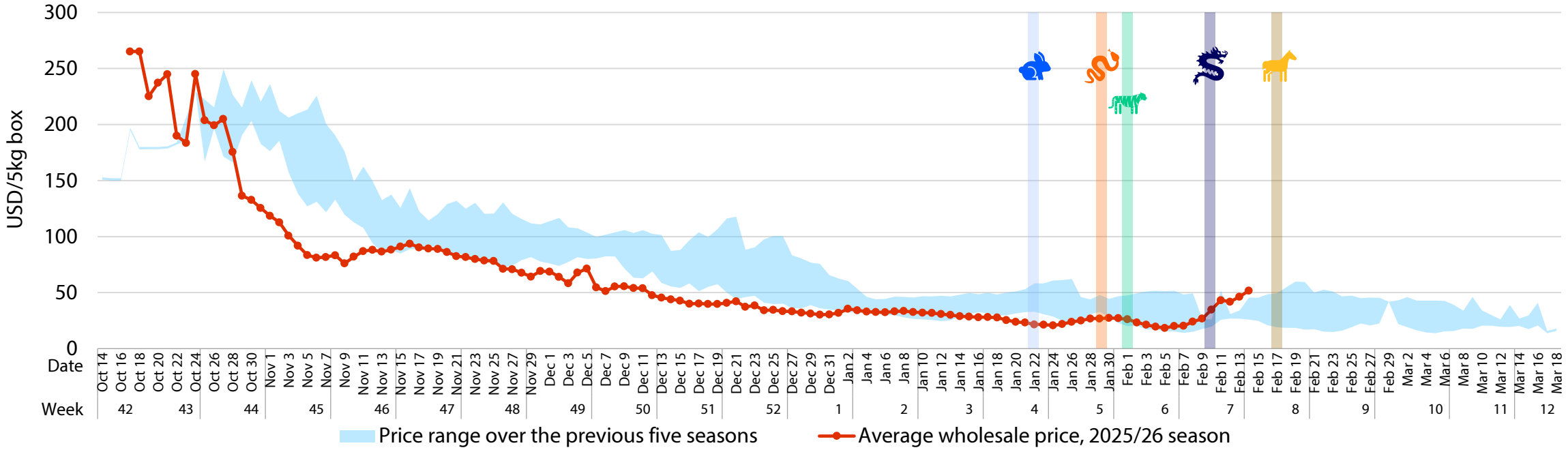
Figure 13: Average daily wholesale prices of Chilean sweet cherries in China, last six seasons

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Initial pallets (airfreight only)	Higher airfreight and transition to early maritime	5-6 weeks before Chinese New Year (maritime shipments only)	After Chinese New Year (latest volumes on sale)
Share of volume: 0.5% Price level: Very high	Share of volume: 11% Price level: High	Share of volume: 85% Price level: Around average	Share of volume: 3.5% Price level: Volatile



Chinese New Year guide

Season	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Date	February 1	January 22	February 10	January 29	February 17
Animal	Tiger	Rabbit	Dragon	Snake	Horse

Note: *The length of each stage is variable, subject to the volume that arrives and date of the Chinese New Year. Average daily prices in the Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Jiaxing wholesale markets. All sizes included; Bicolor varieties (labeled as Rainier, Tip Top, Skylar Rae) not included.*
Source: *Wholesale market reports, RaboResearch 2026*

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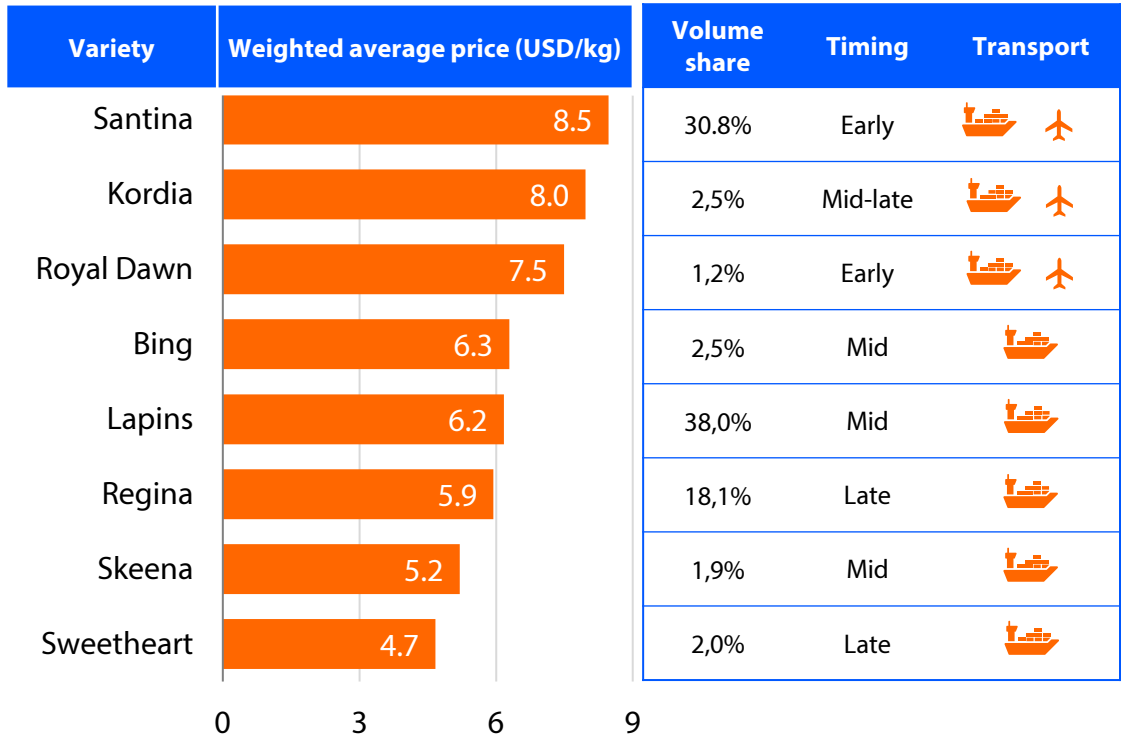
China

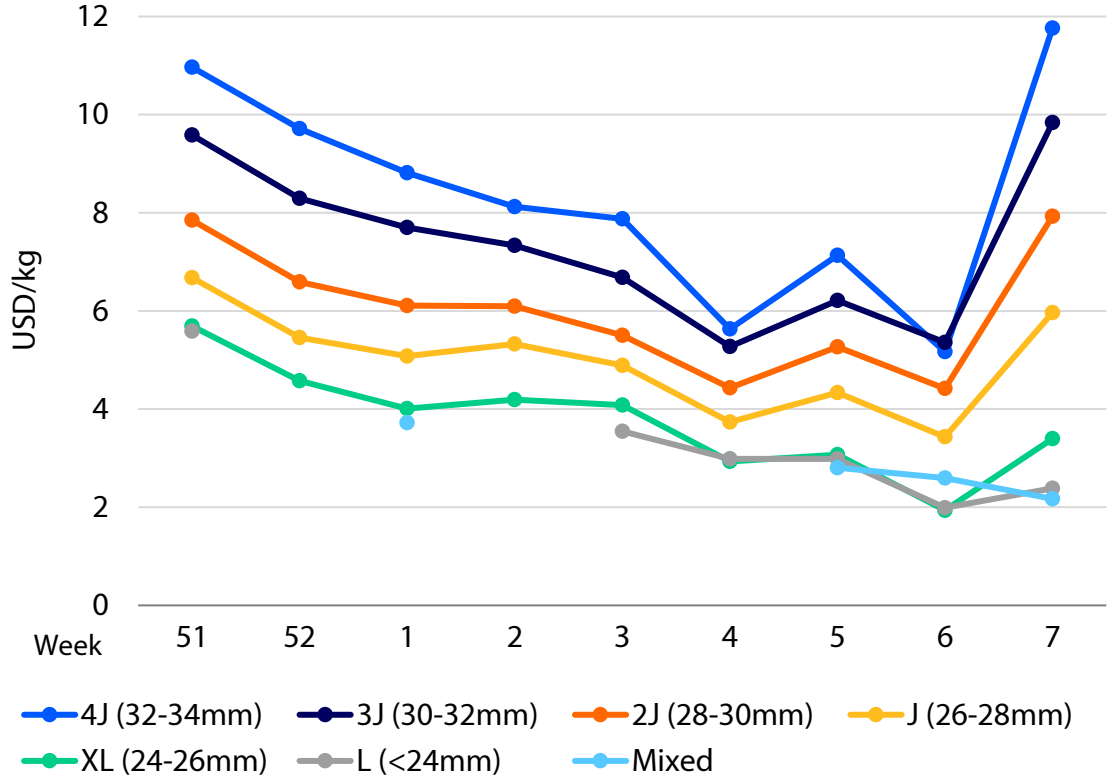
Variety and size are key determinants of seasonal performance

Figure 14: Weighted average wholesale prices for select Chilean sweet cherry varieties in China, 2025/26



Note: *Prices include sizes J (26mm) and above. Varieties with a volume share below 1% are excluded.*
Source: *Market reports, Chile Customs, RaboResearch 2026*

Figure 15: Average wholesale prices of Chilean sweet cherries in China by size, 2025/26



Note: *Varieties included: Santina, Lapins, and Regina.*
Source: *Market reports, RaboResearch 2026*

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Market diversification for Chile

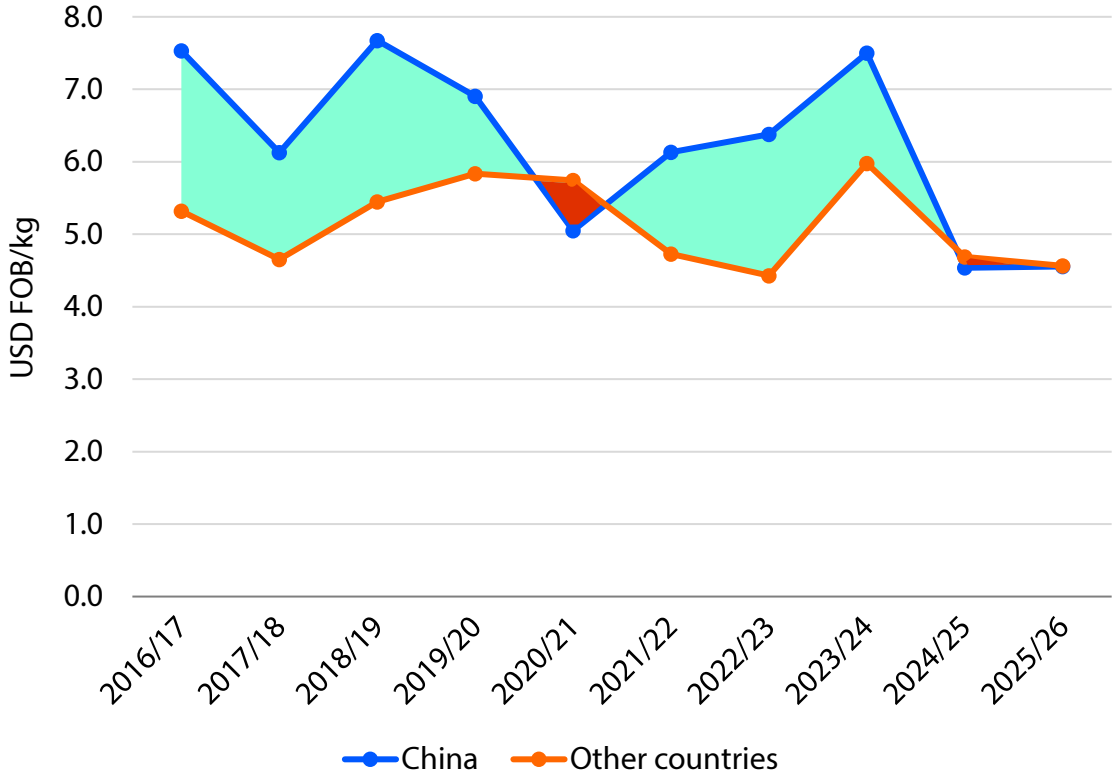
Other destinations are becoming more competitive, but controlled growth remains key

One of the key drivers behind Chile's cherry planting boom was the price premium historically paid by Chinese consumers compared to other markets. Since the first exports in 1996/97, China has consistently delivered higher FOB unit values than the rest of the world combined – by an average of USD 1.5 per kg, or around 33% – with the sole exception of the 2020/21 season.

However, this price advantage has disappeared over the past two seasons (see figure 16). As a result, China has become a relatively less attractive destination for Chilean exporters, increasing the strategic importance of market diversification.

Several destinations now offer similar or even higher export unit values than China, including markets across Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Moreover, nearby markets with lower price levels may still be attractive due to logistical advantages. That said, expansion into alternative destinations will need to be gradual and carefully managed, with a strong focus on quality, logistics, transit times, and cold-chain performance.

Figure 16: Export unit values of Chilean sweet cherries to China and other destinations, 2016/17-2025/26



Note: *China includes Hong Kong. Values for the 2025/26 season are subject to change.*
Source: *ODEPA, RaboResearch 2026*

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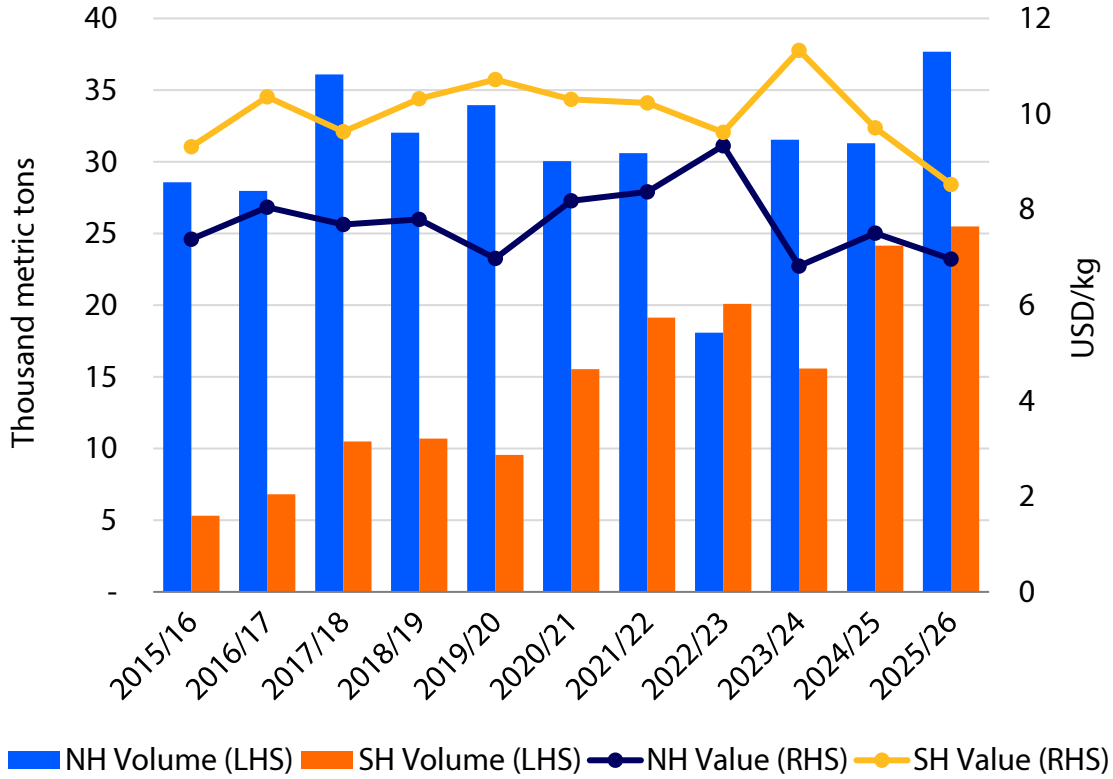
Other Asian markets

Other Asian markets offer opportunities for Chile to diversify its exports

Other Asian countries offer attractive alternatives for market diversification. A decade ago, imports in these countries were dominated by Northern Hemisphere supply (84%), mainly from the US and Canada. More recently, total imports have reached 64,000 metric tons, almost double the volume of a decade ago, with the Southern Hemisphere now accounting for around 40% of arrivals (see figure 17). These shipments also capture higher unit values, driven by premium-priced cherries from Australia and New Zealand. Overall supply remains highly seasonal, with clear peaks throughout the year (see figure 18).

In 2025, Taiwan emerged as the second-largest sweet cherry importer after China, overtaking South Korea (see figure 19). With the exception of Japan, most Asian markets have recorded double-digit compound annual growth rates in cherry imports over the past decade. Although Cambodia and Indonesia still import less than 500 metric tons per year, the region as a whole is becoming increasingly important in the global demand landscape.

Figure 17: Sweet cherry imports in selected Asian countries by hemisphere, 2015/16-2025/26

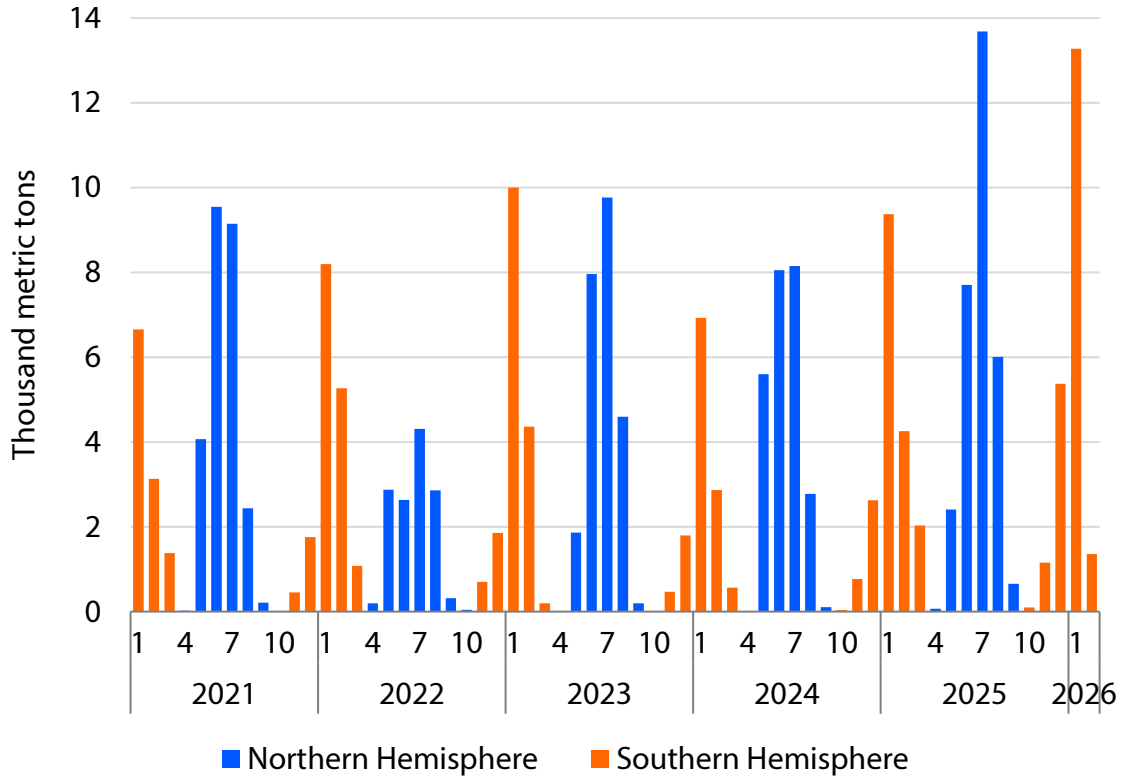


Note: *NH = Northern Hemisphere; SH = Southern Hemisphere. Northern Hemisphere seasons are labeled by their starting year on the x-axis. Countries included are South Korea, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Singapore, Thailand, Taiwan, and Vietnam.*
Source: *Trade Map, RaboResearch 2026*

Other Asian markets

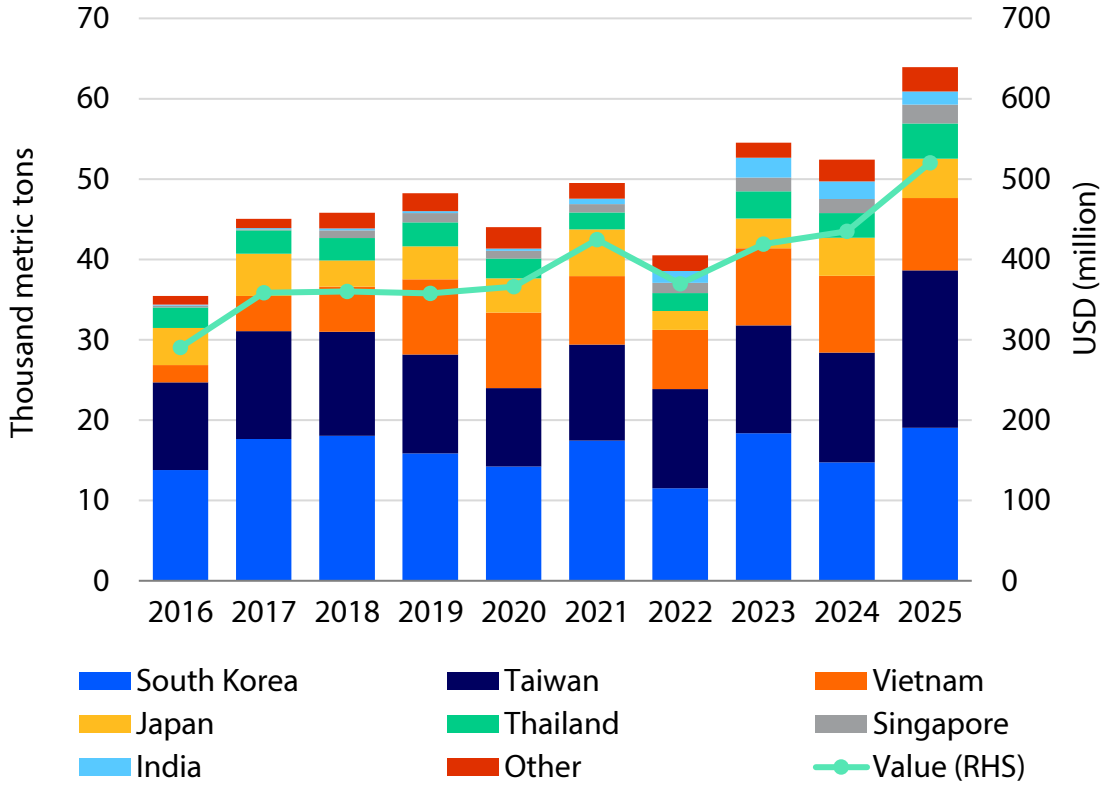
The winter market continues to grow, with quality remaining a key focus

Figure 18: Monthly sweet cherry imports in selected Asian countries, by hemisphere, 2021-2026



Note: *Vietnam data is not included.*
Source: *Trade Map, RaboResearch 2026*

Figure 19: Sweet cherry imports in selected Asian countries, 2016-2025



Source: *Trade Map, RaboResearch 2026*

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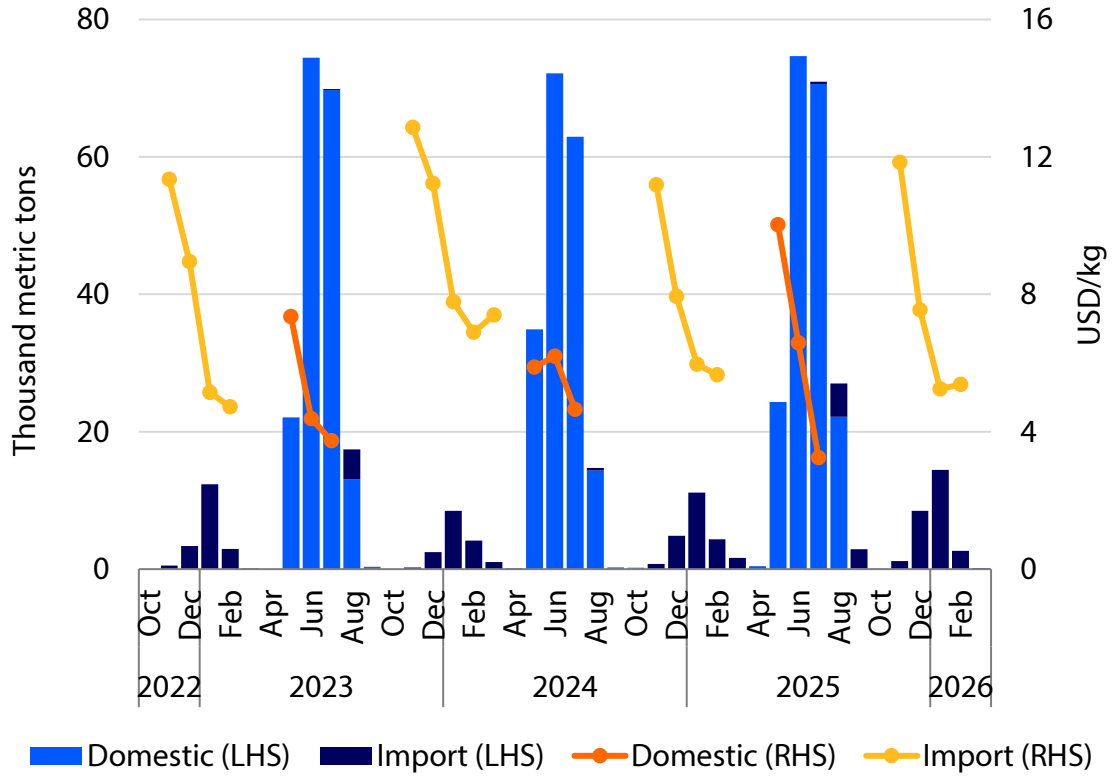
United States and European markets

Growth potential remains in the winter season

Figure 20: Monthly fresh sweet cherry supply and shipping-point prices in the US, 2022-2026



Source: *USDA AMS, RaboResearch 2026*

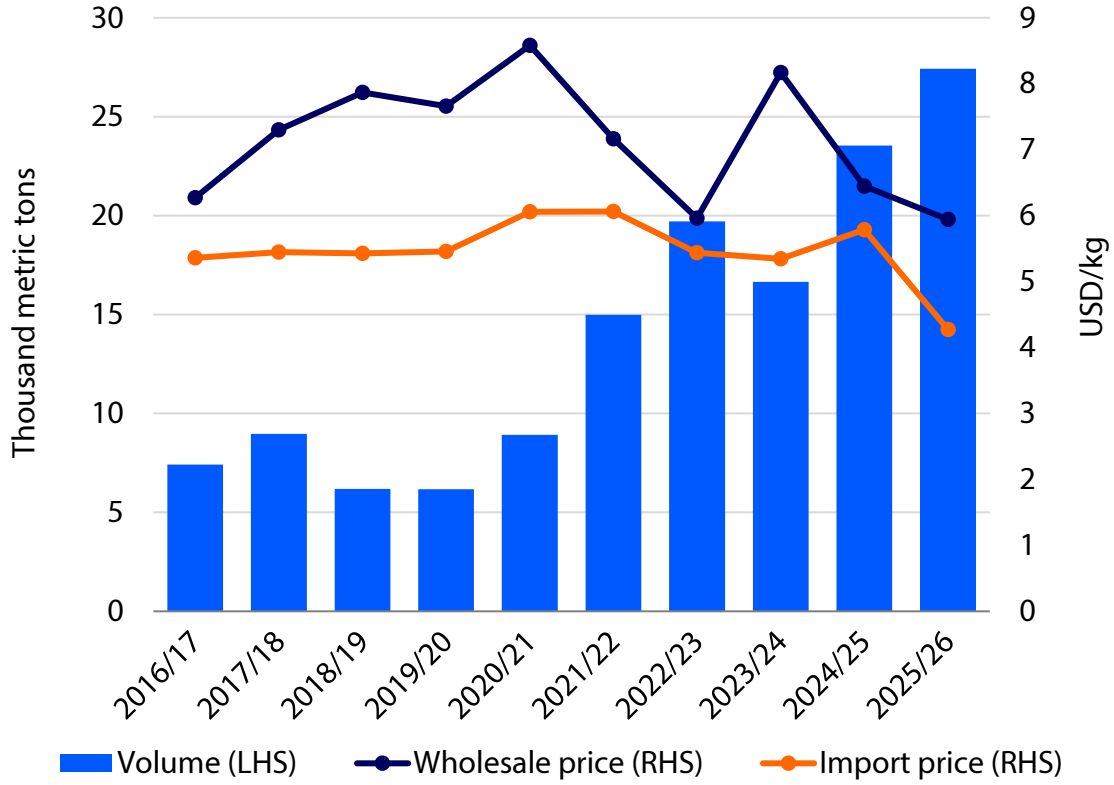
The US fresh sweet cherry market shows two distinct dynamics. During the summer season, dominated by domestic supply, the market is relatively mature, with strong activity in June and July (see figure 20). In 2025, summer availability reached its highest level in four years. In contrast, the winter season is characterized by growing supply, with record volumes and declining prices reflecting increased availability (see figure 21). Despite this, growth has been relatively orderly and is concentrated in larger cherries, which command the best prices in the wholesale market (see figure 22).

We observe a similar pattern in the EU. During the summer season, prices in the French wholesale markets show significant variation by fruit size (see figure 23). In the winter season, Chile, Argentina, and South Africa exported record volumes to the EU, putting downward pressure on wholesale prices in the Dutch market (see figure 24). However, the quality of supply has improved, with a greater share of larger fruit (above 30mm) reported weekly.

United States

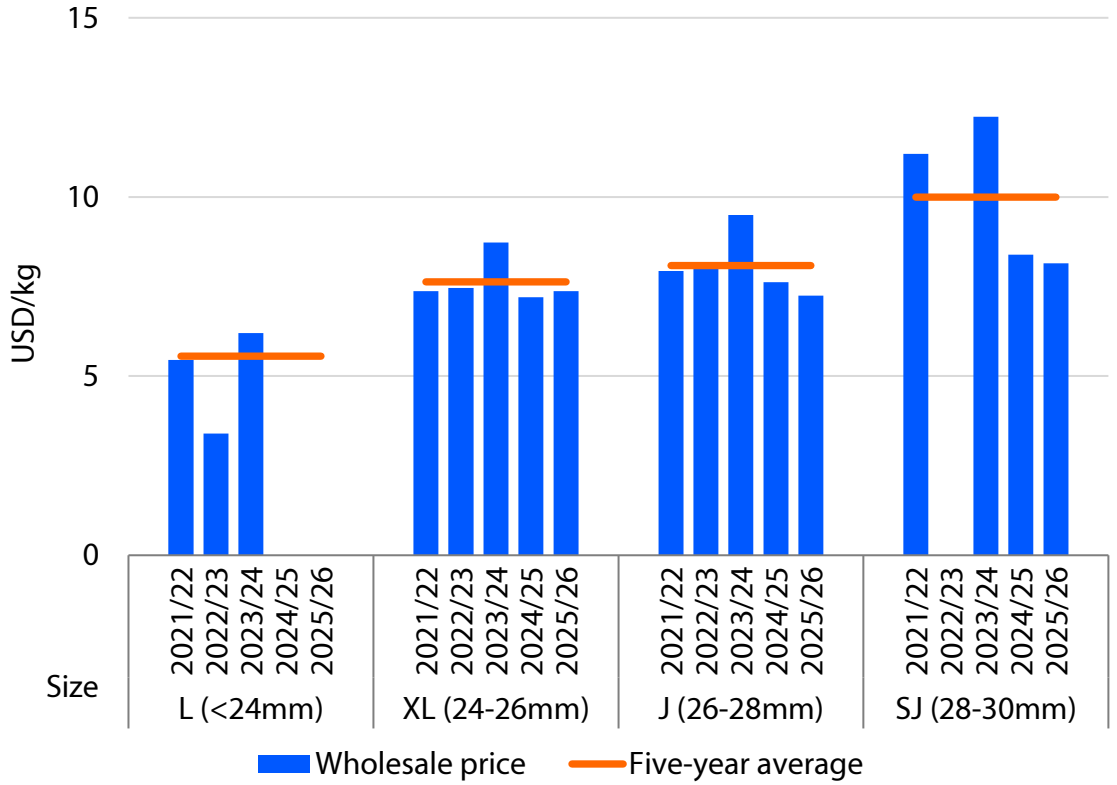
Strong price adjustments due to higher imports from the Southern Hemisphere

Figure 21: Volume and prices of imported sweet cherries in the US during the winter season, 2016/17-2025/26



Note: The winter season refers to imports between October and March.
Source: USDA GATS, USDA AMS, RaboResearch 2026

Figure 22: Average shipping-point prices for Chilean sweet cherries in the US, 2021/22-2025/26



Note: Seasons without bars indicate that data is not available.
Source: AMS-USDA, RaboResearch 2026

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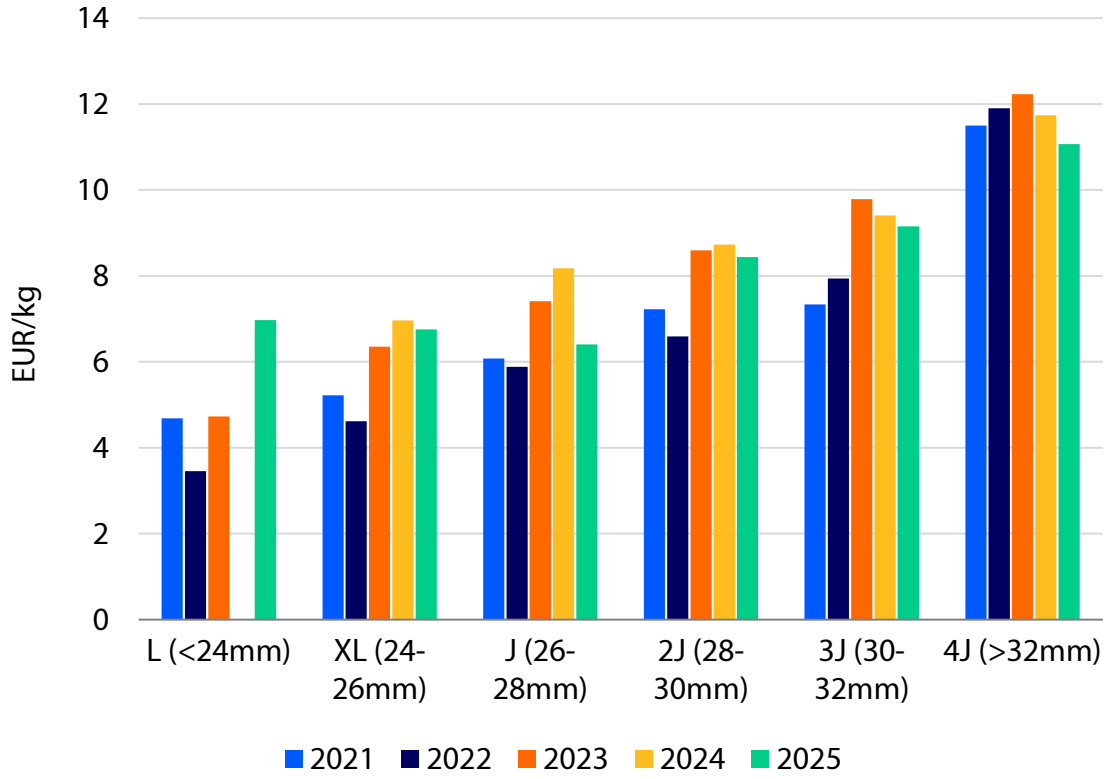
Europe

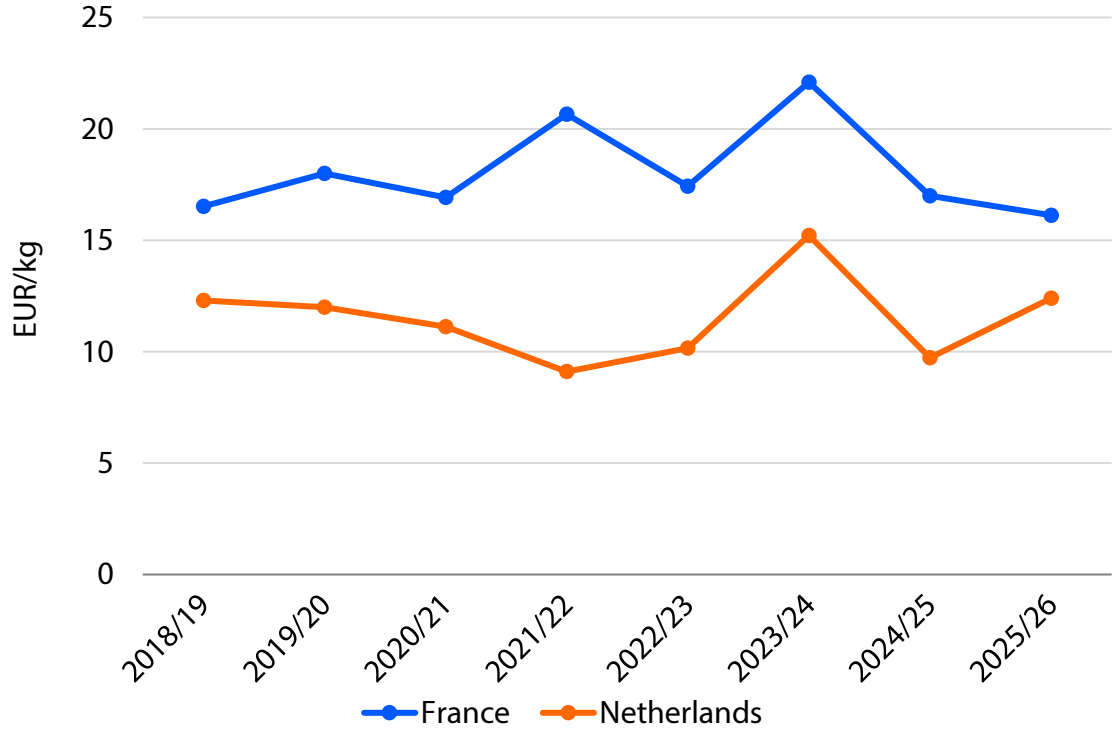
Significant price differences by size in the French market

Figure 23: Average wholesale prices of Northern Hemisphere cherries in France, by size, 2021-2025



Source: RNM, RaboResearch 2026

Figure 24: Average wholesale prices of Southern Hemisphere cherries in the Netherlands and France, 2018/19-2025/26



Note: Prices for the Netherlands refer to the Rotterdam wholesale market
Source: RNM, market reports, RaboResearch 2026

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