Inside Africa's Fastest-Rising Agricultural Export:

A **1.7 Million** Tonne Sesame Market Worth Billions

Sesame seeds come from the sesame plant (Sesamum indicum), one of the earliest oilseed crops cultivated by humans.

They are valued primarily for their exceptionally high oil content (**45–55%**), which is higher than that of many competing oilseeds, as well as for their nutritional density and industrial versatility. Because of this combination, sesame is often referred to as the "queen of oilseeds."

A defining characteristic of sesame is its drought resistance, and its short gestation period. Unlike crops that require intensive irrigation or fertiliser inputs, sesame performs well in semi-arid conditions with limited rainfall.

This makes it particularly suitable for African agro-ecological zones, where climate variability is increasing.

45-55%
Oil based

Across countries such as Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan, and Tanzania, sesame has become a strategic crop for smallholder farmers seeking **cash income, export access, and resilience to climate shocks.**

From a commercial standpoint, sesame's appeal goes beyond agriculture. It is a globally traded commodity, deeply embedded in international food systems and industrial supply chains.

Food and baking

The largest share of sesame consumption is in food. Whole sesame seeds are used in bread, pastries, snacks, and traditional dishes across Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa. Processed forms such as tahini are core ingredients in sauces, spreads, and prepared foods. These uses are culturally ingrained and tied to daily diets, making demand structurally stable.

Edible oil production

Sesame seeds are widely crushed to produce sesame oil, which is prized for its distinctive flavour, high oxidative stability, and long shelf life. Sesame oil is used both as a cooking oil and as a flavouring oil, especially in Asian cuisines. This oil segment drives large-scale industrial demand.

Health foods and supplements

Sesame is rich in calcium, healthy fats, and antioxidants, including sesamin and sesamol. These properties have increased their use in health foods, fortified products, and dietary supplements, particularly in developed markets.

Cosmetics and pharmaceuticals

Sesame oil is used in skincare, hair products, massage oils, and medicinal formulations due to its skin-friendly properties and stability. While smaller in volume, this segment commands higher margins and supports value-added processing.

From a trade lens, sesame stands out because it combines high value, low physical bulk, and good storability, reducing logistics risk and making it ideal for export.

Sesame thrives in tropical and semi-arid climates, where temperatures range between **25–35°C.** A pH between **6.0 and 7.0** is considered suitable. It prefers well-drained soils and moderate rainfall but is uniquely tolerant of rainfall variability. This resilience enables it to outperform many competing crops in regions prone to drought or irregular weather.

As climate risks have increased globally, production has gradually shifted toward Africa, where agroecological conditions align well with sesame's biological strengths.

Global Sesame Production and Market Context

The global sesame market for 2025 was valued at approximately **USD 13.8 billion**

This grew at a compound annual growth rate of **5.8%.** Annual global production is estimated at 6–7 million metric tonnes.

40-45%
global output from Africa

Asia remains the largest producer and consumer, but Africa now accounts for roughly **40–45%** of global output and an even larger share of international sesame trade. This reflects Africa's role as a net export supplier, particularly to Asian and Middle Eastern markets.

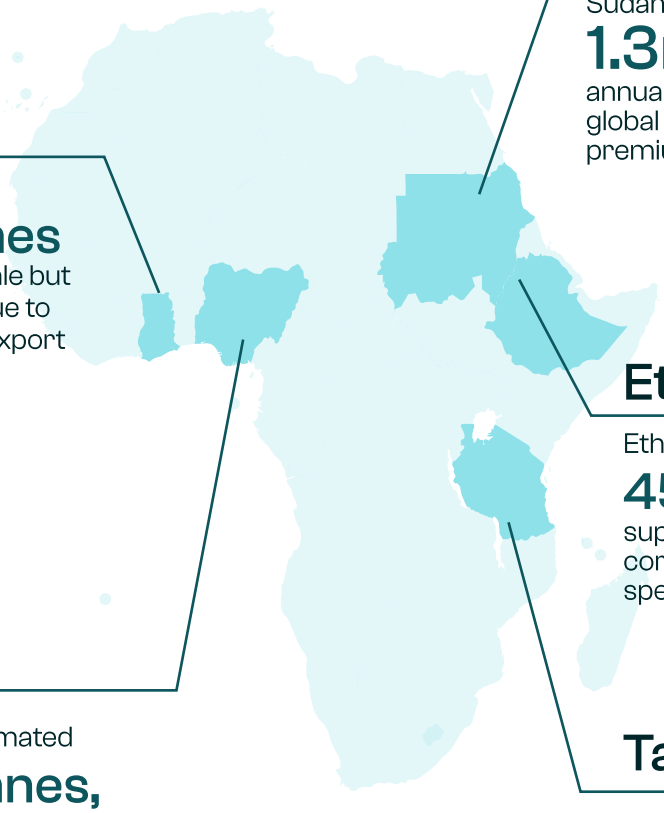
Asia-Pacific accounted for **41.2%** of global sesame consumption in 2024, while Africa is expected to record the fastest consumption growth globally, expanding at **6.9%** CAGR through 2030. This indicates both export strength and rising domestic demand.

Several structural trends support global sesame demand:

- Growing awareness of sesame's health and nutritional benefits
- Expansion of plant-based and vegan diets, where sesame is a key ingredient
- Increased industrial use of processed foods and beverages
- Policy-driven efforts by African governments and institutions to diversify export earnings away from traditional commodities

Major African Sesame-Producing Countries

Africa is one of the world's most important sesame supply regions:



Sudan

Sudan produces an estimated
1.3million tonnes
annually, making it one of the largest global producers, especially known for premium white sesame

Ghana

Ghana produces
45,000 tonnes
annually, on a smaller scale but increasingly attractive due to regulatory stability and export credibility.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia produces about
450,000 tonnes,
supported by established export corridors and strong Asian demand specifically in the Japanese Market

Nigeria

Nigeria produces an estimated
700,000 tonnes,
with rapid growth driven by exports to China, Japan, and Turkey.

Tanzania

Ethiopia produces about
450,000 tonnes,
supported by established export corridors and strong Asian demand specifically in the Japanese Market

Global sesame demand is consumption-driven, not speculative.

Annual demand

6–7M

tonnes

Market value

$7-9B

Africa's share of global exports

45–50%

Annual demand growth

2–3%

Demand growth tracks population growth, urbanisation, and food processing, rather than commodity cycles.

Major Demand Centres

60%+

global sesame imports

Asia

Asia accounts for over **60%** of global sesame imports. China alone imports **1.2–1.5 million tonnes** annually, primarily for oil extraction and industrial food processing. Japan and South Korea import smaller volumes but pay premium prices for quality, cleanliness, and traceability.

1M

tonnes annually

Middle East and Mediterranean

This region consumes **1 million tonnes annually**, driven by tahini, bakery, and traditional foods. Demand is culturally entrenched and relatively price-inelastic.

900K-1.1M

tonnes

Europe and North America

Bakery, packaged foods, and health products drive the combined demand of **900,000–1.1 million tonnes.** These markets place strong emphasis on certification, traceability, and food safety, rewarding compliant suppliers with price premiums.

Strong, Non-Speculative Demand

Sesame is embedded in daily diets and industrial food systems, making demand stable, repeat-based, and resilient during economic downturns.

High Value-To-Weight Ratio

At **USD 1,100–1,400 per tonne,** sesame generates far more revenue per container than bulky staples like maize or rice. This lowers freight costs as a share of revenue and improves margin resilience.

Africa's Production Advantage

Warm climates, semi-arid tolerance, and low input needs give Africa a structural edge as global supply shifts toward resilience.

Low Input Intensity

Minimal fertilizer and irrigation requirements reduce exposure to volatile input prices and lower production risk for smallholders.

FX Advantage

Exports are USD-denominated while costs are local, creating natural FX upside and strong appeal for trade finance.

Scalability Without Land Ownership

Sesame businesses scale through aggregation and working capital, rather than land acquisition, enabling faster, more capital-efficient growth.

Threat of new entrants – Moderate
While farming is easy to enter, exporting profitably requires compliance, capital, logistics expertise, and buyer trust.

Supplier power – Moderate to high
Smallholders can side-sell during price spikes, giving them leverage unless exporters build long-term relationships and pre-financing structures.

Buyer power – High
Large international buyers enforce strict quality and pricing discipline. Consistency is the only way to reduce this power.

Threat of substitutes – Low to moderate
Few true substitutes exist for the flavour of sesame oil or tahini, limiting substitution except at extreme price levels.

Competitive rivalry – Moderate
The market is crowded at the raw level but thin at the disciplined exporter level, where reliability becomes a competitive moat.

Pre-cleaning removes foreign matter and prevents rejection at destination, immediately improving price realisation.

Drying and moisture control reduce spoilage risk and ensure compliance with food safety standards.

Cleaning and grading are the primary sources of price premiums, determining access to standard versus premium markets.

De-hulling enables entry into the tahini and bakery supply chains, significantly increasing unit value.

Oil extraction unlocks the highest value per tonne but requires scale, certification, and downstream market access.

Packaging and export preparation protect buyer trust, reduce payment delays, and safeguard cash flow.

PHASE 1: Location & Strategy Setup

Objective

Choose a country and zone where farming, logistics, and exports are predictable.

Key biological requirements

Temperature	Rainfall	Soil	Crop Cycle
25–35°C	Light to medium	Well-drained	90–120 days

Viable sesame belts in Africa

- Northern Ghana
- Nigeria (Benue, Jigawa, Nasarawa)
- Ethiopia (Humera, Tigray)
- Sudan
- Tanzania

Strategic choice

Ghana is a low-risk entry point:

- Clear export procedures
- Port reliability
- Strong buyer credibility

Even if yields are lower than those in Sudan or Ethiopia, execution risk is lower.

PHASE 2: Land & Farm Structure

Objective

Learn before scaling.

Land strategy

- Lease, do not buy
- Lease duration: **1–3 seasons**
- Start small and controlled

Why

Sesame margins are lost through mistakes, not land size

Early seasons are for learning:

- Yield behavior
- Pest pressure
- Harvest timing

PHASE 3: Inputs & Farm Setup

What you physically need

- Certified white sesame seed (export-preferred)
- Land preparation:
  - Ploughing
  - Ridging
- Minimal fertilizer
- Labour for:
  - Planting
  - Weeding
  - Harvesting

What you must understand

- Sesame does not tolerate waterlogging
- Over-fertilising:
  - Increases leaf growth
  - Reduces oil content
  - Lowers export quality
- Harvest timing directly affects:
  - Oil yield
  - Seed colour
  - Buyer acceptance

Sesame is precision-driven, not input-driven.

PHASE 4: Farm Management

Key farm risks

- Late planting
- Poor germination
- Weed competition
- Delayed harvest → seed shattering

Control actions

- Plant early in the season (April–June)
- Weed aggressively in the first **3–4 weeks**
- Harvest when:
  - Lower capsules turn yellow
  - Not when fully dry

PHASE 5: Harvest & Post-Harvest Handling

Objective

Choose a country and zone where farming, logistics, and exports are predictable.

Immediate actions after harvest

- Cut plants carefully
- Dry:
  - Upright
  - Or on tarpaulins
- Thresh carefully
- Dry to safe moisture levels
- Remove:
  - Stones
  - Sticks
  - Dust

Reality check:
More sesame is rejected due to post-harvest errors than poor farming.

PHASE 6: Storage & Lot Control

Objective

Choose a country and zone where farming, logistics, and exports are predictable.

Non-negotiables

- Store bags off the floor
- Use dry, ventilated storage
- Separate lots by:
  - Field
  - Harvest date
- Track:
  - Moisture
  - Cleanliness per lot

Once lots are mixed, export traceability is lost.

PHASE 7: Aggregation

Objective

Reach export volumes.

Key reality

Your farm alone will never be enough for export scale.

What aggregation means operationally

- Buy from neighbouring small-scale farmers
- Apply identical quality standards
- Reject substandard sesame
- Treat your farm as:
  - Quality benchmark
  - Not the volume engine

Export scale comes from aggregation, not self-production.

PHASE 8: Export Readiness & Compliance

Objective

Become a formal exporter.

You must secure

- Export registration
- Phytosanitary certificate
- Quality inspection reports
- Export-grade packaging
- Clearing agent
- Freight forwarder

PHASE 9: Buyer Development

Objective

Avoid unsold stock.

While the crop is growing

You must:

- Identify international buyers
- Share samples early
- Confirm:
  - Moisture specs
  - Purity specs
  - Colour grades
- Agree pricing basis
- Lock Incoterms:
  - FOB recommended initially

Waiting until harvest to find buyers is a common failure mode.

Production Risks and Mitigation

Late planting leads to poor establishment and lower yields	Plant at the onset of rains to ensure uniform germination
Low-quality or recycled seed causes uneven growth and weak plants	Use certified, export-preferred sesame seed varieties
Weed competition in the first 3–4 weeks significantly reduces yield	Weed early and aggressively during crop establishment
Excess water damages roots and reduces seed quality	Select well-drained soils and avoid low-lying fields
Delayed harvest causes seed shattering and yield loss	Harvest when lower capsules turn yellow, not fully dry

About Us

One Africa Markets is a leading global financial services firm that bridges Africa's dynamic and rapidly growing financial markets with the rest of the world, while seamlessly bringing global markets closer to Africa. We combine world-class technology, institutional-grade execution, and a client-centric service model to deliver speed, reliability, and strategic insight across the financial value chain.

Our offerings span global payments, fixed income, commodities, foreign exchange, digital assets, technology solutions, data, and advisory services providing integrated solutions tailored to our clients' evolving needs. Over the past decade, we have built a trusted track record serving a diverse and sophisticated client base, including governments, multinational corporations, high-net-worth individuals, SMEs, fintechs, global and local banks, and leading investment institutions.

Rooted in Africa yet globally connected, we position ourselves as a true gateway to the continent. With a team of experienced professionals across key financial centers worldwide, we bring deep market expertise, local insight, and global best practices to deliver exceptional value to our clients at every stage of their journey.

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traded in fixed income & forex markets

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teams across our global offices

1000+
global client coverage

100+
global banking partnerships