

## Global Trends and Export Development Opportunities for Iranian Dairy Powder Products: A Future-Oriented Analysis

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### Abstract

The dairy powder industry has become one of the most strategically significant segments of global food trade. Products such as Whole Milk Powder (WMP), Skimmed Milk Powder (SMP), whey powder, and milk protein concentrates are used across food industry, infant nutrition, confectionery, bakery products, beverages, and specialized dietary regimes. This article discusses market structure, export opportunities, policy barriers, as well as future trends concerning Iranian dairy powder trade. The analysis reveals that dairy powder trade is shaped by different factors including population growth, urbanization, protein demand, industrial food expansion, climate-related supply shocks, exchange-rate changes, and regional trade dynamics. New Zealand, the European Union, and the United States remain the leading exporters, whereas China, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, and emerging African markets are major and prospective import destinations. For Iran, the paper identifies meaningful opportunities including geographical proximity, energy-cost advantages, and the potential for non-oil export. Nevertheless, sanctions, banking restrictions, technological gaps, conventional branding, macroeconomic volatility, and limited participation in global value chains continue to constrain export performance. The paper then concludes that industrial improvements, digital trade capabilities, product differentiation, brand development, and market diversification are essential for enhancing Iran's position in the dairy powder trade and for ameliorating the resilience of its export sector.

**Keywords:** dairy powder, export development, futuristic perspective on Iran's trade, globalization, market analysis.

## Introduction

Non-oil exports are a central policy concern in economies that seek to lower dependence on fossil fuels and develop more resilient growth models. Iran is one such economy that needs careful attention. Its export structure has historically been affected by concentration in a limited number of product groups and destinations, highlighting the importance of diversification of export portfolios as a strategic necessity rather than a merely commercial choice. Within this context, dairy powder products claim a particularly important position as they can be stored, transported, and traded more easily than liquid dairy products, while serving various industrial and personal applications.

Dairy powders should be considered as part of a broader architecture of export-led development. This means that their significance lies not only in agricultural output but also in processing capacity, logistics, branding, international standards, and market access. The dairy powder export is therefore a series of steps that should satisfy the needs of domestic production systems and external trade conditions. A country may produce substantial quantities of milk, but to reliably convert that milk into standardized powder products as well as deliver them to foreign markets, export competitiveness remains in question.

The article is mainly based on four key questions: i) how is the global dairy powder market structured?; ii) what long-term trends are likely to shape demands and trade?; iii) what are Iran's strengths and weaknesses in this sector?; and iv) what policy and business strategies should Iran take to join international trade market? Answering these questions, the paper provides an academically organized collection of sources within the scope of international trade, market analysis, and future-oriented industrial policy focusing on Iran's global position.

## Background and Definitions

Dairy powder products are produced through removing water from milk or whey through drying technologies. The most common categories include Whole Milk Powder (WMP), Skimmed Milk Powder (SMP), whey powder, milk protein concentrates, and specialized dairy ingredients. These products differ in the fat content, protein concentration, and technical function, though they share several commercial advantages. They are shelf-stable, relatively compact, and easy to ship, making them a highly relevant cross-border trade option.

From a trade perspective, dairy powders are important as they sit at the intersection of agriculture and industrial processing. Their export value is dependent not only on milk availability but also on drying technology, energy efficiency, packaging quality, compliance with sanitary standards, as well as the ability to meet foreign specifications. As a result, dairy powders are not a simple nutritional commodity for any country; rather, they are considered a world-class production strategy.

Further, there is an expanding range of end uses for these product types. This means that dairy powder ingredients are now widely demanded in confectionery, bakery products, infant formula, protein supplements, beverages, and many other foods. This broad industrial use diminishes reliance on a single consumer segment and augments the strategic significance of product diversification. Exporters that can move beyond undifferentiated bulk powders and offer specialized functional products are more likely to secure stable demands and better

margins. With regard to export strategy, the market only rewards firms that are able to combine volume, quality, and adaptation to all available market requirements.

In order to apply these strategies in volatile Iranian trade environment, some factors play a role. One is the significance of market orientation. Exporting firms that systematically collect information from customers, competitors, and foreign regulations tend to perform better than those relying on intuition or ad hoc decision-making. Another is the role of competitiveness, whereby product quality, pricing power, logistics reliability, and marketing capability can help companies shape international trade.

A second factor concerns global value chains. Participation in value chains can ameliorate export survival through enhancing access to technology, quality upgrading, and market diversification. In practical terms, firms that connect with international supply networks learn faster, benchmark their products with a high degree of confidence, and boost their ability to fulfill technical specifications. This is especially applicable in dairy processing, in which compliance, consistency, and traceability determine whether a shipment would be accepted or not.

A third consideration is the significance of macroeconomic conditions. Research on Iranian dairy exports suggests that real exchange rates positively impact export value, while inflation tends to lower export performance (Abedini, et al., ۲۰۲۴ and Asheri, et al., ۲۰۲۱). These findings align with the trade competitiveness: when domestic costs rise and the local currency becomes less predictable, exporters confront difficulties in pricing contracts, managing margins, and planning investments. This is also where managerial mental models (whether to be market-oriented, government-oriented, resource-oriented, profit-oriented, infrastructure-oriented, or institutional) have a significant influence on trade tendencies. Indeed, how firms respond to risk, innovation, and opportunity is in line with these models, and companies should find a way to make more constructive decisions in the global market.

### **Methodological Approach**

This paper is a narrative, descriptive-analytical perspective on the Iranian dairy industry and its future position in the international dairy powder trade. For this purpose, reports from OECD-FAO, USDA, FAO, Reuters, and Global Dairy Trade have been collected and studied together with Iranian academic literature.

Specifically, market overview, policy interpretation, and future-oriented forecasting are deeply analyzed to help decisions on Iranian dairy powder trade. The article is then followed by a report on the global market structure, long-run demand trends, Iran's comparative position, export opportunities for Iran, barriers to development, price dynamics, digitalization, branding, and future predictions. In this regard, forecasts are treated cautiously and are presented as directional outlooks rather than exact predictions. This is of importance in a commodity market highly sensitive to weather, feed costs, animal health, energy prices, and geopolitical changes.

The article therefore does not claim to estimate causal effects through econometric analysis. Instead, it aims to offer a response to an Iranian dairy company request and to present the findings on a global level. Further, the literature can be employed as a reference for

companies entering into Iranian powder dairy industry or already involved in this business. In this sense, the article is both case-specific and analytical: case-specific since it has merely been provided for a company request, and analytical as it interprets the content within a coherent export-development framework.

### Global Market Structure

The global dairy powder market is dominated by a limited number of exporters and a far broader set of import-dependent countries. According to international reports on trade (Global Dairy Trade reports, ۲۰۲۰), New Zealand, the European Union, and the United States are the principal exporting dairy powers. Their leadership reflects scale, technological sophistication, supply chain integration, and strong international brands. These countries have been able to convert domestic milk production into standardized exportable commodities that fulfill the expectations of global demands. Meanwhile, China, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Mexico, and Nigeria are named as major importers. This mix of destinations demonstrates an important feature of the market: dairy powder trade is shaped both by consumer demand and dairy-system structure. In some countries, imports support food processing and industrial output, while in others, they help fill gaps in domestic milk supply or provide shelf-stable nutritional inputs. The result is a geographically diversified but commercially concentrated market.

Dairy powders are also strategically important since they are less perishable than liquid milk. This gives them a major advantage in international settings, particularly for countries with limited refrigeration infrastructure or with geographically dispersed populations. Powder products can be shipped over longer distances, stored for longer periods, and incorporated into various applications. Accordingly, dairy powder trade often becomes a medium for broader food-system integration, linking agricultural production, industrial processing, and retail distribution across national borders.

**Table ۱. Main Powdered Dairy Products and Typical Uses**

| Product category              | Typical uses  |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Whole Milk Powder (WMP)       | Reconstitution, beverages, bakery products, confectionery, infant foods   |
| Skimmed Milk Powder (SMP)     | Recombined milk, food processing, bakery, dairy mixes                     |
| Whey powder                   | Protein enrichment, confectionery, bakery, beverages, nutrition products  |
| Milk protein concentrates     | High-protein foods, supplements, specialized ingredients                  |
| Specialized dairy ingredients | Infant formula, sports nutrition, functional foods, industrial processing |

## Market Trends and Demand Drivers

Forecasts suggest an expansion in the dairy powder market over the next decade, though the pace of growth is to vary by region as well as product type. Population growth in Africa, the rise of the middle class in Asia, and increasing protein consumption are among the most influential factors. Urbanization and industrial food growth also matter as they heighten demand for ingredients that can be easily incorporated into processed foods and nutritional products.

At the same time, the future is highly unlikely to be linear. Agricultural markets are sensitive to climate events, feed-cost shocks, animal disease, and geopolitical disruptions. Overall, dairy powder prices heavily depend on feed prices, energy costs, weather conditions, as well as demand from major importers such as China. This means that the market can experience rapid adjustment although demand remains positive. Fig. ۱ depicts changes in prices of different dairy categories between ۲۰۰۴ and ۲۰۳۴, and can be applied as a tool for future predictions.

**Figure ۱. Global Dairy Powder Price Chart**



Note: Butter, FOB export price, 82% butterfat, Oceania; Skim Milk Powder, FOB export price, non-fat dry milk, 1.25% butterfat, Oceania; Whole Milk Powder, FOB export price, 26% butterfat, Oceania; Cheese, FOB export price, cheddar cheese, 39% moisture, Oceania. Real prices are nominal world prices deflated by the US GDP deflator (2024=1).

Source: OECD/FAO (2025), "OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook", OECD Agriculture statistics (database), <http://data-explorer.oecd.org/s/1hc>.

Exporters need strategies that are flexible enough to manage price changes and resilient enough to survive in this fluctuating international market.

Consumer preference is another major factor to be taken into consideration. In developed countries, cheese and butter demands may grow at a slightly faster pace than dairy powders, whereas in developing markets shelf-stable powder products may remain highly attractive. This divergence implies that exporters should not assume that all dairy products follow the same trajectory. Instead, product mix, target geography, and market specifications should be aligned carefully. Firms that understand these differences can move toward more sophisticated market segmentation as well as better export planning.

## Iran's Export Position

Iran occupies a mixed position in the global dairy powder trade. Iran has several notable advantages in the region. Its geographic location offers access to the Middle East, Central Asia, and parts of South Asia. It also has relatively low energy costs, which can support industrial processing. These two factors create a potential for producing and exporting dairy powder products to larger areas.

Nevertheless, there are a series of constraints that prevent these advantages from being fully realized. Sanctions and banking limitations make trade settlement challenging. Exchange-rate instability promotes uncertainty and complicates pricing. Technological gaps can lower efficiency and product consistency. Weak global branding makes it harder to compete in markets where consumer trust matters. The outcome is that Iran has export potential, but not yet export dominance. Its position is better understood as promising but still scarce.

The limitations are still innumerable. Iranian exports, especially non-oil commodities, have often been concentrated in a small number of countries and product groups. The same vulnerability applies to dairy powders. A strong export model requires diversification, as dependence on a limited number of destinations leaves firms exposed to policy changes, logistics disruptions, and demand shocks. In practical terms, Iran's future competitiveness will depend on whether it can move from opportunistic trade toward a more systematic approach developed around product quality, market selection, and long-term relationships. For this reason, these market changes should be observed as an opportunity to enter into a wider global market while considering both pros and cons.

## Export Opportunities

Based on historical data, only some international markets are the main global partners for Iran ([https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/IRN/Year/۲۰۲۲/TradeFlow/Import/Partner/ALL/Product/۱۶-۲۴\\_FoodProd](https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/IRN/Year/۲۰۲۲/TradeFlow/Import/Partner/ALL/Product/۱۶-۲۴_FoodProd)). Therein, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Central Asia, Oman, and some African countries serve as the most promising destinations for exporting dairy powder. These markets are attractive for different reasons. Some are nearby and hence logistically efficient. Others are growing rapidly and require a higher level of dairy products. Still others offer commercial or re-export advantages that can help Iranian exporters build experience and reach new consumers there.

Africa receives special attention owing to its long-term growth potential. Countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, and Ghana are highlighted as important future trade destinations. Their attractiveness lies in the combination of population growth, urbanization, and rising demand for processed foods. Further, many African markets value shelf-stable products that can be stored and transported without complex refrigeration systems. This makes dairy powders especially suitable for export expansion.

Oman is known as a strategically valuable partner. This is due to the fact that business registration is relatively simple, foreign ownership rules are favorable, and investment incentives can make trade as well as distribution attractive. Oman may thus function not only as a market but also as a commercial hub. For Iranian exporters, such markets are important since they offer a bridge between direct exports and broader regional integration.

## Barriers and Constraints

The constraints on export growth are multi-level. At the macroeconomic level, sanctions, financial restrictions, and exchange-rate instability induce uncertainty and raise transaction costs. At the firm level, weak branding, limited marketing capabilities, and inefficient quality plans lower the likelihood of winning and retaining foreign buyers. At the technological level, inadequate drying systems, weak product standardization, and lack of packaging standards can undermine competitiveness. These constraints may also interact and complicate the trade further.

Another difficulty for Iranian international export is related to managerial perspectives. Mental models among dairy-industry managers are keys to the trade success. Many firms operate with a strong reliance on government support or internal resource assumptions rather than market intelligence as well as customer-oriented thinking, making organizations slower to adapt to foreign demand conditions. Exporting, however, is an adaptive process and requires continuous monitoring of regulations, consumer preferences, competitor positioning, and logistical changes. Firms suffering from this flexibility will find it challenging to move beyond occasional exports.

Another barrier is the concentration of export revenue in a small number of markets. This is mainly because of the fact that concentration elevates risk. If one market weakens, the exporter has limited alternatives. If one currency policy changes, contracts become difficult to maintain. If a key buyer switches suppliers, revenue falls sharply. As such, diversification is not a peripheral option; it is a core resilience strategy. For Iranian dairy powder exporters, this means creating a portfolio of markets rather than relying on a single destination or channel.

**Table ۲. Major Exporters, Importers, and Strategic Implications of Global Dairy Providers**

| Market group            | Representative countries                                 | Strategic implication   |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Major exporters         | New Zealand, European Union, United States               | Compete through scale, technology, branding, and logistics                |
| Major importers         | China, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria | Demand is driven by population growth, food processing, and food security |
| Emerging growth markets | Africa, Central Asia, parts of the Middle East           | Offer diversification opportunities for new exporters such as Iran        |

## Exchange Rates and Macroeconomic Stability

The role of exchange rates is central in the Iranian dairy export capabilities. Research by Abedini, et al. (۲۰۲۴) together with Asheri, et al. (۲۰۲۱) also suggests that real exchange-rate movements have a positive effect on dairy exports, while inflation exerts a negative impact. A more favorable exchange rate can improve export margins, whereas inflation augments

domestic costs and compromises price stability. Yet, excessive volatility is itself harmful since exporters need predictability to sign contracts, set prices, and plan production.

For Iran, exchange-rate volatility is especially problematic since the export process depends on imported materials, foreign payment channels, and long lead times. Dairy powder production often requires machinery, packaging materials, and other imported goods. If the currency changes rapidly, margins become difficult to manage. Thus, it is of utmost importance that policymakers avoid short-term, ad hoc exchange-rate interventions and instead adopt a more stable macroeconomic framework – supportive of trade and investment.

### **Price Dynamics and Commodity Cycles**

Dairy powder prices are shaped by a complex interplay of agricultural and macroeconomic factors. Feed costs play a key role because milk production depends heavily on animal nutrition and farm prices. When grain or forage costs rise, production costs grow throughout the entire dairy value chain. Energy costs are equally important since drying milk into powder is energy-intensive. As a result, price movements in dairy powders often reflect the combined pressure of farm inputs and industrial processing costs.

Climate conditions add another layer of volatility. Droughts, temperature stress, and weather disruptions can impact forage availability, herd productivity, and transportation. Since dairy production is continuous rather than seasonal in the same way as some crops, climate disturbances can create persistent supply pressure. Further, demand from China is a particularly important variable in global pricing. Major buying behavior by a single large market can alter the balance of international supply and demand, which in turn affects prices across export destinations.

For exporters, the practical implication is that price strategy needs to be managed with care. Firms need to understand when to compete on price, when to emphasize quality, and when to focus on lower-volume but higher-margin segments. Commodity cycles also imply that exporters should avoid overexpansion in periods of temporary price strength. Sustainable trade performance requires planning for downturns and peaks. Exporters that see dairy powder as a strategic portfolio rather than a short-term price opportunity have a greater chance to remain viable over time.

### **Regional Market Prioritization**

Considering Iran, it could be a far favorable decision to invest on a geographically focused export strategy. Rather than trying to serve all markets at once, Iranian exporters should prioritize destinations where they can establish commercial relationships, shipping reliability, and brand recognition efficiently. As noted, Iraq and Afghanistan are immediate candidates owing to proximity, cultural familiarity, and persistent import needs. Pakistan also offers demand potential, especially if exporters can tailor packaging, pricing, and compliance to local conditions.

Central Asia presents another significant opportunity. These markets are accessible from Iran's geographic corridor and can benefit from lower transport distances relative to longer-distance exporters. Simultaneously, they may require careful adaptation in terms of

distribution channels, payment arrangements, and product mix. Oman occupies a different role: it can serve as a market, logistics bridge, or re-export node. Its business environment is therefore particularly attractive for firms seeking to establish a more regional commercial presence.

Africa should be considered as a medium- to long-term expansion zone. The continent's diversity means that market entry cannot rely on a single zone. Exporters need to identify countries with rising urban populations, food-processing growth, and import dependence. Nigeria, Kenya, and Ghana could be the most important potential destinations. Success in these markets may require developing positive relationships, managing local partners, and supplying adaptable product preferences. In all of these cases, the strategic principle is to study demand structure, logistics, and institutional feasibility, along with the entire supply chain, and not solely the market size.

### **Digital Economy, Marketing, and Branding**

Digitalization and branding are the major limitations for Iran. The digital economy can lower transaction costs, speed up access to market information, and expand the reach of exporters to foreign demands. In practice, this signifies that digital tools can support e-commerce, B2B communication, market research, order management, and customer service. For export-oriented nutritional firms, digital capability functions increasingly as a basic requirement rather than a future investment.

Branding is equally important for a successful trade. Bulk commodity sales heavily depend on price, but many dairy powder segments are now differentiated by trust, consistency, and functional attributes. A strong export brand can communicate product quality and reliability across borders. It is thus recommended to create an independent export brand and establish a more explicit market orientation. That includes regular customer satisfaction monitoring, active complaint management, and systematic competitor analysis. Firms taking these branding initiatives into their market research will be guaranteed better product design and will be able to anticipate foreign demand changes in advance.

Internal coordination is as crucial as market research. Production, logistics, human resources, and administrative systems need to be aligned so that the firm can deliver values. Cost reduction should not be understood as simple austerity; rather, it should involve process redesign, efficient machinery, and skill development that flourish productivity while preserving quality. In international trades, reliability often matters as much as low price. Hence, firms most likely to succeed are only those that combine digital responsiveness with disciplined operations as well as a clear brand. This is exactly where there will be many opportunities for the overwhelming majority of the cases in Iran's international trade.

### **Risk Management**

Exporting dairy powder requires a sophisticated approach to risk. This could be mainly owing to exchange-rate volatility, sanctions, international banking limitations, regulatory changes, and competitive pressures. Each of these risks can disrupt trade at a different stage. Some affect payment settlement, some shipping and customs, while still others influence the longer-

term willingness of foreign demands to commit to a supplier. Firms hereby need contingency planning rather than reactive decision-making.

It is somehow viable that Iran succeeds in strengthening technology, resolving some commercial bottlenecks, and diversifying markets in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, in a more realistic scenario, export activity remains regionally concentrated and vulnerable to shocks. In the current situation, the external environment might also worsen and companies be forced to lower their export numbers. In all cases, it is recommended to treat international trade as a volatile environment since it helps identify trigger points, contingency strategies, and investment priorities under uncertainty.

Operationally, the most important risk-mitigation measures include market diversification, contractual flexibility, working-capital discipline, and customer portfolio management. Exporters should avoid depending on a single market or route. In contrast, they should maintain adequate liquidity to absorb temporary disruptions in payments or shipping. Public policy can support risk management through improving customs predictability, trade finance, and regulatory stability. The overall lesson should be that export success in unpredictable markets is as much about resilience as it is about growth.

### **Policy Recommendations**

Several strategic recommendations follow from the analysis. Initially, Iran should prioritize industrial upgrading in dairy drying, quality assurance, packaging, and compliance systems. Further, policy support should emphasize value-added products, especially whey-based ingredients and specialized powders, rather than only bulk commodity exports. Also, trade diplomacy needs to be employed more actively to develop, maintain, and deepen access to global markets. In addition, export incentives from the government, where appropriate, should be transparent and tied to measurable performance improvements.

Participation in the global value chain should also be expanded. This is only achieved by technology transfer, quality improvement, and market diversification. Firms linked to international production networks are highly likely to learn global standards and adapt to consumer requirements. Further, market diversification should become a formal strategic objective. Overreliance on a few countries is a risk that can be mitigated only through deliberate geographic expansion.

Ultimately, digitalization and market intelligence should be incorporated integrally into export planning. Firms need systems that allow them to track demands, compare competitors, manage customer relationships, and respond timely to foreign market fluctuations. Public policy can be supported by ameliorating logistics, financing, customs procedures, and the institutional reliability of trade channels. Together, these measures will make the export environment more predictable and more attractive for investment. Without such measures, even technically capable firms may fail to scale internationally.

### **A Practical Guide to Export Development in Iran**

A practical export development roadmap for Iranian dairy powder producers can be organized into three phases. The first step involves internal readiness. Firms should ascertain production

capacity, quality systems, packaging standards, and financial resilience. They should map target markets by size, accessibility, and competitive intensity. The second phase pertains to market entry. At this stage, firms should choose a limited number of destinations, establish reliable distribution channels, and develop a consistent brand identity. The third phase involves scaling and diversification. Once a stable foundation has been created, the firm can add new products, new packaging formats, as well as new geographic destinations.

This guideline is especially useful for Iran as it turns a broad export ambition into a sequence of achievable tasks. It also considers an essential requirement: export development is not an event but a process. A number of Iranian companies may try to scale too quickly, but often face quality problems, payment disputes, or reputational losses. In contrast, the techniques hereby are developed step by step to help survive and expand. This roadmap links strategy to implementation altogether.

At the policy level, the same logic applies. Government support should first diminish bureaucracies, then enable market exploration, and finally reward successful upgrading. In the dairy powder sector, such a sequence could be more effective than isolated interventions. Export growth is most durable when firms and institutions move together toward higher quality, broader market reach, as well as stronger international credibility. Only then is governmental support purely beneficial.

## Conclusion

This article argued around the global structure of the dairy powder market, Iran's export position, and the conditions required for its future export growth. The analysis indicated that dairy powder products are strategically important as they are durable, versatile, and widely used across the food industry. The global market is dominated by a few exporters, but overall demand continues to expand in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

In Iran, the opportunity is real but conditional. Geographic location, energy costs, and access to regional markets provide a basis for growth. Nevertheless, sanctions, banking barriers, exchange-rate volatility, weak branding, and technological gaps continue to limit performance. The way forward is not a single policy measure but a coordinated strategy of industrial growth, digital transformation, product differentiation, and market diversification.

Overall, dairy powder exports can contribute meaningfully to Iran's non-oil development agenda provided that they are managed as a long-term competitive policy rather than a short-term activity. In that respect, the sector is valuable not only owing to its immediate foreign-exchange potential but also because it demonstrates how industrial policy, trade strategy, and firm-level capability can align in order to generate profitable long-term export returns.

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