



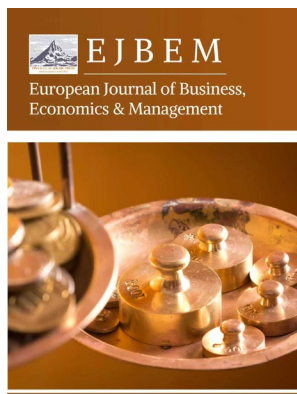
Review **Open Access**

Research on Market Expansion Strategies under the New Pattern of International Agricultural Trade

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Abstract: This review examines the evolving patterns of international agricultural trade and the strategies employed by firms to expand their markets in a rapidly changing global environment. Drawing on literature from the past decade, the study highlights three dominant trends: market diversification, technological digitalization, and sustainability-oriented trade practices. Case studies from China's Belt and Road Initiative, Latin America's soybean sector, the European Union's organic agriculture, and Africa's emerging markets illustrate how infrastructure development, policy frameworks, value-added processing, and digital supply chain integration shape trade outcomes. While these strategies enhance market access and competitiveness, challenges persist, including institutional disparities, environmental sustainability concerns, and uneven technological adoption. The review synthesizes these insights to identify research gaps and proposes future directions, emphasizing comparative studies, data-driven analytics, and the interplay between policy support and firm-level strategies. The findings provide a comprehensive framework for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to navigate contemporary agricultural trade dynamics effectively.

Keywords: international agricultural trade; market expansion strategies; sustainability; digital transformation; belt and road initiative

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

In recent decades, the global pattern of agricultural trade has undergone profound transformation. Traditionally, international agricultural trade was dominated by the exchange of bulk commodities such as grains, soybeans, and cotton, largely flowing from resource-rich countries to food-importing regions. However, the rise of globalization, advances in information technology, and evolving consumer demand have reshaped this landscape. Agricultural trade is no longer confined to the circulation of raw commodities; instead, it increasingly incorporates diversified, processed, and high-value-added products. The integration of digital tools, such as blockchain traceability systems and cross-border e-commerce platforms, has further accelerated this transition, providing new opportunities for efficiency and market expansion [1].

Meanwhile, the external environment of international trade has become increasingly complex. On the one hand, regional trade agreements, such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), have created new platforms for agricultural cooperation and integration. On the other hand, rising trade protectionism, tariff disputes, and the growing emphasis on sustainable development and carbon reduction have introduced

uncertainties and new challenges. As agricultural products are closely tied to food security and ecological sustainability, international agricultural trade has gradually become a critical area in which economic, political, and environmental factors intersect. In this context, digital infrastructure construction has been identified as a key driver for improving trade efficiency and resilience, while challenges such as uneven adoption of digital systems and associated risks also emerge [2,3].

1.2. Purpose of the Review

Given this background, it is essential to systematically examine how the new global trade pattern is influencing agricultural development and how firms and nations can effectively expand their markets [4]. The purpose of this review is threefold. First, it seeks to synthesize the existing body of literature on the evolving structure of international agricultural trade, highlighting major shifts in drivers and dynamics. Second, it aims to summarize the main strategies for agricultural market expansion as identified in prior studies, including diversification of markets, product upgrading, digital transformation, and policy support. Third, this review identifies research gaps and unresolved issues within the literature, thereby proposing a future research agenda to deepen scholarly and practical understanding. By doing so, the paper intends to provide both a comprehensive academic reference and practical insights for policymakers and industry stakeholders engaged in agricultural trade. Furthermore, attention is given to the role of international cooperation and collaborative capacity sharing in shaping agricultural supply chain strategies [5].

1.3. Methodology of the Review

This study adopts a structured review approach, drawing on both academic and institutional sources. The literature search was conducted primarily through internationally recognized academic databases such as Web of Science and Scopus, supplemented by authoritative reports from organizations including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). The selection criteria focused on highly cited research articles, policy analyses, and case studies published over the past 10–15 years, ensuring both relevance and academic rigor [6].

The collected literature was analyzed using thematic categorization and comparative analysis. Specifically, the materials were grouped according to major themes, such as trade pattern evolution, market diversification, digitalization, and sustainability. A comparative perspective was employed to examine differences across regions, commodities, and policy environments. This methodological design ensures that the review captures the breadth of current scholarship while also identifying inconsistencies, gaps, and potential directions for further inquiry [7].

2. The New Pattern of International Agricultural Trade – A Literature Review

2.1. Evolution and Trends

The evolution of international agricultural trade reflects a gradual but significant transformation in both trade flows and product structures. Historically, the majority of agricultural exports originated from developed economies, supplying bulk commodities to less industrialized nations. In recent decades, however, emerging economies have risen as key exporters of agricultural products, reshaping global trade flows [8]. This trend illustrates a multipolar trade system, where developing countries increasingly act as both major suppliers and consumers.

In terms of product composition, international trade has shifted away from traditional primary commodities toward more diversified and value-added agricultural goods. Processed foods, organic products, and specialty items have gained prominence, responding to the rising income levels and changing dietary preferences of global consumers. This structural transformation not only enhances the profitability of agricultural exports but also contributes to greater integration of agriculture into global value chains [9].

2.2. Driving Forces in the Literature

Scholars have identified multiple drivers behind the restructuring of international agricultural trade.

Globalization and regional integration. Regional trade agreements have expanded market access and reduced tariff barriers, facilitating greater agricultural exchange. Some studies emphasize the efficiency gains and comparative advantage brought by such agreements, while others point out the uneven benefits across member states.

Technological innovation and digitalization. Literature highlights the transformative role of digital platforms, blockchain-enabled traceability, and precision agriculture. E-commerce has lowered transaction costs and enabled small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to participate in global agricultural trade. Blockchain applications are frequently discussed in the context of food safety and transparency, enhancing consumer trust [10].

Sustainability and green trade. Climate change, environmental degradation, and global commitments to carbon neutrality have intensified scholarly attention on sustainable agricultural trade. The growing demand for certified organic and low-carbon products, as well as the integration of environmental standards in trade agreements, are recurring themes in this strand of literature.

To synthesize these perspectives, the major driving forces are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Key Driving Forces of International Agricultural Trade.

Driving Force	Key Features
Globalization & Regional Trade	Trade liberalization, new trade agreements, uneven distribution of benefits
Technological Innovation	E-commerce platforms, blockchain traceability, smart agriculture applications
Sustainability & Green Trade	Organic certification, carbon neutrality, climate-related trade policies

2.3. Challenges Identified in Previous Studies

Despite significant opportunities, scholars also emphasize persistent challenges within international agricultural trade. First, the rise of protectionist measures and non-tariff barriers has limited the potential benefits of trade liberalization. Sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) standards often serve as hidden barriers for exporters from developing economies.

Second, the global supply chain has demonstrated vulnerability to external shocks. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted logistics, labor mobility, and demand patterns, while geopolitical tensions have further exposed risks in trade dependencies. These vulnerabilities underscore the importance of resilience-building strategies in agricultural trade.

Finally, institutional and infrastructural limitations remain significant obstacles for developing countries. Weak logistics systems, lack of cold chain facilities, and inadequate financial support mechanisms reduce their competitiveness in international markets. Without targeted policy interventions, these structural deficiencies will continue to hinder equitable participation in global trade [11].

3. Market Expansion Strategies – Evidence from the Literature

3.1. Market Diversification and Product Upgrading

Market diversification remains one of the most widely discussed strategies for agricultural trade expansion. Firms that focus narrowly on a single export destination are vulnerable to geopolitical tensions, tariff changes, and sudden shifts in consumer demand. Expanding into multiple markets allows firms to distribute risk, stabilize revenue streams, and capitalize on growth opportunities in emerging economies. Moreover, diversification

is not purely geographic; it can also involve targeting multiple consumer segments or different product categories within international markets [12].

Closely linked to diversification is product upgrading. As global consumers become more quality-conscious, firms that supply standardized raw commodities often face stiff price competition. Offering value-added products—such as certified organic goods, eco-friendly products, or items with geographical indications—enables firms to differentiate themselves and capture higher margins. This dual approach, combining market diversification with product differentiation, has been shown to create synergies: while diversification reduces exposure to external shocks, upgrading increases resilience by embedding firms more deeply into global value chains [13]. Additionally, integrating consumer trends, such as sustainability and health-conscious consumption, can enhance market acceptance and brand reputation, further supporting export growth.

3.2. Digital Transformation and Supply Chain Integration

The rapid development of digital technologies has transformed international agricultural trade, particularly by lowering barriers to entry for smaller firms and enabling faster market penetration. Cross-border e-commerce platforms allow producers to reach distant markets without relying on traditional intermediaries, reducing both transaction costs and time-to-market. Digital marketing strategies, including social media campaigns, targeted promotions, and online marketplaces, provide firms with direct consumer feedback and analytics, allowing them to adapt products and pricing dynamically.

Simultaneously, supply chain integration has become increasingly important. Vertical integration, where producers coordinate closely with processors, logistics providers, and distributors, ensures product quality, reduces inefficiencies, and enhances responsiveness to demand fluctuations [14]. Strategic partnerships, including alliances with international distributors or cooperatives, help firms share risks and resources while entering complex foreign markets. The combination of digital tools and integrated supply chains can generate a competitive advantage: digitalization improves operational efficiency, while integration ensures stability, quality, and reliability. This synergy has been identified as a key driver for successful expansion, particularly in high-value or perishable agricultural products that require strict quality control and timely delivery.

3.3. Policy and Institutional Support

The institutional environment, including both government policies and regulatory frameworks, plays a critical role in shaping the strategies firms adopt. Supportive measures such as trade agreements, export subsidies, preferential credit programs, and technical assistance can significantly reduce barriers for firms seeking to expand abroad. Trade agreements not only lower tariffs but also harmonize standards, reducing the complexity of cross-border transactions [15]. Policy interventions often complement firm-level strategies, such as diversification and digitalization, by providing financial security and infrastructural support.

However, literature also emphasizes caution: overreliance on state-led incentives may distort market incentives, reduce innovation, and create inefficiencies. The most effective policy environments are those that combine macro-level support with micro-level firm capabilities, fostering an ecosystem in which companies can pursue long-term, sustainable expansion strategies. Moreover, institutional quality—including enforcement of contracts, intellectual property protection, and transparent customs procedures—further determines the success of market expansion initiatives. Firms that strategically align internal capabilities with supportive policy frameworks tend to perform better in volatile or competitive international markets.

As shown in Table 2, these three thematic areas—market diversification with product upgrading, digital transformation with supply chain integration, and policy/institutional

support—capture the main strategies highlighted in the literature. Each dimension interacts with the others to create synergies that enhance overall trade performance and resilience.

Table 2. Market Expansion Strategies in Literature.

Strategy	Key Findings
Market Diversification and Product Upgrading	Diversification reduces exposure to external shocks; value-added products and certifications increase competitiveness and capture premium markets.
Digital Transformation and Supply Chain Integration	E-commerce and digital tools lower entry barriers; partnerships and vertical integration improve efficiency, quality, and resilience.
Policy and Institutional Support	Trade agreements, subsidies, and export credit support expansion; effectiveness depends on alignment with firm-level strategies and institutional quality.

4. Case Studies in the Literature

4.1. China and the Belt and Road Initiative

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has emerged as a strategic platform for enhancing agricultural trade, linking Chinese producers with markets across Asia, Africa, and Europe. The literature identifies multiple dimensions through which BRI facilitates trade expansion. First, infrastructure development—including new ports, inland transport corridors, rail connections, and cold chain logistics—has significantly reduced transportation costs and improved the reliability and timeliness of perishable and high-value agricultural exports. Second, bilateral and multilateral agreements under the BRI framework have lowered tariff barriers, harmonized customs procedures, and simplified regulatory compliance, particularly benefiting staple crops, aquaculture products, and horticultural exports. Additionally, technological adoption, such as digital traceability systems, block-chain-based supply chain monitoring, and smart logistics platforms, has enhanced product quality assurance, transparency, and consumer confidence in importing markets.

Despite these advantages, challenges remain. Scholars note that institutional disparities among partner countries often lead to inconsistencies in contract enforcement, quality certification, and regulatory alignment, which may delay or disrupt trade flows. Environmental sustainability is another concern, as large-scale agricultural projects can accelerate land degradation, water scarcity, and ecological imbalance if not carefully managed. Furthermore, while high-potential trade corridors receive concentrated investment, peripheral or less-developed regions remain underconnected, limiting the inclusiveness of trade benefits. Literature emphasizes that the integration of policy alignment, technological solutions, and capacity-building initiatives is essential to maximize the long-term effectiveness of BRI-driven agricultural trade. Case evidence suggests that provinces such as Jiangsu and Shandong have successfully leveraged BRI corridors to expand exports of fruits and aquaculture products, demonstrating the tangible impact of coordinated infrastructure and trade facilitation.

4.2. Latin America's Soybean Trade

Latin America, particularly Brazil and Argentina, plays a dominant role in the global soybean market, collectively accounting for over 50% of global trade in recent years. Literature highlights divergent national strategies for export expansion. Brazil emphasizes high-volume, mechanized production, supported by substantial investments in port infrastructure and efficient inland transport systems. This approach allows Brazilian producers to maintain competitive delivery schedules, particularly to major importers such as China, and to capitalize on economies of scale. In contrast, Argentina focuses on value-

added processing, converting raw soybeans into oil, meal, and other derivatives, thereby generating higher profit margins and insulating exports from commodity price volatility.

Both countries face significant environmental and policy challenges. In Brazil, deforestation in the Amazon and Cerrado regions has attracted international scrutiny, with sustainability becoming a prerequisite for market access in Europe and Asia. In Argentina, soil degradation and water resource management issues limit long-term productivity and may affect export quality. Trade policy volatility in destination markets—including changing tariffs, biosecurity regulations, and sustainability standards—adds further complexity to export planning. Comparative studies suggest that Brazil's volume-driven strategy ensures rapid global market penetration, while Argentina's focus on processing and value addition enhances export stability and profitability. Moreover, scholars emphasize the role of institutional frameworks, including export regulations, farmer cooperatives, and industry associations, in shaping trade outcomes. These case studies illustrate how national resource endowments, technological adoption, and environmental management collectively influence the effectiveness of market expansion strategies in Latin America.

4.3. European Organic Agriculture

European Union (EU) member states have leveraged strict regulatory frameworks and certification systems to promote sustainable and organic agricultural exports. Literature documents steady growth in organic grains, fruits, and dairy products, driven by domestic policy support, consumer demand in high-income countries, and internationally recognized certification standards. Organic and eco-labeled products command higher prices and enjoy preferential access in markets such as North America, East Asia, and the Middle East.

Challenges remain for small- and medium-scale producers. Compliance with EU standards requires substantial investment in production systems, certification, and monitoring, creating entry barriers. Market saturation in certain product segments and competition from non-EU producers, particularly in South America and Asia, further limit expansion potential. Scholars suggest that EU producers succeed when combining strong institutional support, strategic marketing, and quality assurance. These cases highlight that regulatory frameworks, when aligned with firm-level strategies, can effectively expand high-value agricultural markets while promoting environmental sustainability.

4.4. Africa and Emerging Markets

Africa is recognized as a region with high agricultural potential but facing structural and institutional challenges. Research emphasizes the abundance of high-demand commodities such as coffee, cocoa, tropical fruits, and horticultural products, which align with consumption growth in emerging Asian and Middle Eastern markets. Export expansion is supported by regional trade agreements and increasing investment in logistics infrastructure.

Nevertheless, smallholder dominance, limited cold chain facilities, and weak institutional capacity constrain competitiveness. Market entry barriers, such as inconsistent policy enforcement, low technical capacity, and fragmented production, reduce the ability to scale operations. Scholars argue that strategic interventions—such as cooperative farming models, targeted infrastructure investment, capacity-building programs, and adoption of digital platforms—are essential to unlocking Africa's export potential. Comparative studies suggest that African exporters can succeed in niche, high-value markets if supported by institutional reforms and private sector engagement, rather than relying solely on volume-based strategies.

As summarized in Table 3, the four case studies illustrate distinct approaches to agricultural market expansion across different regions. China's Belt and Road Initiative emphasizes infrastructure development and trade facilitation, which has significantly reduced logistical costs and improved the reliability of perishable exports. Despite these

gains, institutional disparities among partner countries and environmental sustainability concerns remain key challenges.

Table 3. Comparative Summary of Agricultural Market Expansion Case Studies.

Region / Case	Core Strategies	Key Outcomes	Main Challenges
China – Belt and Road Initiative	Infrastructure development (ports, transport, cold chain); bilateral/multilateral trade agreements; digital traceability systems	Reduced trade costs; improved reliability for perishable goods; expanded access to Asia, Africa, Europe	Institutional disparities; uneven regional development; environmental sustainability concerns
Latin America – Brazil & Argentina Soybean Trade	Brazil: large-scale mechanized production, port infrastructure, high-volume export Argentina: value-added processing, export of soybean oil and meal	Brazil: rapid global market penetration; Argentina: higher profit margins and export stability	Environmental issues (deforestation, soil degradation); policy volatility in importing countries; market fluctuations
European Union – Organic Agriculture	Strict regulatory frameworks; organic and eco-certifications; targeted marketing to high-income markets	Access to premium markets; strong brand reputation; price premiums for certified products	High compliance costs for SMEs; market saturation; competition from non-EU producers
Africa – Emerging Markets	Investment in infrastructure; cooperative farming models; adoption of digital platforms; targeted technical assistance	Access to high-demand emerging markets; potential for niche high-value exports	Smallholder fragmentation; weak cold chain and logistics; inconsistent policies; low technical capacity

In Latin America, Brazil and Argentina adopt contrasting strategies within the soybean sector. Brazil focuses on high-volume, mechanized production and efficient transport to achieve rapid global market penetration, whereas Argentina emphasizes value-added processing to secure higher profit margins and more stable export performance. Environmental risks, such as deforestation in Brazil and soil degradation in Argentina, coupled with trade policy volatility, represent major constraints.

The European Union demonstrates how regulatory frameworks and certification systems can support market expansion in high-value segments. Strict compliance with organic and eco-certification standards has enabled EU producers to access premium markets and maintain strong brand reputations. However, high compliance costs and competition from non-EU producers pose limitations, particularly for small- and medium-sized enterprises.

Africa's experience highlights the opportunities and structural challenges faced by emerging markets. Strategic interventions, such as cooperative farming models, infrastructure investment, and adoption of digital platforms, facilitate access to high-demand commodities in emerging markets. Nevertheless, smallholder fragmentation, limited logistics and cold chain infrastructure, and inconsistent policy enforcement constrain competitiveness.

Overall, Table 3 reveals that successful agricultural market expansion is highly context-dependent. While infrastructure and policy support can reduce barriers and enhance trade reliability, firm-level strategies—including diversification, value addition, and technological adoption—are equally critical. Moreover, environmental and institutional factors consistently emerge as cross-cutting challenges that must be addressed alongside market-oriented strategies. This integrated perspective underscores the need for a holistic

approach combining policy, technology, and firm capabilities to maximize export performance.

5. Discussion and Future Research Agenda

5.1. *Synthesis of Findings*

The review of literature and case studies reveals several overarching trends in international agricultural trade and market expansion. A clear consensus emerges around the importance of market diversification, sustainability, and digitalization as central strategies for firms seeking to expand their global presence. Diversification allows exporters to mitigate risks associated with reliance on a single market or product, while sustainability measures—including organic certifications, eco-labels, and compliance with environmental standards—enhance competitiveness in high-value markets. Digital tools, such as cross-border e-commerce platforms, smart logistics, and data-driven marketing, increasingly facilitate efficient entry into new markets and improve operational responsiveness.

However, the literature also highlights areas of divergence. First, the effectiveness of policy interventions varies significantly across contexts. While some studies underscore the positive impact of export subsidies, trade agreements, and institutional support, others caution against overreliance on state-led mechanisms, which may limit firm-level innovation. Second, the adoption and effectiveness of digitalization are uneven, particularly in developing countries where infrastructure, regulatory frameworks, and digital literacy may constrain full utilization of technology-driven strategies. These differences underscore the need to interpret market expansion strategies in a context-sensitive manner, considering both firm-level capabilities and the surrounding institutional environment.

5.2. *Theoretical Contributions*

This review contributes to the theoretical understanding of international trade and agricultural economics in several ways. First, it extends traditional trade theories by integrating the role of firm-level strategies and technological adoption into models of comparative advantage and export performance. Second, the literature emphasizes the importance of sustainability and value-added production, highlighting how environmental and social considerations are increasingly embedded in trade decisions—a dimension often underrepresented in classical trade theory. Third, case studies illustrate the dynamic interplay between policy, infrastructure, and firm capabilities, suggesting that theories of international trade must account for multi-level interactions, including regulatory, institutional, and technological factors, to fully explain export outcomes in contemporary agriculture.

5.3. *Research Gaps*

Despite substantial progress, several notable gaps persist in the literature. First, there is a lack of longitudinal studies examining the long-term impact of digital transformation on agricultural trade performance. Most studies focus on short-term efficiency gains, leaving questions about sustainability, scalability, and adoption barriers unaddressed. Second, developing country perspectives are underrepresented; much of the literature concentrates on China, Latin America, and the EU, while the challenges and opportunities in Africa and smaller emerging markets require deeper exploration. Third, research on the adaptability of sustainability certifications across different cultural, regulatory, and market contexts remains limited. Questions such as how organic or eco-certifications influence consumer preferences in diverse regions, and how firms adjust certification strategies accordingly, are yet to be systematically addressed.

5.4. Future Research Directions

Building on the identified gaps, several avenues for future research emerge. Comparative cross-national studies can provide insights into how different institutional environments, policy regimes, and cultural contexts shape market expansion strategies and outcomes. The integration of data-driven analytics and big data into agricultural trade research offers opportunities to quantify trade patterns, consumer behavior, and supply chain efficiency with greater precision, allowing for predictive modeling and real-time strategy assessment. Finally, further exploration of policy–firm collaborative mechanisms is needed to understand how public interventions can best complement firm-level initiatives, particularly in fostering sustainable and resilient agricultural exports. Research that combines qualitative insights with quantitative modeling will be particularly valuable in advancing both theoretical and practical knowledge.

In summary, while the literature consistently underscores the strategic importance of diversification, sustainability, and digitalization, future studies should adopt a more longitudinal, comparative, and technology-integrated approach to address remaining gaps and guide policy and managerial practice in international agricultural trade.

6. Conclusion

This review has systematically examined the evolving patterns of international agricultural trade and the strategic approaches adopted by firms to expand their markets. The global agricultural trade landscape is increasingly characterized by market diversification, technological digitalization, and sustainability considerations. Trade flows are shifting from traditional developed markets toward emerging economies, while product structures are transitioning from primary commodities to high-value and differentiated agricultural goods. Key drivers influencing these changes include regional trade agreements, technological innovations such as cross-border e-commerce and smart logistics, and rising environmental and social sustainability standards.

From the literature, three core strategies for market expansion emerge. First, diversification and product upgrading allow firms to mitigate market-specific risks, tap into multiple consumer segments, and enhance competitiveness through value-added offerings such as organic, eco-labeled, or geographically indicated products. Second, digital transformation and supply chain integration facilitate more efficient market entry, optimize logistics, and improve responsiveness to changing demand patterns, thereby strengthening firms' resilience against global shocks. Third, policy and institutional support—including trade agreements, export subsidies, and infrastructure investment—provides essential enabling conditions that complement firm-level strategies and encourage sustainable growth. Case studies across China, Latin America, the European Union, and Africa illustrate how these strategies interact with regional contexts, resource endowments, and institutional capacities to produce varied outcomes in terms of trade performance and market penetration.

The value of this review lies in its integrated perspective, synthesizing theoretical frameworks, empirical evidence, and practical experiences. By highlighting areas of consensus, identifying divergent findings, and outlining research gaps, it provides scholars, practitioners, and policymakers with a comprehensive understanding of contemporary trends and actionable strategies. This review emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach that combines firm capabilities, technology adoption, and supportive policies to navigate the complexities of international agricultural trade. Ultimately, it offers both academic insights and practical guidance for achieving sustainable, resilient, and competitive market expansion in the global agricultural sector.

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