



**ZIMBABWEAN
BUSINESS COUNCIL**
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

EXPORTING TO THE UAE (AGRICULTURAL & FOOD PRODUCTION)

A Comprehensive Guide for Zimbabwean Meat & Agricultural Exporters

TARGET AUDIENCE

Zimbabwean exporters of beef, game meat, fresh fruits, vegetables, and cut flowers - including abattoir operators, commercial farmers, pack-house operators, and freight/logistics businesses.



Publication standard and revision note

ZIBCO PUBLICATION STANDARD

Series Trade Intelligence, Vol. 1 No. 1 · **Version** 2.0 · **First Published** March 2026 · **Revised** August 2026

Verified as at August 2026 for UAE regulatory structure and authority names. **Items marked (PENDING)** await written confirmation from the named Zimbabwean authority and are not yet verified.

Next scheduled review February 2027

Primary sources MOIAT; MOCCAE; Dubai Municipality Food Safety; ADAFSA; UAE Federal Customs; GSO standards; Zimbabwe Department of Veterinary Services; Zimbabwe Plant Quarantine Services; ZIBCO Exporter Survey

Disclosures ZIBCO holds no commercial relationship with any certifier, freight forwarder, consultant or importer named or described in this document. No entity has paid for inclusion

Disclaimer Informational only. Not legal, regulatory, tax or financial advice. Regulations change frequently and often without notice. Verify with the competent authority before every shipment. ZIBCO accepts no liability for decisions taken in reliance on this document

1. Executive summary

The UAE imports roughly 90% of its food. Annual food and agricultural imports exceed US\$17 billion, and Dubai's ports handle the large majority of incoming volume, which makes Jebel Ali the practical gateway for sea freight and Dubai International the gateway for air. Beyond its own consumption, the UAE re-exports across the Gulf, South Asia and East Africa, so a Zimbabwean exporter who establishes there reaches considerably more than eleven million consumers.

That is the opportunity, and it is real. This paper covers what it takes to capture it, in two parts - because the original edition of this document covered only the first.

Part one is the regulatory pathway: certification, documentation, labelling and clearance. Zimbabwean exporters generally find this the hardest part to research and the most expensive to get wrong.

Part two, new in this version, is the commercial case: landed cost, margin, competition and freight. Compliance tells you whether you *may* export. It does not tell you whether you *should*. A significant number of Zimbabwean exporters have completed certification and then discovered they could not compete on price against Brazilian beef or Indian produce with established scale. That is an expensive way to learn it.

Key takeaways

- Halal certification is non-negotiable for all red meat, poultry and processed meat. **The certifying body - not merely the certificate - must appear on the UAE's approved list**
- Halal certification-body approval is administered by **MOIAT**. ESMA, which the first edition of this paper referenced, was dissolved in 2020 and its functions absorbed into MOIAT



- Multiple certificates are required per consignment, and most are consignment-specific rather than annual
- Labels must be in Arabic and English and comply with GSO standards
- **Confirm Zimbabwe's current animal and plant health status and your facility's UAE approval before you spend anything.** This determines eligibility and is not within the exporter's control
- **For perishables, air freight capacity out of Harare is usually the binding constraint - not certification.** Check it first
- Model your landed cost against the competing origin before you certify, not after

2. The regulatory landscape

Who regulates what

Authority	Role
MOCCAE - Ministry of Climate Change & Environment	Federal agricultural and food safety standards; phytosanitary protocols; veterinary import conditions; pesticide maximum residue limits
MOIAT - Ministry of Industry & Advanced Technology	Technical regulations, standards and conformity assessment. Absorbed ESMA in 2020. Administers approval of Halal certification bodies
Dubai Municipality - Food Safety Department	Administers federal food regulation in Dubai; product registration; import approval
ADAFSA - Abu Dhabi Agriculture & Food Safety Authority	The Abu Dhabi equivalent. Separate portal, separate registration
UAE Federal Customs / emirate customs	Duty assessment and clearance

The point of entry determines the authority. Dubai-destined and Abu Dhabi-destined consignments follow different registration processes. Establish your importer's port of entry before beginning any registration.

3. Exporting meat

3.1 Before anything else: eligibility

Meat export eligibility is a country-and-establishment matter settled between governments. No amount of exporter effort substitutes for it.

Confirm these three things before spending money



1. Zimbabwe's current animal health status for UAE import purposes. Disease status determines eligibility and can change after an outbreak. Foot-and-mouth zoning has historically constrained Zimbabwean beef access to premium export markets

2. Whether your abattoir holds UAE establishment approval. This is separate from Halal certification and requires Zimbabwe's Department of Veterinary Services to certify your facility to UAE counterparts, potentially including inspection

3. Whether your intended Halal certifier is currently UAE-approved

(PENDING) - ZIBCO is seeking written confirmation from the Department of Veterinary Services of Zimbabwe's current status and the list of approved establishments, and from MOIAT of the approved certifying bodies valid for Zimbabwe-origin product. **Members should contact ZIBCO before commencing certification.** This paper will be updated when confirmations are received

3.2 Halal certification

All meat headed for the UAE - with the narrow exception of pork directed to licensed outlets - must be certified Halal. The UAE accepts certificates only from certifying bodies on its approved list, administered by MOIAT. A general Islamic slaughter certificate or a generic local Halal mark does not qualify product for entry.

The Halaal Association of Zimbabwe is a recognised domestic certifier. **Its current UAE approval status must be confirmed directly with MOIAT before you rely on it** - this is the single most common and most expensive assumption Zimbabwean exporters make.

Facility requirements for abattoirs:

- Slaughter by a practising Muslim using the Zabiha method, with the name of Allah invoked at slaughter
- Where mechanical stunning is used it must not cause death; full bleeding must be achieved
- The facility must be entirely free of pork and pork-derived substances, with no cross-contamination from non-Halal proteins
- Full traceability linking each batch to identified Halal-slaughtered animals
- An internal Halal Audit Committee
- At least two practising Muslim slaughtermen employed in the process
- A Certificate of Islamic Slaughter must accompany **every** consignment, endorsed by the UAE Embassy in Zimbabwe where required

3.3 Veterinary health certificate

Issued by Zimbabwe's Department of Veterinary Services. Confirms animals were healthy at slaughter, the facility passed government inspection, and the country of origin is free of specified diseases. Zimbabwe's Public Health (Abattoir, Animal and Bird Slaughter and Meat Hygiene) Regulations require slaughter in registered, licensed abattoirs meeting construction, lairage, drainage and hygiene standards.

For poultry, the certificate must declare origin from a country free of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza for the preceding three months, per WOA standards. For red meat, disease-free status must be confirmed before each shipment - eligibility can change following an outbreak.



3.4 Labelling

Arabic and English, both. Must include: product name in Arabic identifying the species; country of origin; production or slaughter date and expiry date (DD/MM/YYYY where shelf life is three months or less); net weight; storage conditions; Halal status; lot or batch number; producer, packer or importer name and address; ingredients and allergens for processed or cured products.

3.5 Cold chain

- Frozen: -18°C or below throughout transit. Reefer containers mandatory
- Chilled: 0-4°C throughout, with remaining shelf life sufficient to survive transit and distribution
- Outer cartons marked with description, weight, origin and batch number
- Vacuum sealing strongly recommended for chilled and frozen cuts
- **Temperature logs are inspected on arrival.** A broken cold chain is the most common cause of rejection and is not recoverable

4. Exporting fresh produce

Zimbabwe produces citrus, berries, avocados, mangoes, paprika, herbs, baby vegetables, macadamia and specialty produce with genuine UAE potential. The market is large, quality-sensitive and highly competitive.

4.1 Phytosanitary Certificate

The foundational document for all plant-based exports. Issued by Zimbabwe's Plant Quarantine Services, certifying inspection, freedom from quarantine pests, and compliance with UAE requirements. Register with Plant Quarantine Services and schedule inspection for each consignment before export.

4.2 Pesticide Residues

MOCCAIE enforces maximum residue limits broadly aligned to Codex, drawing also on EU, US and Australian standards. Exporters must:

- Obtain a Certificate of Analysis from an accredited laboratory confirming residues are within UAE limits
- Monitor MOCCAIE circulars - thresholds and approved compounds change
- Operate an Integrated Pest Management programme at farm level
- Apply only UAE-acceptable pesticides to export crops

Consequence of failure

Consignments may be destroyed, returned or quarantined entirely at the importer's expense. Repeat violations can suspend import permission for the exporting facility.



Because the cost falls on the importer, a single residue failure frequently ends the commercial relationship as well as the shipment.

4.3 Certificate of origin

Required for all fresh produce, confirming Zimbabwean origin. Typically issued by the Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce or the relevant ministry. Where the phytosanitary certificate explicitly states country of origin, a separate certificate may not be required - verify with your importer.

4.4 Labelling and Packaging

Arabic and English: product name, country of origin, variety, size or grade, net weight, producer and packer details. Shelf life and storage conditions stated. Packaging must protect against contamination and physical damage. GMO declaration where applicable.

4.5 The clearance process

Step	Action
1. Pre-export	Register with Plant Quarantine Services. Obtain phytosanitary certificate and residue analysis per consignment
2. Documentation	Commercial invoice; packing list; bill of lading or airway bill; certificate of origin; phytosanitary certificate; residue certificate
3. Shipping	Refrigerated or appropriate ambient transport. Maintain cold chain throughout
4. Arrival	Consignee or agent submits documents to UAE Customs and MOCCA. Physical inspection may be triggered
5. Clearance	Customs duty, typically 5% of CIF value, plus MOCCA inspection fees
6. Distribution	Cleared product moves to retail, hotel or food service via the licensed UAE importer

5. Cut flowers

Zimbabwe built a substantial cut flower industry, and at its 1990s peak was among the world's larger rose exporters. **The sector contracted significantly thereafter and current national capacity is a fraction of that peak.** Exporters should assess the opportunity against present capability, not historical standing - the UAE hospitality and events market is attractive but expects consistent year-round volume, and intermittent supply loses accounts quickly.

- A phytosanitary certificate from Plant Quarantine Services is mandatory
- Flowers must be free of quarantine and regulated non-quarantine pests
- Stems must carry no soil or growing media
- Some species face specific treatment requirements
- Pre-cool to 2-5°C immediately post-harvest; refrigerated transport to the airport
- Air freight to Dubai, minimising transit time - vase life is the product



- Coordinate immediate cold storage on arrival

6. Does the maths work?

6.1 Why this matters more than certification

Certification is a cost and a delay. Competitiveness is the business. A Zimbabwean exporter arriving in Dubai is competing against origins with scale, established cold chains and, in several cases, freight advantages measured in thousands of kilometres.

Model the landed cost before you certify. Certification costs are largely sunk once incurred; the pricing question can be answered in a week with a spreadsheet and two importer conversations.

6.2 The landed cost model

Build this for your own product, per unit, in USD:

Line	Note
Ex-works cost	Production, packing, on-farm handling
Certification, amortised	Halal, phytosanitary, residue analysis, per consignment where applicable
Inland transport to port or airport	Refrigerated where required
Freight	Usually the decisive line for perishables. See Section 7
Insurance	
= CIF Dubai	
Customs duty	Typically 5% of CIF for most food products
Inspection fees	Per consignment
Port handling, agency, clearance	
UAE cold storage and trucking	
= Landed cost, importer's warehouse	
Importer or distributor margin	Typically 20-40%, category-dependent
= Wholesale price	Compare this against the competing origin's shelf-equivalent price

The test. If your wholesale-equivalent price exceeds the incumbent origin's by more than roughly 10-15%, you need a differentiating story - organic, single-origin, counter-seasonal supply, or a quality grade the incumbent cannot supply - and you need the buyer to confirm they will pay for it **before** you certify.



What must be true for a price premium to hold: the buyer has a distinct customer segment that pays for it; your supply is consistent enough for them to list it; and no closer origin offers the same attribute. If any one of those fails, the premium disappears at the first contract renewal.

6.3 The competitive set

Category	Principal competing origins	Their structural advantage	Where Zimbabwe can compete
Beef and red meat	Brazil, India, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan	Scale, established UAE cold chains, long-standing establishment approvals	Grass-fed and game meat as premium niches, subject to eligibility
Citrus and deciduous fruit	South Africa, Egypt, Spain, Morocco	Freight cost, volume, established programmes	Counter-seasonal windows and speciality varieties
Avocados, macadamia, specialty nuts	Kenya, South Africa, Peru	Volume and freight	Quality grade and single-origin positioning
Baby vegetables, herbs, paprika	Kenya, Egypt, Jordan	Air freight frequency and cost	Quality and specification, where freight can be secured
Cut flowers	Kenya, Ethiopia, Netherlands	Freight frequency and cost per kg; enormous scale	Difficult. Requires a secured freight position

The honest reading: Zimbabwe's realistic positions are specialty, counter-seasonal and quality-differentiated - not volume commodity. Exporters who position as a lower-cost alternative to Kenya or South Africa on the same product generally cannot sustain it, because the freight arithmetic does not support it.

6.4 Seasonality

The UAE demand calendar is pronounced and exploitable. Ramadan and Eid drive a substantial food consumption peak; the hospitality season runs roughly October to April with the summer trough; and Gulfod: **15-19 March 2027**, a change from the event's previous February position, sets the annual buying rhythm for many importers.

Counter-seasonal supply is one of the few structural advantages a southern-hemisphere origin holds. Where Zimbabwean production fills a window when northern-hemisphere origins are out of season, price resistance falls sharply. **The single most productive question to ask a prospective importer: when is your supply gap?**

7. Freight: the constraint nobody plans for

New in Version 2.0.

For perishables, freight determines viability more often than any certificate. This is the most common reason a fully certified Zimbabwean exporter might fail to build volume.



7.1 Air

Air freight from Harare depends on belly-hold capacity on passenger services and on limited freighter availability. Capacity is finite, seasonally contested, and priced accordingly. Many exporters route via Johannesburg, adding cost and a handling step.

Before certifying a perishable product for the UAE, establish:

- Available capacity in kilograms per week on your intended route, in your intended season
- Cost per kilogram, and what it does at peak
- Frequency, and whether it supports the shelf life your buyer requires
- Whether a forwarder will commit to allocation, or whether you compete for space each week

The realistic test. If you cannot secure a committed weekly allocation, you cannot promise a UAE buyer consistent supply - and a buyer who is let down twice delists the product regardless of quality. Several Zimbabwean horticultural ventures have failed at exactly this point, having passed every regulatory requirement.

7.2 Sea

For frozen meat, processed goods and non-perishables, sea freight via Beira or Durban to Jebel Ali is materially cheaper and the constraint moves from capacity to transit time and cold chain integrity. Landlocked origin means an inland leg to port that adds cost and a cold chain risk point.

7.3 What ZIBCO is doing

Freight capacity is a corridor-level problem no single exporter can solve. It is being taken up as a priority engagement item with UAE aviation and logistics counterparts, and the ZIBCO Exporter Survey collects freight cost and capacity data specifically so the case can be made with evidence rather than anecdote. **Members with freight data are asked to contribute it.**

8. Documentation checklist

Document	Meat	Produce / flowers	Issuing authority
Commercial invoice	Required	Required	Exporter
Packing list	Required	Required	Exporter
Bill of lading / airway bill	Required	Required	Freight agent or airline
Certificate of origin	Required	Required	ZNCC or relevant ministry
Halal certificate	Required	N/A	UAE-approved certifier - verify with MOIAT



Document	Meat	Produce / flowers	Issuing authority
Certificate of Islamic Slaughter	Required, per consignment	N/A	UAE-approved Islamic organisation
Veterinary health certificate	Required	N/A	Dept. of Veterinary Services, Zimbabwe
Phytosanitary certificate	N/A	Required	Plant Quarantine Services, Zimbabwe
Pesticide residue certificate	N/A	Required	Accredited laboratory
Product registration (UAE)	Required	Situational	Dubai Municipality or ADAFSA

9. Product registration and finding an importer

9.1 Registration

Processed and packaged food for retail sale must be registered before or upon first importation. Fresh produce may generally be imported without product registration but remains subject to inspection.

- **Dubai:** Dubai Municipality Food Safety Department portal
- **Abu Dhabi:** ADAFSA portal
- Requires a product technical file, labelling artwork, certificate of analysis and applicable declarations
- Must be renewed periodically and updated on any formulation or labelling change

9.2 Choosing an importer

Zimbabwean exporters cannot sell directly to UAE retailers or consumers. All imports flow through a UAE-licensed importing entity, and this choice determines the outcome more than any other commercial decision.

Evaluate on: existing distribution relationships in your channel; demonstrated perishables handling and cold chain; regulatory track record; willingness to co-invest in registration and market development; and financial stability and payment terms.

On payment terms - read this alongside the Banking & Insurance paper

UAE trade commonly runs on open account at 30-90 days. That is not a formality, more so a credit decision. . ZIBCO's Banking & Insurance paper (Series Vol. 1 No. 3) covers trade credit and export credit insurance, which allows you to offer competitive terms without carrying the default risk yourself.

Ask ZIBCO for an introduction before agreeing terms with a new buyer. A reference check costs nothing; a bad debt on a first container can end a small exporter.



10. Recommended actions

Immediate

1. **Confirm eligibility first** - contact the Department of Veterinary Services (meat) or Plant Quarantine Services (produce and flowers) on current status and facility approval, and contact ZIBCO for the position on Halal certifier approval
2. **Model the landed cost** using Section 6 before committing to certification
3. **Test the freight position** - obtain a written capacity and rate indication for your route and season
4. Commission residue analysis from an accredited laboratory for fresh produce
5. Engage a UAE freight forwarder or customs broker experienced in food imports

Medium term

6. Upgrade facilities toward HACCP or ISO 22000 - increasingly required by UAE buyers
7. Pursue Global G.A.P. for fresh produce - required by major UAE supermarket chains
8. Attend Gulfood, **15-19 March 2027**, Dubai World Trade Centre. **Confirm dates with the organiser before booking**
9. Join ZIBCO for market intelligence, buyer introductions and representation with Dubai Chambers
10. Develop bilingual marketing materials and compliant packaging

Ongoing

11. Subscribe to MOCCAE circulars for residue and import requirement updates
12. Monitor MOIAT technical regulations for labelling and standards changes
13. Track Zimbabwe-UAE CEPA developments. **As at August 2026 the agreement is under negotiation and not concluded** - see the ZIBCO Corridor Monitor

11. Contacts

Organisation	Website
MOCCAE - agricultural imports	moccoae.gov.ae
MOIAT - standards and Halal certifier approval	moiat.gov.ae
Dubai Municipality - Food Safety	dm.gov.ae
ADAFSA - Abu Dhabi food safety	adafsa.gov.ae



Organisation	Website
Dept. of Veterinary Services, Zimbabwe	Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development
Plant Quarantine Services, Zimbabwe	Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development
Halaal Association of Zimbabwe	halaalzim.co.zw
ZNCC - certificate of origin	zncc.co.zw
Gulfood, Dubai	gulfood.com
ZIBCO	zimbusinesscouncil-uae.org · research@zimbusinesscouncil-uae.org

DISCLAIMER

Exporters are strongly advised to verify all requirements directly with UAE and Zimbabwe competent authorities before each shipment, as regulations change frequently and often without prior notice. This white paper is published by the Zimbabwean Business Council UAE (ZIBCO) for general informational purposes only. Regulatory requirements are subject to change without notice. Nothing herein constitutes legal, regulatory, tax, or financial advice. Always obtain independent professional advice before making investment or regulatory decisions. ZIBCO accepts no liability for decisions made in reliance on this document.

© 2026 Zimbabwean Business Council UAE (ZIBCO). All rights reserved.

www.zimbusinesscouncil-uae.org | info@zimbusinesscouncil-uae.org