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UK whisky exports rose to £2.5 billion in the first half of 2026.

Food and Drink Federation data showed wine imports fell 2.7%, reinforcing spirits’ dominance in Britain’s alcohol trade.

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The United Kingdom imported less wine in the first half of 2026 while increasing exports of whisky and gin, according to a recent trade analysis published by the Food and Drink Federation, the British food and beverage industry group, using customs data.

From January through June, UK wine imports totaled £1.6 billion, down 2.7% from the same period in 2025. Imported volumes fell 2.1%. The drop in value was slightly larger than the drop in volume, which suggests that the average value per imported unit declined by about 0.6%. The FDF figures cover trade flows at the border, not retail sales, so they do not show what happened to bottle prices in stores or to wine consumption in Britain.

Whisky remained the main driver of British alcohol exports. Overseas whisky sales reached £2.5 billion in the first six months of the year, up 2.2% in value. Export volumes rose 5.8%, meaning shipments grew faster than revenue. Based on those two changes, the average export value per unit fell by about 3.4%. The published data do not show how much of that change came from prices, product mix, or differences among destination markets.

Gin exports moved in the opposite direction on unit value. UK gin shipments abroad rose to £306.9 million, up 2.8% from a year earlier, while volumes increased 1.3%. That implies an average value per unit increase of about 1.5%. Taken together, whisky and gin generated about £2.807 billion in export sales in the first half.

Using the rounded totals in the FDF release, British alcohol exports appear to have been worth about £3.5 billion during the period, compared with roughly £2.3 billion in alcohol imports. That would leave an estimated trade surplus of around £1.2 billion. The federation did not publish that as a separate official alcohol balance. The figure is an approximation derived by removing food and nonalcoholic drink categories from the broader totals, so it should not be read as an exact breakdown.

Wine was the only alcoholic drink listed among the UK’s 10 largest import categories in the FDF ranking. That underlines how different Britain’s trade profile is between imports and exports. On the import side, wine remains a major foreign purchase. On the export side, spirits, especially whisky, carry far more weight.

The FDF data also include trade measured in liters of pure alcohol, a separate unit that tracks alcohol content rather than the finished volume of wine, beer, or spirits. On that basis, UK exports reached 234.3 million liters in the first half of 2026, up 1.8% from a year earlier and 2.3% above the same period in 2024. Imports measured in pure

alcohol moved the other way. The UK brought in 39 million liters, down 16.5% from the first half of 2025, although still 1% above the level recorded in the first half of 2024. The FDF figures make clear that this 16.5% decline applies only to categories reported in liters of pure alcohol and should not be confused with the 2.1% drop in imported wine volumes.

Mercosur provided one of the clearest regional snapshots in the report. Whisky accounted for more than two-thirds of all UK food and drink exports to the South American trade bloc. British whisky sales to Mercosur reached £96.5 million in the first half, up 6.6% in value and 1.8% in volume. That means the average value per exported unit rose by about 4.7% in that market, unlike the decline seen across total global whisky exports.

Gin did not perform as well in Mercosur. UK gin exports to the bloc fell 12.4% in value to £15.9 million, while volumes dropped 9%. The separate category listed by the FDF as spirits, excluding whisky and gin, also declined. It totaled £2 million, down 8.1% in value, with volumes off 0.7%. Beer recorded the fastest percentage growth among the alcoholic categories shown for Mercosur, but from a small base. Exports rose to about £500,000, up 229.7% in value and 176.4% in volume.

Those four categories together came to about £114.9 million. Based on the FDF’s published totals, that equals roughly 83.6% of the £137.4 million in all UK food and drink exports to Mercosur. Whisky alone represented about 70.2% of that broader export trade. Even so, when the relationship is measured in liters of pure alcohol, exports to Mercosur were slightly weaker. They totaled 12.4 million liters, down 0.7% from a year earlier.

In the other direction, wine from Mercosur lost ground in the British market faster than total UK wine imports did. Britain bought £33.6 million worth of wine from the bloc in the first half, down 17.4% from the same period in 2025, while imported volumes fell 8.4%. That suggests an average value per unit decline of about 9.8%. The £33.6 million figure was about 2.1% of the UK’s total £1.6 billion in wine imports based on the rounded FDF numbers. The report does not break Mercosur wine purchases down by country, so it does not show which supplier accounted for most of the decline.

In Asia, the federation grouped together Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand in its pure alcohol measure. Combined UK exports to those three markets fell to 1.2 million liters, down 21.4% from a year earlier. Within that region, the report highlights very different results for whisky sales to Thailand and the Philippines.

Thailand bought £9.7 million worth of UK whisky in the first half, up 6.1% from the same period in 2025, even though volume fell 16.7%. That points to an increase of about 27.4% in the average value per unit exported. The FDF tables show whisky as the highest-value British export category listed for Thailand.

The Philippines moved sharply in the other direction. UK whisky exports there dropped to £1.3 million, down 57.2% in value, while volume fell 70.4%. Because quantity declined faster than value, the average value per unit still rose by about 44.6%, but that did not offset the much smaller scale of the business. The FDF tables also list different reference most-favored-nation tariff rates for whisky in the two markets: 60% for Thailand and 15% for the Philippines.