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U.S. bought 81.13% of Mexico’s tequila exports in the first half

Roughly 174 million of 214.4 million liters shipped abroad went to one market, leaving producers exposed to shifts in American demand

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More than four out of every five liters of tequila that Mexico exported in the first half of the year went to the United States, underscoring how heavily the industry still depends on a single foreign market.

Food News Latam reported on Wednesday, November 11, that 81.13% of Mexico's tequila exports from January through June were shipped to the United States. The figure means that roughly 174 million of the 214.4 million liters exported in that period were sold there, according to data the publication attributed to the Tequila Regulatory Council, known in Spanish as the CRT.

The concentration stands out because tequila is one of Mexico's best-known export products and one of its most tightly protected drinks. Under its denomination of origin, tequila can be made only in authorized areas of Mexico and only from blue agave, Tequilana Weber. That leaves producers exposed if demand weakens in the United States or if trade conditions change in their largest market.

The same data set showed that tequila production reached 302.1 million liters in the first six months of the year, down 1.7% from the same period a year earlier. Agave consumption, however, rose 3.3% to 1.17 million metric tons, reflecting continued demand for raw material across the industry even as output slipped.

The United States has dominated tequila's export map for years, but the latest figures show how large that dependence remains. The U.S. market has been a major engine of growth for premium spirits, and tequila has benefited from that shift through higher-end offerings, broader cocktail use, celebrity-backed brands and investment by multinational drinks groups. Those forces helped tequila move well beyond its traditional consumer base and gain a larger place in bars, restaurants and retail shelves across the country.

That same dependence creates clear risks for Mexican producers and suppliers. Any change in U.S. tariff policy, consumer spending or alcohol demand can quickly affect export volumes, pricing and margins for distillers, agave growers and packaging companies. Industry concerns have also centered on the review of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or USMCA, as well as signs of slower alcohol consumption growth in the United States and inventory adjustments by distributors after several years of rapid expansion.

Industry officials have been pushing for wider geographic diversification. Food News Latam said Aurelio López Rocha, president of the CRT, has argued that the share going to the United States should decline over time as producers build sales in other regions. Europe is one of the main targets, with the United Kingdom, Spain, France and Italy already listed among the top buyers. In Latin America, Colombia is the only market mentioned among the 10 leading destinations, while Brazil has been identified as a priority for future growth. Asia is also seen as an expansion opportunity.

Expanding beyond the United States, however, is likely to be slow and costly. Producers need new distribution networks, more promotion, product portfolios suited to local tastes and, in some markets, relief from steep import barriers. Food News Latam said Roberto Ciprés Cruces, president of Mexico's National Chamber of the Tequila Industry, has called on the Mexican government to seek lower tariffs in India, where the duty on tequila is 150% and can rise to 200% in some states.

The tequila industry also remains closely tied to agricultural conditions and to a regulated production base inside Mexico. The CRT, a nonprofit Mexican civil association that inspects and certifies compliance with tequila rules and defends the denomination of origin in Mexico and abroad, said in a July 24 statement that it had 229 authorized producers and 3,402 brands linked to producers. Tequila can be produced only with blue agave grown in authorized municipalities in Jalisco, Guanajuato, Michoacán, Nayarit and Tamaulipas.

The export figures cited by Food News Latam were not presented as new November data but as an analysis of earlier industry statistics. The publication also cited an export growth rate that differs from the one in the CRT's July 24 statement for the same volume, an inconsistency that was not resolved in the material reviewed. The published figures also do not specify whether export volumes were normalized by alcohol strength, a technical detail that can matter in comparing spirits data across markets.