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Irish Beer Exports Climb Amid Tariffs and Trade Uncertainty

Domestic sales decline as brewers face U.S. tariffs, rising non-alcoholic demand, and calls for government support

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Irish beer exports reached €330 million last year, according to a new report from Drinks Ireland, but the sector now faces significant challenges due to new U.S. tariffs and ongoing trade uncertainty. The annual beer market report for 2024, published Monday, shows that overall beer production in Ireland increased by 10.7%, largely driven by export demand. However, domestic beer sales declined by 1.6% for the second

consecutive year, with per capita consumption falling by 3%.

Drinks Ireland, which represents alcohol drinks manufacturers and suppliers and is part of Ibec, reported that Irish beer exports grew by 3.8% in 2024, continuing a recovery that began after the pandemic in 2022. The United Kingdom remains the largest market for Irish beer exports, accounting for €152 million or nearly half of total exports. The United States is the second-largest market at €62 million (14%), followed by France at €33 million (10%), and both Germany and Canada at €16 million each (4.8%).

Lager continues to be the most popular type of beer in Ireland. Despite the growth in exports, the international trading environment has become more difficult for Irish brewers. Exports to the United States now face a 15% tariff, a weaker dollar, and persistent trade uncertainty. Cormac Healy, director of Drinks Ireland, said these factors create a challenging environment for exporters and called for continued efforts by the Irish Government and European Commission to remove these tariffs and return to zero-for-zero tariff trading.

Healy also highlighted an additional challenge: new tariffs linked to steel and aluminum used in beer cans. He urged for their removal as well and emphasized the need for increased government investment through agencies like Bord Bia and Enterprise Ireland to help develop new markets and diversify export destinations.

The report also notes significant growth in non-alcoholic beer sales within Ireland. Sales of non-alcoholic beer rose by 25%, while production increased by 77% in 2024. Non-alcoholic beers now make up more than 2.5% of the overall Irish beer market—a 150% increase in market share over five years. In June, Diageo reported that sales of Guinness 0.0 in bars grew by 27% over the past year, with plans for the non-alcoholic version to account for 12% of total stout production at its Dublin brewery next year.

Healy said there is growing acceptance of non-alcoholic products among Irish consumers, calling it one of the most significant innovations in the drinks industry in decades. He pointed out that across the European Union, one in every fifteen beers consumed is now non-alcoholic and predicted that Ireland could reach similar levels with proper government support.

Beer remains Ireland’s most popular alcoholic beverage, holding a 43.3% share of the alcohol market in 2024—an increase of nearly one percentage point compared to last year. Most beer sales—63.7%—occur through on-trade channels such as pubs, restaurants, and hotels.

Ireland continues to have one of the highest excise tax rates on alcohol in Europe, second only to Finland. Beer excise receipts totaled €397 million last year, with the sector contributing over €4.4 billion in excise receipts over the past decade. For every pint of lager sold in Ireland, €1.70 goes to Revenue when combining excise duty and VAT.

The report underscores both opportunities and obstacles facing Irish brewers as they navigate shifting consumer preferences at home and changing trade conditions abroad.