



Vanilla

Summary of Key Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Vanilla Production

- ✓ Structural Supply Chain Features Contributing to Trafficking in Persons Vulnerability
 - Seasonal Surges in Labor Demand
- ✓ Undesirable and Hazardous Work
- ✓ Vulnerable Workforce
 - Child Labor

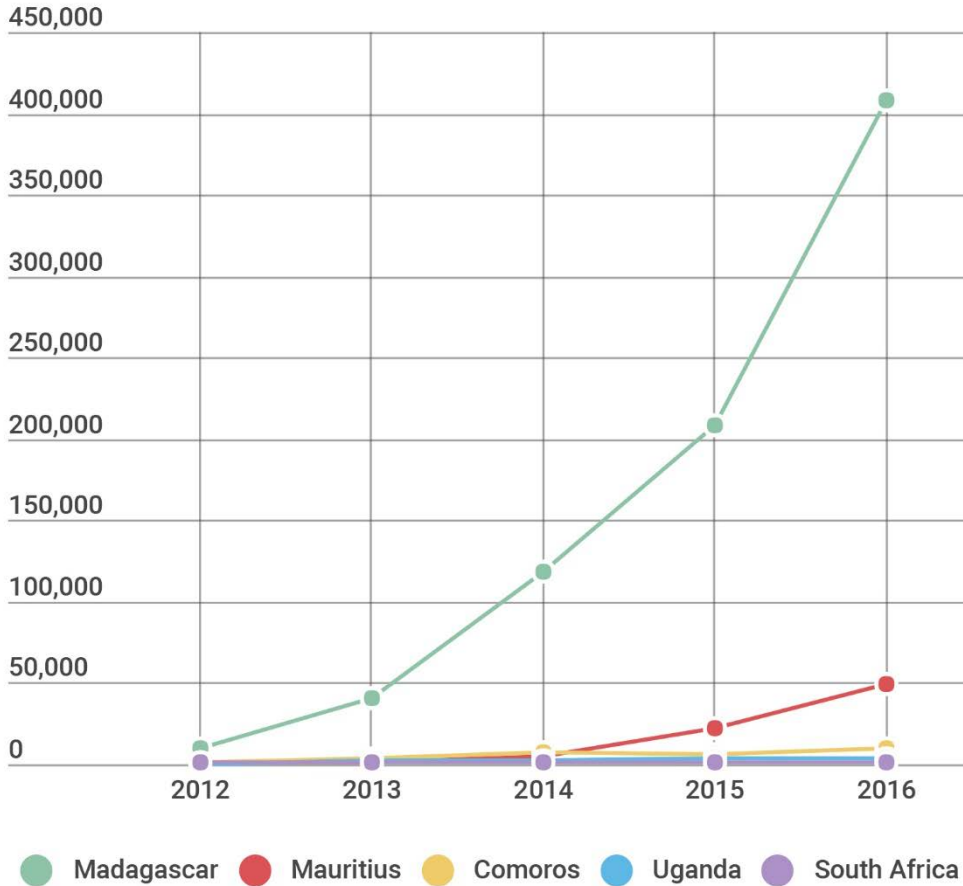
Overview of Vanilla Production in sub-Saharan Africa

Trade

The top exporters of vanilla from Sub-Saharan Africa are Madagascar, Mauritius, Comoros, Uganda, and Tanzania.¹



Top Exporters of Vanilla (Value USD/Thousands)



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The top importers of vanilla from African countries are the United States, France, Germany, Mauritius, and the Netherlands.³

Features of Production and Supply Chain

Vanilla is the world's second most expensive spice,⁴ and one of the most labor intensive to produce.⁵ Madagascar is the global leader in vanilla exportation, growing 80% of the world's vanilla.⁶ There is very little information available about vanilla production in other top-producing African countries. The vanilla industry in Madagascar employed 80,000 smallholder farmers and 5,000 producers in 2016.⁷ Vanilla exports are monopolized by the Malagasy government and the Association of Vanilla Exporters;⁸ the



government sets the price for vanilla, and the crop represents a large share of the Malagasy government's revenue.⁹ Eighty percent of Malagasy vanilla (representing 64 percent of global production) is grown by smallholder farmers in the northern coastal region of Sava.¹⁰

The harvesting season occurs six to nine months after pollination,¹¹ between June and August.¹² Since most vanilla is produced on smallholder farms, the number of members in a household often determines how much vanilla can be harvested. Farmers often must employ their entire family to aid in the harvesting process.¹³ Vanilla beans must be picked multiple times a week during harvest season, as overripe beans are far less valuable.¹⁴

After harvesting, vanilla is soaked in hot water and then wrapped in a warm woolen blanket and dried in the sun.¹⁵ This process is what turns the green, freshly harvested beans into the dark brown beans that are found in grocery stores. Beans are then sorted by quality based on length and moistness and then stored for six months.¹⁶ It takes six kilos of green vanilla to make one kilo of black vanilla.¹⁷

In Madagascar, vanilla is then purchased by middlemen known as "collectors."¹⁸ These collectors negotiate with vanilla farmers for the lowest possible prices.¹⁹ Collectors then sell the vanilla to other collectors or to exporters, often at a 20 percent markup or more.²⁰ Vanilla farmers make between MGA 30,000 and 800,000 (USD 10-45) per kilo of vanilla beans.²¹ Prices are highly volatile, and can differ greatly from year to year.²² After vanilla is sold to exporters, it is transported to importers and then processed in factories in the country where the vanilla will be sold.²³

Malagasy farmers have reported problems with vanilla bean theft. Thieves come in the night and take ripe beans to sell to middlemen.²⁴ Farmers often sleep in their fields during harvest season to prevent this theft. Because vanilla beans are not marked or labeled when they are sold, exporters and importers have no way of knowing if they are selling stolen vanilla.²⁵

Key Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Vanilla Production

Undesirable and Hazardous Work

Vanilla production is extremely labor intensive. Vanilla is an orchid with long vines. After it is planted, it takes three to four years to flower and produce fruit.²⁶ Vanilla requires a temperature range of 21 to 32 degrees Celsius, annual precipitation of 1500 mm or more, and 80 percent relative humidity in order to grow.²⁷ In Mexico, where vanilla is indigenous plant, birds and insects pollinate vanilla flowers, allowing them to fruit.²⁸ These species of pollinating animals do not exist in SSA vanilla-producing countries, necessitating hand pollination for all vanilla flowers.²⁹ The flowers only open for pollination once a year, sometimes for only a few hours, creating an extremely short window of time for farmers to pollinate their crops.³⁰ This processes requires a large among amount of manual labor.



Vulnerable Workforce

Child Labor

There is evidence of child labor in Malagasy³¹ and Ugandan³² vanilla farming. In Madagascar and Uganda, children often help with pollination work on their family farms because of their small, dexterous hands.³³ This work cannot be done after school; it must be done in the morning to be successful.³⁴ This leads to high levels of truancy during the pollination period. Nearly a third of those working in Madagascar's vanilla industry are between the ages of 12 and 17, and children as young as ten have to work on vanilla farms.³⁵ It has been reported that major European food companies have witnessed children working in fields and have not reported it, and that vanilla companies are not completing appropriate risk assessments with their suppliers.³⁶ Malagasy authorities are also aware of the child labor problem in vanilla harvesting, but often do not take action because child labor is normalized in vanilla growing regions.³⁷

After the harvest season, vanilla farmers take out loans from middlemen (the same men that will buy their crops in the summer) known as "flower contracts."³⁸ These flower contracts use the prospective vanilla harvest price and farmers plants as collateral. Because of price volatility, farmers frequently sell their crop during harvest season for a lower price than they took out their loan with, trapping farmers in debt. Farmers may have to sell their homes, livestock or land to pay back these loans. In the most severe cases, children of vanilla farmers may be vulnerable to trafficking in other areas as a means for parents to pay back their loans.³⁹

Examples of Business, Government and Civil Society Action

In 2017, the United States Department of Labor and the International Labor Office announced the United States would provide USD 4 million to SAVA-BE: Soutenir les Acteurs de la Vanille au Benefice des Enfants (Supporting Sustainable and Child Labor Free Vanilla Growing Communities in Sava). The goal of SAVA-BE is to "Bring together leadership from the international vanilla sector through the national vanilla platform to professionalize the vanilla sector and improve the livelihoods of vanilla producing families."⁴⁰

Fair Trade and Rainforest Alliance both offer certification for vanilla from Africa.⁴¹ In Uganda, for example, a farmers' association comprised of separate cooperatives helps smallholder vanilla farmers find markets for their Fair Trade vanilla, the majority of which is also certified organic. In addition to using the Fair Trade premium to support education and other development goals, members have pursued a pilot beekeeping program to assist with pollination and decrease manual labor needs.⁴²





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Endnotes

¹ International Trade Centre. Trade Map. www.trademap.org.

² International Trade Centre. Trade Map. www.trademap.org.

³ International Trade Centre. Trade Map. www.trademap.org.

⁴ Hjerl Hansen, Julie; Lykke Lind, Peter; et al. "The Hidden Cost of Vanilla: Child Labour and Debt Spirals." 2016. *Danwatch*. <https://www.danwatch.dk/en/undersogelse/thehiddencostofvanilla/>.

⁵ Charles, Dan. "Our Love of 'All Natural' Is Causing a Vanilla Shortage." NPR. 2017.

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⁸ De La Cruz Median, Javier; Rodriguez Jimenes, Guadalupe; Garcia, Hugo; et al. *Vanilla: Post Harvest Operations*. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. 2009.

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¹¹ De La Cruz Median, Javier; Rodriguez Jimenes, Guadalupe; Garcia, Hugo; et al. *Vanilla: Post Harvest Operations*. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. 2009.

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¹² Hjerl Hansen, Julie; Lykke Lind, Peter; et al. "The Hidden Cost of Vanilla: Child Labour and Debt Spirals." 2016. *Danwatch*. <https://www.danwatch.dk/en/undersogelse/thehiddencostofvanilla/>.

¹³ De La Cruz Median, Javier; Rodriguez Jimenes, Guadalupe; Garcia, Hugo; et al. *Vanilla: Post Harvest Operations*. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

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