

Commodity Report: Tomatoes (2026)

Tomatoes are reportedly produced with forced labor (FL) and/or child labor (CL) in the following countries:¹

- Argentina (CL)
- China (CL, FL)
- Dominican Republic (CL)
- Mexico (CL, FL)
- Paraguay (CL)

Top ten countries that produce tomatoes worldwide:²

- | | | | |
|----|---------------|-----|---------|
| 1. | China | 6. | Italy |
| 2. | India | 7. | Spain |
| 3. | Turkey | 8. | Mexico |
| 4. | United States | 9. | Brazil |
| 5. | Egypt | 10. | Nigeria |

Where are tomatoes reportedly produced with human trafficking, including forced labor, and/or child labor?

According to the U.S. Department of State's *2025 Trafficking in Persons Report*, tomatoes are produced with forced labor and child labor in China and with child labor in the Dominican Republic.³ According to the U.S. Department of Labor's *2024 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor*, tomatoes are produced with child labor in Argentina, the Dominican Republic, and Paraguay, and with child labor and forced labor in Mexico.⁴

¹ This list is based solely on findings from the [U.S. Department of State's 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report](#) and the [U.S. Department of Labor's 2024 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor](#).

² FAOSTAT [Crops and Livestock Products. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. 2024](#). **Note:** This list is ordered by value produced.

³ US Department of State. [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report](#). 2025

⁴ U.S. Department of Labor. [List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor](#). 2024

The *2025 Trafficking in Persons Report* lists Argentina as a Tier 1 country, while the Dominican Republic, Paraguay, and Mexico are all listed as Tier 2 countries; China is listed as a Tier 3 country.⁵

What does human trafficking, including forced labor, and/or child labor in tomato production look like?

This section includes countries with publicly available research and reporting on forced labor and child labor, in addition to the countries listed in the above-mentioned government reports.

Many reports have documented significant indicators of human trafficking, including forced labor, among workers on vegetable farms in **Mexico**, including farms that produce tomatoes. In 2021, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) issued a withhold release order (WRO) on tomatoes from some farms in the Mexican state of San Luis Potosí in response to reports of forced labor abuses in 2020.⁶ CBP stated that it identified indicators of forced labor including abuse of vulnerability, deception in recruitment, withholding of wages, debt bondage, and abusive working and living conditions.⁷

Indicators of forced labor were identified at tomato fields in Mexico supplying prominent U.S. retailers and restaurants.⁸ The majority of workers at these locations belonged to indigenous Mexican groups, and traveled hundreds of miles from their homes to work at large agricultural complexes that grow tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, and other vegetables. An investigation found that laborers working on farms growing tomatoes were confined to encampments, often without a reliable water supply, functioning toilets, or beds. Camp bosses reportedly withheld wages and inflated prices for necessities at company stores, pushing laborers into debt. Additionally, some camps utilized guards, barbed-wire fences, and threats of violence by supervisors to keep workers from leaving.

In **China**, over one million Uyghur adults and children, part of an ethnic minority group native to the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (XUAR), are reportedly in forced labor, including in the picking and

⁵ [For the 2025 Trafficking in Person Report's tier ranking methodology, see "A Guide to the Tiers."](#)

⁶ Marosi, Richard. "[U.S. Blocking Tomato Shipments from Mexican Farms Accused of Abusing Workers](#)." Los Angeles Times. 31 Dec 2021.

⁷ U.S. Customs and Border Protection. "[CBP Issues Withhold Release Order on Tomatoes Produced by Farm in Mexico](#)." 21 Oct 2021.

⁸ Daria, James and Anna Canning. "[Certified Exploitation: How Equitable Food Initiative and Fair Trade USA Fail to Protect Farmworkers in the Mexican Produce Industry](#)." Corporate Accountability Lab, Oct 2023.

processing of tomatoes. Reports over the last several years claim that Uyghurs have been held in detention facilities by the Chinese government and subjected to forced labor on farms in XUAR, the cotton and tomato growing center of China.⁹ As a result, CBP issued a WRO, effective January 13, 2021, that bans any XUAR tomatoes and downstream products (in addition to cotton products) from entering the United States. CBP stated that at least six labor violations against Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities were identified, including debt bondage, withholding wages, and intimidation and threats.¹⁰ Enforcement of this WRO was superseded by enforcement of the rebuttable presumption of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA), upon its entry into force in June 2022. In fact, tomatoes and their downstream products were designated as a high-priority sector in the original text of the UFLPA.¹¹ As of 2026, several Chinese tomato and downstream product companies have been added to the UFLPA Entity list.¹² Reporting indicates that the UFLPA appears to have influenced purchasing practices for goods being sold in the United States; a BBC investigation into Italian tomato paste sold in the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union found that none of the Italian tomato paste products it tested in the United States contained Chinese tomatoes, unlike comparable products sold in the United Kingdom and European Union.¹³

The salad vegetable sector in **Italy**, including tomato growing, has high rates of migrant workers. Per 2021 reporting, migrant workers in this sector in Italy were often engaged by labor contractors, to whom they can owe up to half of their earnings for food, lodging, and fees.¹⁴ The Italian tomato industry is linked with organized crime, facilitating what is known as the *caporalato* system. In this structure, the *caporale*, or gang leader, acts as a middleman between farmers and the mafia by recruiting migrant workers and taking a cut of their wages.¹⁵ Foreign worker recruitment relies on the promise of work contracts. However, the gang leaders have been known to falsify these documents, leaving workers vulnerable to wage theft, exploitative pay rates, blacklisting, and coercion. Though illegal since 2016,

⁹ U.S. Department of State. [2025 Tracking in Persons Report](#). 2025.

¹⁰ U.S. Customs and Border Protection. [“CBP Issues Region-Wide Withhold Release Order on Products Made by Slave Labor in Xinjiang.”](#) 13 Jan 2021.

¹¹ [Murphy, Laura. “Assessing the Impact of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act After Three Years.” CSIS, 29 Aug 2025.](#)

¹² Center for Strategic and International Studies. [“Assessing the Impact of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act After Three Years.”](#) 29 August 2025.

¹³ BBC. [“Italian’ purees in UK supermarkets likely to contain Chinese forced-labour tomatoes.”](#) 1 December 2024.

¹⁴ Scatturo, Ruggero. [“Modern Slavery Made in Italy—Causes and Consequences of Labour Exploitation in the Italian Agricultural Sector.”](#) *Journal of Illicit Economies and Development*. 3(2), 2021.

¹⁵ The Guardian. [“How the Italian mafia makes millions from tinned tomatoes – video.”](#) 14 September 2023.

this system has persisted covertly; restrictive asylum and migration policies deepen workers' exposure to these illegal labor brokers and increase the risk of forced labor.¹⁶ Most regularly employed migrants in the tomato sector originate from Romania, Morocco, India, Albania, and Senegal, with many sources noting a sharp increase in the immigration of Sub-Saharan Africans to Southern Italy.¹⁷ However, that data does not include illegal migration, which is widespread through the *caporalato* system. Migrant tomato workers in Southern Italy under this system are paid on a piece-rate basis, making just EUR 3.50 (USD 4.03) per 300 kilogram crate of tomatoes picked, while also being obligated to pay for food, water, transportation, and even phone charging.¹⁸ The conditions these workers are subjected to have widely been considered forced labor. Approximately 420,000 people have been estimated to have been exploited as part of this system in intensive agriculture in Italy.¹⁹

In the **United States**, Mexican and Guatemalan migrants, including children, reportedly work on tomato fields in multiple states including Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia. Significant indicators of human trafficking have been documented in this population, including debt to labor brokers, sub-minimum wages and wage theft, sexual harassment, and physical abuse.²⁰ During Virginia's hot and humid tomato harvest season (July–October), H-2A workers have reported living in cramped housing without air conditioning or adequate access to drinking water.²¹ Child workers – both U.S.- and foreign-born - are common among tomato harvesters in the U.S.; a 2024 study surveyed 202 child agricultural workers in North Carolina who reported their work schedules kept them from attending school, with 50 percent having to repeat a grade.²²

In **Paraguay**, children work in agriculture in rural regions producing a variety of vegetables, including tomatoes. As of 2024, 53 percent of children living in rural areas worked as child laborers on

¹⁶ Perrotta, Domenico. "[Caporalato capitalism. Labour brokerage and agrarian change in a Mediterranean society.](#)" 25 July 2022.

¹⁷ Ambrosini, Maurizio. "[Immigrant Work and the Production of Italian Agrifood: The Variants of Subordinate Integration.](#)" 4 November 2024.

¹⁸ The Guardian. "[How the Italian mafia makes millions from tinned tomatoes – video.](#)" 14 September 2023.

¹⁹ Zampano, Giada. "[Italy faces rising problem of 'modern slavery,' experts say demands systemic approach.](#)" 31 July 2024.

²⁰ Blau, Max. "[Farmworkers Are Frequently Exploited. But Few Farms Participate in a Program That Experts Say Could Prevent Abuse.](#)" Pro Publica, 16 Dec 2025.

²¹ Legal Aid Justice Center. "[Tomato Camp: A migrant farmworker camp on the Eastern Shore of Virginia.](#)" 23 June 2026.

²² Arnold, Taylor, et al. "[Understanding Latinx Child Farmworkers' Reasons for Working: A Mixed Methods Approach.](#)" 17 January 2024.

farms.²³ These children are known to suffer accidents and illnesses, in many cases as a result of using dangerous tools and handling chemicals.²⁴ In **Argentina** and the **Dominican Republic** children also engage in dangerous agricultural work, including harvesting tomatoes.²⁵

Tomato Production and Supply Chain:

Harvesting is the most labor-intensive part of tomato production. After harvesting, fresh tomatoes are transported to a processing plant where they are washed and sorted and ultimately are sent to a packing house, where they are distributed to various retail food sellers, food preparation outlets, and processing operations to be stewed, crushed, and pressed into tomato products.²⁶

How consumers are linked to human trafficking, including forced labor, and/or child labor in tomato production:

Top ten countries that export tomatoes worldwide:²⁷

- | | |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1. Mexico | 6. Canada |
| 2. Netherlands | 7. Belgium |
| 3. Morocco | 8. Turkey |
| 4. Spain | 9. United States |
| 5. France | 10. Italy |

²³ [U.S. Department of Labor. Child Labor and Forced Labor Reports: Paraguay. 2024.](#)
[“5 Safety Risks That Child Poverty in Paraguay Causes.” The Borgen Project, 8 Nov 2023.](#)

²⁴ U.S. Department of Labor. [List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor](#). 2024

²⁵ US Department of State. [Argentina, 2023 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor](#) 2023.

The Borgen Project. [“Child Labor in The Dominican Republic.”](#) 1 March 2021

²⁶ Tomato Wellness. [“Farm to table: how tomatoes are processed.”](#) 16 May 2023.

²⁷ [International Trade Center. Trade Map](#). (ITC Calculations based on UNCOMTRADE Statistics). **Note:** The country list is ordered by value exported.

Top ten countries that import tomatoes worldwide:²⁸

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------|
| 1. United States | 6. Spain |
| 2. Germany | 7. Poland |
| 3. France | 8. Russia |
| 4. United Kingdom | 9. Canada |
| 5. Netherlands | 10. Italy |

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, fresh tomatoes are America's second-most consumed type of fresh-market produce.²⁹ Americans primarily consume domestic tomatoes, mainly from California and Florida, as well as tomatoes imported from Canada and Mexico. Mexico exports the majority of its fresh tomato supply to the United States; in 2023, Mexico exported 1.82 million metric tons valued at USD 2.7 billion to the United States.³⁰ In 2024, the United States consumed approximately 19 pounds of fresh tomatoes per person.³¹

Examples of what governments, corporations, and others are doing:

U.S. Withhold Release Orders and Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act

As described above, the United States has banned imports of tomatoes from Mexico and China by issuing WROs. Separately, the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act establishes a “rebuttable presumption” that any goods mined, produced, or manufactured wholly or in part in Xinjiang, or produced by entities on the UFLPA Entity List, are made with forced labor and are therefore prohibited from entering the U.S. unless proven otherwise.³² The burden of proof falls on companies to prove that their supply chains are free of forced labor. According to the CBP commissioner, WROs pressure

²⁸ [International Trade Center. Trade Map.](#) (ITC Calculations based on UNCOMTRADE Statistics). **Note:** The country list is ordered by value imported.

²⁹ [U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. “Food Availability and Consumption.” 8 Jan 2025.](#)

³⁰ Davis, Wilma et al. [“Vegetables and Pulses Outlook: April 2025.”](#) USDA, 24 Apr 2025.

[Mandujano, Manuel. “Tomatoes and Products Annual.” U.S. Department of Agriculture Foreign Agricultural Service, 4 Jun 2024.](#)

³¹ Ozburn, T. [“Per capita consumption of fresh vegetables in the United States in 2024, by vegetable type \(in pounds\).”](#) Statista, 28 Nov 2025.

³² U.S. Customs and Border Protection. [“Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act.”](#) Dec 2021.

companies to know their supply chains, which makes it possible to mitigate human rights violations.³³ Similarly, the Act “gives the U.S. government new tools to prevent goods made with forced labor in Xinjiang from entering U.S. markets and to further promote accountability for persons and entities responsible for these abuses,” according to a statement by the U.S. Department of State.³⁴

Coalition of Immokalee Workers

In the early 2000s, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) brought global attention to exploitation of tomato-pickers in Immokalee, Florida. In 2011, the CIW launched the Fair Food Campaign, targeting large fast food conglomerates for purchasing tomatoes from agribusinesses harvested by workers subjected to human trafficking.³⁵ In 2015, the campaign expanded company participation to growers in Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Maryland, Virginia, and New Jersey.³⁶ Participating buyers agree to pay a ‘Fair Food Premium’ and to enforce the Fair Food Code of Conduct in their supply chains.³⁷ The program also provides workers with a transparent complaint resolution system.³⁸ As of 2026, participating buyers included Ahold USA, Aramark, Bon Appetit Management, Burger King, Chipotle Mexican Grill, Compass Group, The Fresh Market, McDonald’s, Sodexo, Subway, Trader Joe’s, Walmart, Whole Foods Market, and Yum Brands, along with 13 tomato growers in Florida and other states.³⁹

U.S. Department of Labor and Social Accountability International

Proyecto Sustentar was a project funded by the U.S. Department of Labor and led by Social Accountability International (SAI).⁴⁰ The initiative describes its aim as supporting the implementation of Mexican labor law reforms between 2022 and 2026. Specifically, it intends to increase compliance with labor legislation regarding child and forced labor within the tomato and chili pepper supply chains while also increasing the application of remediation systems.

³³ Swanson, Ana. [“U.S. Bans All Cotton and Tomatoes from Xinjiang Region of China.”](#) *The New York Times*. 19 Jan 2021.

³⁴ Blinken, Antony J. [“The Signing of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act: Press Statement.”](#) U.S. Department of State. 23 Dec 2021.

³⁵ Bright, Justin. [“Rising From the Roots.”](#) *WUFT News*. 18 Nov 2019.

³⁶ Coalition of Immokalee Workers. [“About CIW.”](#)

³⁷ Toussaint, Kristin. [“‘The stakes are nothing less than life and death’: Why farmworkers are marching against Wendy’s.”](#) *Fast Company*. 2 Apr 2022.

³⁸ Asbed, Greg and Steve Hitov. [“Preventing Forced Labor in Corporate Supply Chains: The Fair Food Program and Worker Driven Social Responsibility.”](#) *Wake Forest Law Review*. 2017.

³⁹ Fair Food Program. [Partners.](#)

⁴⁰ Social Accountability International. [“Proyecto Sustentar Aims to Advance Working Conditions in Mexican Tomato and Chile Sectors.”](#) 24 October 2022.

Argentina

In 2024, Argentina reported making significant advancements in its efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. It reportedly accomplished 91 percent of the actions listed under the National Plan Against Human Trafficking and Exploitation 2022–2024. This included establishing the first Binational Border Roundtable Against Child Labor in Posadas with Paraguay and delivering trainings to strengthen provincial efforts to eradicate child labor.⁴¹

Paraguay

Paraguay reported making “moderate” advancement in its efforts to eliminate trafficking and child labor in 2024; the government expanded the reach of its *Tekoporã* Cash Transfer Program, which provides cash transfers to families in rural communities and monitors recipients to ensure they do not engage in child labor. Earlier, in 2020, the Ministry of Labor launched a training curriculum for inspectors and created a labor complaint hotline.⁴²

Where can I learn more?

- [Watch videos about the Coalition of Immokalee Workers’ Fair Food Program.](#)
- [Read about African migrants in Italy’s tomato sector.](#)
- [Watch a documentary about Xinjiang’s tomato industry.](#)

⁴¹ U.S. Department of Labor. “[Child Labor and Forced Labor Reports: Argentina](#).” 2024.

⁴² U.S. Department of Labor. “[Child Labor and Forced Labor Reports: Paraguay](#).” 2024.

U.S. Department of Labor. [2020 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Paraguay](#). 2020.