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REGIONAL FRUIT BRANDS AND EXPORT COMPETITIVENESS IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract. Regional fruit brands can help Uzbek producers differentiate their products by origin, quality, and production characteristics, but brand recognition alone is insufficient to ensure export performance. This article examines the relationship between regional branding and export competitiveness, drawing on examples of Uzbek fruit identities, horticultural marketing initiatives, and export-oriented business practices described in the source material. The analysis covers target-market research, geographical indications, product positioning, logistics, market information, and public support. The findings indicate that local products such as Quva and Sherobod pomegranates, Fergana grapes, and Khorezm melons have potential for origin-based differentiation, while variations in quality, fragmented supply, limited market intelligence, and high logistics and financing costs may constrain export performance. The article outlines a regional branding pathway linking product identification, common standards, brand communication, target-market selection, and coordinated delivery. It recommends strengthening market research, producer cooperation, digital trade information, and targeted export support to enhance the credibility and competitiveness of Uzbek fruit brands.

Keywords: regional fruit brands, export competitiveness, geographical indications, market research, agrologistics, fruit and vegetable products.

Аннотация. Региональные бренды фруктовой продукции могут способствовать дифференциации продукции узбекских производителей по происхождению, качеству и особенностям производства, однако одной узнаваемости бренда недостаточно для обеспечения успешной экспортной деятельности. В данной статье рассматривается взаимосвязь между региональным брендингом и экспортной конкурентоспособностью на основе примеров региональных брендов фруктовой продукции Узбекистана, инициатив в области маркетинга плодоовощной продукции и экспортно ориентированных бизнес-практик, представленных в исходных материалах. Анализ охватывает исследование целевых рынков, географические указания, позиционирование продукции, логистику, рыночную информацию и государственную поддержку. Результаты исследования показывают, что такие региональные продукты, как гранаты из Кувы и Шерабада, виноград из Ферганы и дыни из Хорезма, обладают потенциалом для дифференциации на основе географического происхождения. Вместе с тем различия в качестве продукции, фрагментированность поставок, ограниченность рыночной информации, а также высокие логистические и финансовые затраты могут сдерживать развитие экспортной деятельности. В статье предлагается поэтапный подход к формированию региональных брендов, объединяющий идентификацию продукции, единые стандарты, продвижение бренда, выбор целевых рынков и координацию поставок. Рекомендуется укреплять систему маркетинговых исследований, развивать сотрудничество между производителями, совершенствовать цифровое информационное обеспечение торговли и расширять адресную поддержку экспорта для повышения доверия к региональным брендам фруктовой продукции Узбекистана и укрепления их конкурентоспособности.

Ключевые слова: региональные бренды фруктовой продукции, экспортная конкурентоспособность, географические указания, маркетинговые исследования, агрологистика, плодоовощная продукция.

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INTRODUCTION

Uzbekistan's fruit and vegetable producers operate in markets where export competitiveness depends on quality, price, supply reliability, logistics, and buyer confidence. A regional brand can communicate the origin and distinctive characteristics of a product, but it can support export growth only when producers consistently meet buyer requirements and deliver products in appropriate volumes and conditions.

The source material identifies several products with regional branding potential, including Quva, Sherobod, Jizzakh, and Varganza pomegranates, Fergana grapes, and Khorezm melons. Their identities are associated with local growing conditions and producers' knowledge. Geographical indications and other origin-based tools can help formalize these identities and enhance their visibility in domestic and international markets.

Export-oriented branding also requires detailed knowledge of target markets. The horticultural marketing support project examined markets in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Türkiye and disseminated its findings through a website, journal, forums, exhibitions, and regional events. This article examines how regional fruit brands can translate such market knowledge into stronger export positioning and more reliable value chains.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marketing and logistics are closely interconnected in agricultural export activities. Karimova and Islamov discuss the development of marketing activities and their impact on agrologistics services [6], while research on SWOT and PESTEL analyses addresses the use of market and environmental factors in economic forecasting for agricultural products [2]. Together, these perspectives emphasize the need to integrate product promotion with market assessment and delivery capacity.

Other studies examine fruit branding as a means of expanding export potential [4], factors affecting fruit and vegetable exports [3], and the role of digital platforms in food trade [5]. Research on fruit brand positioning and international branding strategies further links brand identity to competitive differentiation [1]. This body of research supports an export approach in which regional identity, standards, market selection, and logistics are planned as interconnected components of a unified strategy.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The article employs descriptive and comparative analyses of the market examples and institutional measures presented in the source material. The review focuses on four dimensions of export readiness: product and origin differentiation, market intelligence, quality and certification, and supply chain coordination. The findings are synthesized into a five-stage regional branding pathway. This pathway is a conceptual proposal and is not presented as an empirically tested model of export performance.

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used to a limited extent, accounting for approximately 10% of the overall research preparation process. Their use was primarily confined to language refinement, technical editing, and structural support. The selection of research methods, analysis and interpretation of findings, formulation of scientific conclusions, and development of recommendations were carried out independently by the author. The author assumes full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and scientific integrity of the research.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The technical assistance project for fruit and vegetable marketing included research on external markets, branding practices, product requirements, and promotional channels. The target markets identified in the source material include the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Türkiye. Market research can help producers identify which products and varieties are in demand, compare prices, determine applicable quality standards, and assess competing suppliers' offerings.

Regional identity provides a starting point for product positioning. Quva and Sherobod pomegranates, Jizzakh and Varganza pomegranates, Fergana grapes, and Khorezm melons are cited as products whose identities are associated with specific geographical locations. The Law "On Geographical Indications," adopted on 3 March 2022, provides a legal basis for protecting names linked to geographical origin. To strengthen export recognition, registration should be accompanied by common production standards, verifiable quality, traceability, and consistent use of regional names.

The "Romas" melon brand, exported by Red Pack, illustrates the role of market information in commercial decision-making. The marketing support project conducted surveys and analyses of importing markets, demand for melon varieties, price levels, competitors' product quality, and market shares. This information can help producers select suitable products and plan export volumes and promotional activities. It also demonstrates

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why a branding strategy should be based on target-market evidence rather than solely on brand name creation.

The “UzAgro” initiative was discussed as a potential umbrella brand for Uzbek food and agricultural products. The source material describes several operational aspects requiring attention in connection with the proposal: planning production volumes, setting appropriate prices, maintaining reliable trading partnerships, selecting partners in higher-risk markets, and managing logistics and credit costs. It also notes that the project was not fully developed following changes in the holding company’s institutional arrangements. This case highlights the importance of clearly defined brand ownership, effective governance, and a viable commercial model.

Export support measures described in the source material include assistance with logistics, certification, standardization, quality control, trade administration, participation in international exhibitions, and the promotion of national products. These measures also include partial compensation for certain export-related costs, support for establishing foreign offices and warehouses, advertising assistance, and assistance with registering national brands abroad. Such services can facilitate market entry, while their effectiveness depends on clear eligibility criteria, timely access to information, and alignment with producers’ actual market requirements (Figure 1).

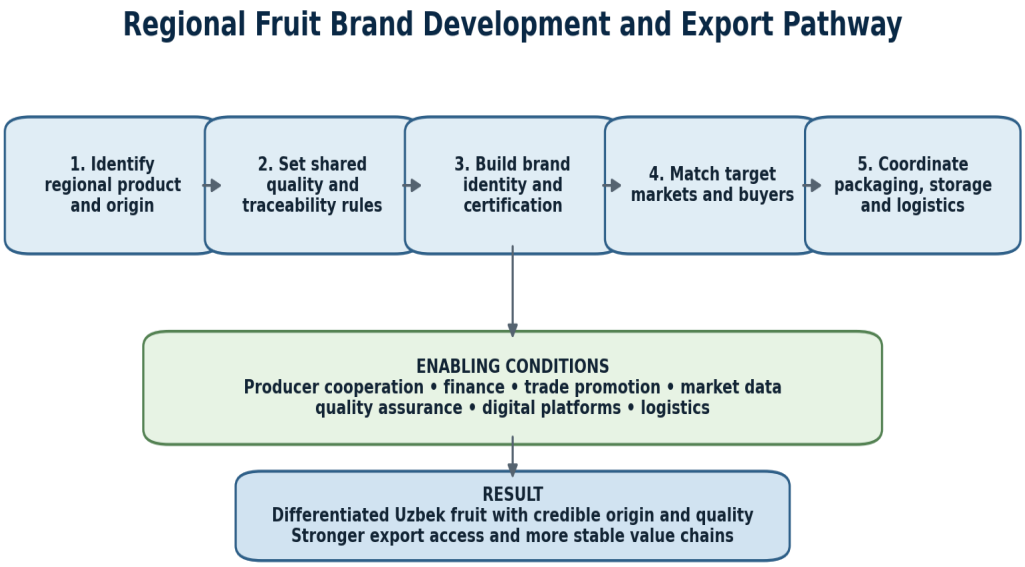


Figure 1. Regional fruit brand development and export pathway[1]

A regional brand can therefore be developed through a sequence of interconnected steps: identifying the product and its origin; establishing common quality and traceability standards; developing the brand identity and obtaining appropriate certification; selecting target markets and buyers based on market research; and coordinating packaging, storage, and logistics. Producer associations, cooperatives, and clusters can help consolidate supply and implement common standards, while digital platforms can improve access to market data and facilitate communication with buyers.

The main barriers extend beyond marketing. Fragmented production can make it difficult to ensure consistent supply volumes and quality; insufficient market analysis can lead to inappropriate product selection and pricing decisions; and high logistics and financing costs can reduce price competitiveness. Therefore, export-oriented branding support should integrate promotional activities with quality assurance, coordination among producers, post-harvest infrastructure, and market intelligence.

A number of regulatory legal acts and institutional structures have been established in the Republic of Uzbekistan to support the branding of fruit products and enhance export potential:

1. The Agricultural Development Strategy for 2020–2030 emphasizes strengthening marketing policies for the production of export-oriented fruit and vegetable products and their promotion in foreign markets, as well as regional specialization and brand development.

2. Decrees and resolutions of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, including Decree No. PF-6011 of 23 June 2020[2], aimed at producing competitive agricultural products and increasing export volumes, and the Programme to Support the Activities of Agrologistics Centres, adopted in 2022. These centres serve as an

1 Author’s development.
2 https://lex.uz/uz/docs/6973220

important link in the production and packaging of branded products.

3. The Ministry of Agriculture, the Food Safety Agency, the Uzstandard Agency, and the Ministry of Investment, Industry and Trade are the principal government bodies involved in fruit product certification, quality standards, export preparation, and branding.

The public administration system supports the development of fruit brands in the following areas: creating regional brands such as “Fergana Pomegranate,” “Namangan Cherry,” and “Surkhandarya Persimmon”; providing financial support for product packaging in accordance with international standards and for certification; and developing cooperation and cluster systems to enable farms to operate under a unified brand. Additional measures include allocating grants for branding training, promotional activities, and participation in international trade fairs, as well as introducing unified export platforms and agricultural marketing information systems, such as the Agro.uz and Made in Uzbekistan portals.

Despite the systematic approach adopted by the government, several areas require further improvement: the legal framework for branding needs further development; mechanisms for identifying regional products and protecting intellectual property rights require strengthening; and branding activities would benefit from greater coordination and broader cooperation.

Therefore, it would be appropriate to:

– Establish a National Agro-Branding Agency or a dedicated department performing these functions;

– Introduce a system of geographical indications and terroir-based certification for products;

– Integrate branding activities with agricultural universities and research centres.

To ensure that the public administration system for fruit branding has a sustainable foundation, it is necessary to engage in strategic planning, consider regional characteristics in management, and apply international experience in practice. Reforms in this area would enhance export potential and contribute to establishing a brand-oriented approach in the country’s agricultural sector.

Establishing a National Agro-Branding Agency is considered a practically important measure for effectively developing Uzbekistan’s agro-economic potential, creating regional agro-brands, and enhancing export potential.

The proposed National Agro-Branding Agency (working title) would have the following principal functions and areas of activity:

1. Developing and coordinating national agro-branding policy. Developing national strategies, programmes, and roadmaps for branding fruit, vegetable, and other agricultural products; compiling a list of geographical brands for regional products, including pomegranates, persimmons, grapes, and cherries; and coordinating cooperation among government bodies, the private sector, and research institutions in branding activities.

2. Developing branding standards and the legal framework. Developing quality criteria for agro-brands based on local and international standards; establishing mechanisms for granting geographical indications, intellectual property rights, and brand certificates for products; and developing unified requirements for products exported under the “Made in Uzbekistan” brand.

3. Marketing, promotion, and international relations. Developing marketing strategies for agro-branded products in domestic and foreign markets; organizing targeted advertising campaigns for foreign markets and participation in exhibitions and trade fairs; and implementing grants, technical assistance, and professional development programmes in cooperation with international organizations and donors.

4. Supporting agro-brand infrastructure. Providing technical and financial assistance for packaging, storage, certification, and logistics services for branded products; offering branding consultancy services to farms and clusters; and establishing “Brand Laboratories” or “Agro-Brand Centres” in the regions.

5. Monitoring, analysis, and the introduction of innovations. Monitoring domestic and international markets for agro-branded products; introducing international best practices, innovative technologies, and marketing tools into branding activities; and enhancing competitiveness through the publication of an annual “Ranking of Uzbekistan’s Agro-Brands.”

It would also be appropriate to establish a Register of Branded Products and an “Agrobrand.axborot.uz” portal under the Agency; organize major annual events such as “Agro-Brand Week” or the “Agro Export Forum”; and cooperate with higher education institutions and research centres on fruit product branding.

The resources required to establish the Agency would comprise several components: administrative costs, including office premises, equipment, and staff salaries; research and marketing activities; and certification and brand-monitoring systems.

Funding could be provided through the state budget, international donor funds (FAO, UNDP, and the World Bank), and public-private partnerships (PPPs).

The Agency’s effectiveness would be assessed based on the following outcomes:

– Increasing product value by promoting local agro-brands in domestic and international markets;

– Strengthening export potential and increasing revenues;

– Encouraging regional economic growth through regional agro-brands.

– International experience shows that similar agencies operate successfully in various countries.

For example, in France, Agence BIO manages the certification and marketing of organic products; in Australia, the Australian Made Campaign promotes the national brand; and in Israel, local products are supported in entering international markets through agricultural and export centres. This experience demonstrates that a systematic approach, quality control, and marketing strategies can enable an agency to develop a national agro-brand effectively.

Organizationally, the Agency could operate as an independent or semi-independent government body or as a dedicated department within an existing institution. It could be managed by a Director or a Board of Directors, with departments responsible for marketing, certification, research, and finance. As noted above, funding could come from government, donor, and private sources.

The main purpose of the Register of Branded Products is to register, identify, and legally protect agricultural products grown in Uzbekistan's regions that are distinguished by their quality, are recognized as brands, or have the potential to become brands. Its principal functions would include:

1. Maintaining a unified state register of branded products. The register would contain detailed information on regional product names, producers, quality standards, packaging design, and geographical origin.

2. Confirming geographical indications and intellectual property rights. Product names included in the register would receive state protection, and official certificates would be issued.

3. Monitoring and updating information. Product quality, production volumes, export status, and market prices would be monitored regularly.

4. Creating a statistical and analytical database. The register would serve as a reliable source of information for government agencies, investors, exporters, and researchers.

5. Assessing and advising on new brand candidates. New products would be evaluated based on expert opinions and established criteria to determine their potential to become brands.

Introducing an effective organizational and economic mechanism for fruit product branding would increase farmers' incomes, enhance foreign currency earnings from exports, and create a sustainable image based on regional brands.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis indicates that regional fruit brands can strengthen export competitiveness by making product origins and distinctive characteristics more visible. Uzbek products cited in the source material have a basis for regional positioning, and geographical indication legislation provides a mechanism for protecting product names. However, the commercial value of these brands depends on consistent quality, traceability, adequate supply, and the ability to meet target-market requirements.

Export initiatives should begin with regular research on demand, prices, competitors, standards, logistics, and buyer expectations in priority markets. Producer organizations and clusters can help establish common quality requirements, consolidate supply, and share the costs of branding and promotion. Public and industry support should provide accessible guidance on certification, packaging, export documentation, and logistics, while digital platforms can facilitate access to market information and regional product profiles.

The experience of "Romas" illustrates the value of evidence-based market positioning, while the development experience of "UzAgro" highlights the importance of clear governance and a feasible operational model. A coordinated approach that links regional identity with standards, market selection, and delivery capacity can help Uzbek fruit producers build more credible brands and participate more effectively in export value chains.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Strengthening regional branding and certification mechanisms. It is recommended to develop unified quality standards, traceability systems, and certification procedures for regionally distinctive fruit products. Particular attention should be given to promoting geographical indications and ensuring consistent product quality under regional brand names. Cooperation among producers, certification bodies, and relevant institutions would contribute to strengthening consumer confidence and improving the international recognition of Uzbek fruit brands.

2. Enhancing market intelligence and digital export promotion. Establishing an integrated digital information platform containing data on international market demand, pricing trends, product standards, potential buyers, and logistics opportunities would support more informed export decisions. Such a platform could also facilitate the promotion of regional fruit brands, improve communication between producers and foreign partners, and strengthen the market positioning of Uzbek agricultural products.

3. Developing coordinated institutional and logistical support for regional brands. Greater cooperation among government institutions, producer associations, agricultural clusters, and export-oriented enterprises

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is recommended to improve supply chain coordination and strengthen branding activities. Targeted support for modern packaging, storage facilities, certification, and transportation services would help producers maintain product quality, optimize export-related costs, and ensure more reliable access to international markets.

The sustainable development of regional fruit brands in Uzbekistan requires an integrated approach combining geographical identity, product quality, market research, institutional cooperation, and efficient logistics. The implementation of these recommendations would contribute to strengthening the international competitiveness of Uzbek fruit and vegetable products, expanding export opportunities, increasing value added, and supporting the long-term development of the country's agricultural sector.

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