
Babycorn



Market requirements

Varieties:	Not relevant
Size:	1 cm diameter, 6-7 cm length
Shape:	Regular, smooth grains and clean cut
Colour:	Pale yellow or creamy white
Ripeness:	Firm not rubbery, easily snapped
Taste & Texture:	Crunchy texture, sweet

Getting to market

Harvesting, Handling and Storage

Babycorn have to be hand-picked and hand-peeled to remove the husks. They must be picked young and be easily snapped by hand. They should be kept cool throughout transport and storage at between 7 and 10°C and at a relative humidity of 95-100%.

Packaging

Babycorn are usually shipped pre-packed in 250 gram PVC overwrapped trays, sent 8 in one 2 kg carton, or in 6 oz packs, 6 to a carton. They must be labelled:

- by origin
- as baby corn, if contents not visible
- by date of packing
- by weight

It is also advisable to display handling information, giving temperature range, fragile and side-up symbols.

(continued)

Branding and Promotion

Thailand is the dominant supplier in the market and has promoted babycorn as Thai produce. Branding is not an important feature of the market. It would be advisable for new suppliers to promote their produce on a national basis, in order to promote the image of babycorn as being available from destinations other than Thailand. Attractive packaging and labelling are essential.

Import Regulations

Babycorn come under tariff number 0709 90 60, which covers sweetcorn, but the tariff of 9%, previously in force for the EEC, has been made obsolete by levies, which can be applied when the market is considered over-supplied. However, they have not been applied to babycorn to date. Certain hygiene standards must be met and all fresh produce entering the EEC must be accompanied by the original of a phytosanitary certificate (see Appendix 1).

When to sell

Timing

There is no seasonality to imports of babycorn, with supplies coming from Guatemala, South Africa, Thailand, Zambia and Zimbabwe year-round. Those from Thailand dominate. Demand also appears to be strong year-round, leaving no particular gaps or gluts in the market. Wholesale prices averaged 305 pence per kg, sold either in 2kg packs or 12 x 150 grams pre-packed, with very little price variation over the year 1989/90. Thai babycorn usually commanded a higher price for its quality.

Market Trends

While there are no seasonal gaps, demand is rising rapidly and importers are keen to source new supplies. Currently, it is estimated that around 300 tons are being imported per annum (they are not recorded separately in trade statistics), and forecasters expect this to double within two years. Babycorn are popular in the catering trade and consumers find them easy to prepare, for use in salads, in stir fry cooking, which is growing in popularity, and as a more traditional side vegetable.