

FOOD

Edible oil imports set for rebound

Big appetite for mooncakes set to revive demand for palm oil in China

By BLOOMBERG
in Kuala Lumpur

China's appetite for palm oil imports is set to recover from a 25 percent slump in the first half as cheaper supplies and a major autumn festival boost edible oil demand.

China's palm oil purchases plunged to 1.87 million metric tons from January to June after El Nino-weather conditions squeezed supplies and drove prices to two-year highs. Buyers in China opted for soybean and sunflower oil, with soybean imports rising by about 3.4 million tons to 38.56 million tons, while sunflower oil imports surged 23 percent to 470,000 tons, according to Chinese customs data.

Palm oil's move into a bear market in July has already helped it gain some of the ground lost to rival oils, with imports from Malaysia jumping 68 percent to 225,856 metric tons in July from June, according to data from cargo surveyor Societe Generale de



A worker prepares mooncakes at a workshop in Yiwu, Zhejiang province. The country's palm oil imports from Malaysia jumped 68 percent in July from June as the forthcoming Mid-Autumn Festival has boosted domestic demand for edible oil. LU BIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Surveillance. A jump in demand for oil to make fried foods and seasonal treats like mooncakes during the three-day Mid-Autumn festival in China, may boost buying further, according to Ivy Ng, regional head of plantations at CIMB Investment Bank Bhd.

"If festival demand is good they'll have to buy because they don't have much stock," Ng said by phone from Kuala Lumpur.

"This is the second grandest festival in China after the spring festival. Typically, during festivals people tend to consume more oil."

Palm oil stockpiles in China are now about 300,000 tons, the lowest since at least 2010, the China National Grain and Oils Information Center said on August 3. Purchases typically rise a couple of months before the Mid-Autumn Festival that

starts on Sept 15 as refiners and foodmakers restock edible oils.

"They're trying to replenish their stocks level before the festival season kicks in," David Ng, derivatives specialist at Phillip Futures Sdn, said from Kuala Lumpur. "Palm oil is preferred by foodmakers because of its low price."

With palm oil's discount to soybean oil widening to as much as \$138 ton on July 12

compared with an average of \$80 in the first half, price-sensitive buyers may switch to palm to meet their consumption needs.

Earlier this month, Chinese companies ordered between 80,000 and 120,000 tons of imported palm oil for delivery from October to November to benefit from its discount to local prices, according to the CNGOIC.

Still, full-year imports may not match previous years as producers grapple with lingering El Nino damage and China steps up sales of stockpiled canola and soybeans, according to Tommy Xiao, an analyst with Shanghai JC Intelligence Co.

"Given the low domestic stocks, imports could jump any time whenever prices are favorable," Xiao said. Monthly palm imports could resume to about 300,000 tons a month, he said.

Palm oil yields in the world's biggest growers Indonesia and Malaysia are struggling to recover from one of the strongest El Ninos on record. Production growth is slow and stressed trees may only show a faster improvement in yields from September onwards, according to Zakaria Arshad, chief executive officer of the world's biggest crude palm oil producer Felda Global Ventures Holdings Bhd.

TECHNOLOGY



A senior woman learns to use her new smartphone at a community center in downtown Beijing. WANG ZHUANGFEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Old-timers jump on the mobile net bandwagon

By XINHUA

Liu Li, 54, teaches third grade in Beijing and keeps touch with parents of her students via WeChat. Four years ago, she did not even own a smartphone. In 2012, her sister bought her an iPhone5 and a whole new world opened up to her.

"I found there were so many things that I needed to learn," she said.

Liu soon noticed that many of her co-workers were using WeChat, so she asked a colleague to install the app for her and teach her how to use it.

She still remembers her first "Moment," a kind of WeChat newsfeed to share text, photos or videos. She posted photos of the first snow in Beijing in 2012.

Now she does far more. She has a chat group that includes parents of all her students. When there is an activity at school, she sends photos or videos of students to their parents.

"I can send notifications and answer parents' questions at any time via the group. It's so convenient," she said.

"Convenient" is a word she uses frequently to describe smartphones and mobile internet, and convenience is probably the main reason why she has become so dependent on them.

"Now I use my phone for checking maps, booking trips, shopping and calling cabs," she said.

Mobile payments also changed the life of Liu Jianhua, 55. After her daughter showed her how to shop online with her phone, she has almost stopped visiting supermarkets.

"It really saves me a lot of time," she said.

Mobile internet also caters to her needs for information. Instead of reading newspapers, she now gets the news on phone every morning.

"I usually spend two or three hours each day reading news on my phone," she said. She subscribes to a dozen

"I found there were so many things that I needed to learn."

Liu Li, 54, a teacher at a Beijing-based middle school

newsfeeds from newspapers like the "People's Daily" and "Beijing Daily."

"If there is a good article, I share it in my Moments," she said.

For retiree Zhu Dan, 56, browsing WeChat moments has become part of her routine.

"I would feel a little awkward if I could not do it one day," Zhu said. "It is like closure for the day." Besides browsing, Zhu posts things herself.

"I'm quite into this new stuff now and very willing to learn more," she said.

However, Luddites remain. According to a 2015 survey by Wuhan University, around a third of the seniors "frequently" encounter difficulties when using the internet and about half of them "occasionally" have problems.

Li, 65, said that he is annoyed that many restaurants offer discounts for mobile payment but he hardly knows anything about smartphones except chatting on WeChat.

"As seniors, we have to spend more money or time to accomplish what young people do just by tapping their fingers," he complained.

There is still a long way to go. The main problem for seniors is not that they are incapable, but that they have not had the chance to learn.

"Many seniors assume that new things are challenging, but if they have a try and learn from the young, there are not too many challenges. You have to believe that you will be able to do it," said Liu Li.

SERVICE

O2O service links millions to family doctors

By XINHUA

It used to be a big headache for Xu Li when her children got sick. She would search the internet for solutions and call friends for suggestions, but usually ended up rushing to a hospital where she sometimes had to queue for hours before seeing a doctor.

"I remember thinking, if only I had a doctor right downstairs," said the 36-year-old mother who lives in the Shuangqing community in southwest China's Chongqing municipality. Now things have changed.

Xu signed a contract with a team of family doctors with the community health center late in 2014. Since then, she has enjoyed a set of personal medical services round the clock, including the use of a family doctor.

Now, using the imaginative application of the online-to-offline or O2O concept, she immediately calls the contracted doctor if any of her family feels unwell, and the doctor visits her at home and gives medical instructions.

"It gives me a sense of safety," she said.

Chongqing began piloting the family doctor program in 2012, under which community doctors sign contracts with res-

idents and provide them customized medical services, including health management, disease prevention and regular physical examinations at home.

A family doctor team is generally composed of at least one general practitioner, a nurse, and a public health physician. In some places, there is also a pharmacist.

They can handle most minor illnesses, while they will register and transfer patients with complications to major hospitals through an internal fast-track system.

The program means every family has a doctor that they can consult first, rather than the internet, said Fang Laiying, director of the Beijing municipal health and family planning commission. Once a preserve of the rich, family doctor services are now becoming available to ordinary Chinese citizens.

Alongside Kunming, 200 Chinese cities will introduce such services this year. By 2020, China is planning to extend family doctor services to the entire population.

In Shanghai, 10.27 million citizens, nearly half of its population, have joined the program, which is mostly paid for by the government.

"It's not such a high-end medical service as private doc-



A hospital doctor provides hospital-to-home service for community residents in Xiamen, Fujian province. PAN SONGGANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

200

Chinese cities will introduce the family doctor program, which means every family will have a doctor they can consult first by 2020

tors. Residents covered by medical insurance only need to pay about 10 yuan for a single home service," said Liu Wei, who signed contracts with dozens of households at Gumei community, Shanghai. The money does not include the cost of medicines.

In Chongqing, a home visit from a general practitioner

costs about 15 yuan, while other services, such as consultations and basic physical examinations from public health physicians, are free of charge.

Liu Wei can visit over 20 families a day. He has also created a WeChat group for all his customers to keep close contact with them.

"I regularly visit my contracted families, examining and documenting their health conditions. I know what they need," he said.

The family doctors have saved residents' time and money as well as reduced the heavy burdens of hospitals, said Meng Shan, head nurse at the Chongqing-based Southwest Hospital.

International Education Column

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