

Rural Migration News

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U.S. Fruit and Vegetable Trade

The US had an agricultural trade surplus in most years between 1960 and 2020, because exported farm commodities were worth more than the commodities that were imported. The US farm trade surplus has turned into a deficit in recent years as the US imports more fruits and vegetables, which are more valuable than the corn and soybeans that dominate among US farm exports.

In 2022, US farm imports of \$199 billion exceeded exports of \$190 billion, producing a \$9 billion farm trade deficit.

The US exports about \$40 billion worth of horticultural products a year, including \$7 billion worth of fresh fruits and vegetables, \$10 billion worth of tree nuts, and \$7 billion worth of processed fruits and vegetables.

The US imports horticultural products worth \$100 billion a year, for a \$60 billion trade deficit. Horticultural imports include \$19 billion worth of fresh fruit and \$12 billion worth of fresh vegetables, that is, the US imports fresh produce worth

\$32 billion and exports fresh produce worth \$7 billion, for a fresh produce trade deficit of \$25 billion.

The US imports farm commodities worth \$47 billion a year from Mexico, which provides almost a quarter of US farm imports, followed by Canada, \$37 billion, Europe, \$36 billion, and Asia \$31 billion. Horticulture includes beer, wine, and distilled spirits. The US imported \$7 billion worth of beer, \$8 billion worth of wine, and \$12 billion worth of spirits in 2022.

Mexico

Mexico is the source of half of US fresh fruit and three fourths of US fresh vegetable imports. The US exports fresh fruits and vegetables

to Mexico, but imports far more fresh fruits and vegetables, explaining the widening fresh produce trade deficit.

The US imported \$7 billion worth of fresh fruit and \$7 billion worth of fresh vegetables from Mexico in 2020. Fresh fruit imports were led by \$2.2 billion worth of avocados, \$1.1 billion worth of raspberries, \$0.8 billion worth of strawberries, \$0.5 billion worth of citrus, and \$0.4 billion worth of blueberries. Since 2010, avocado imports from Mexico quadrupled, while raspberry imports increased tenfold.

Fresh vegetable imports were led by \$2.4 billion worth of tomatoes, \$1.3 billion worth of peppers, \$0.6 billion worth of cucumbers, and \$0.5 billion worth of squash. Since 2010, the volume of tomato imports from Mexico rose by two-thirds, while pepper and cucumber imports doubled.

Individual commodities highlight the dominance of Mexican imports in US consumption. Americans consume about eight pounds of avocados a year, including 90 percent imported from Mexico. US production of avocados has remained stable, so the growth in US avocado consumption has been satisfied by imports from Mexico.

Raspberries are the most valuable fresh berry imported from Mexico, and provide most of the fresh raspberries consumed in the US.

The U.S. Ag Trade Surplus has Become a Deficit

Table 1—U.S. agricultural trade, fiscal years 2016–23 1/

Item	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Forecast fiscal year 2023	
							August	November
<i>Billion dollars</i>								
Exports	144.8	148.6	140.1	139.7	171.7	196.4	193.5	190.0
Imports	127.2	136.5	141.4	143.4	163.3	194.0	197.0	199.0
Balance	17.6	12.1	-1.3	-3.7	8.4	2.4	-3.5	-9.0

Harvest seasons increasingly overlap as Mexico extends its shipping season from the traditional months of October through June.

Fresh strawberries are the most valuable US-produced berry, worth over \$2.5 billion a year. US production peaked in 2012-14 before falling as imports from Mexico rose. Mexico exports fresh strawberries to the US between November and March, competing more with strawberry production in Florida than in California.

Blueberries are produced in many US states and imported from Canada, Mexico, Peru, and Chile. A rising share of the fresh blueberries consumed in the US are imported, including from Mexico, which has prompted complaints from growers in southeastern states whose spring production competes with Mexican imports.

Fresh tomatoes demonstrate Mexico's competitive advantage. Until 2010, most of the fresh tomatoes consumed in the US were produced in CA and FL, often in open fields and picked while green and ripened with ethylene gas. Mexican and Canadian tomatoes, on the other hand, are often grown in CEA structures, under glass or plastic-covered structures that protect plants from weather and pests, raising yields and permitting year-round production and exports.

Fresh peppers tell a similar story of rising imports from CEA structures in Canada and Mexico. Imports from Mexico surpassed US production in 2015, and the Mexican share of the bell pepper market increasing; most bell peppers are harvested in Mexico between November and April.

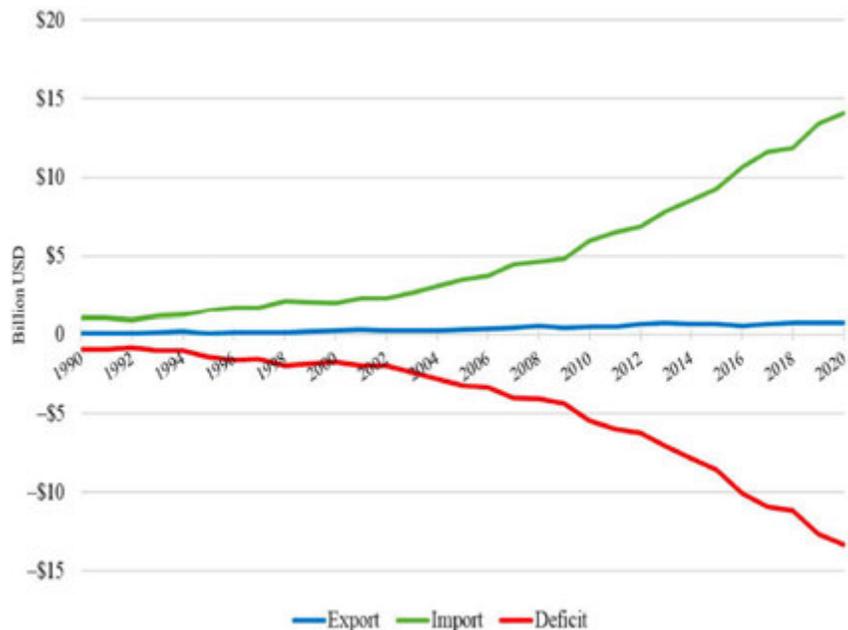
Similarly, imports of Mexican cucumbers have exceeded US production

The U.S. Ag Trade Surplus has Become a Deficit

Table 5--U.S. agricultural imports: Value and volume by commodity, fiscal years 2019-2023

Commodity	Fiscal year				Forecast	
	2019	2020	2021	2022	Fiscal year 2023	
					August	November
VALUE						
	-Billion dollars -					
Livestock, dairy, and poultry	17.616	18.242	20.956	26.042	26.3	26.2
Livestock and meats	13.481	14.189	16.352	20.110	20.7	20.5
Cattle and calves	1.750	1.793	1.555	1.701	2.2	2.1
Swine	0.311	0.249	0.532	0.567	0.6	0.5
Beef and veal	5.797	6.809	7.422	8.819	8.5	8.7
Pork	1.560	1.472	1.968	2.600	2.7	2.6
Poultry	0.812	0.765	0.893	1.326	1.3	1.4
Dairy products	3.323	3.287	3.711	4.605	4.3	4.3
Cheese	1.346	1.173	1.430	1.534	1.6	1.6
Grains and feed	13.377	14.321	15.776	19.763	20.0	20.4
Grain products	9.370	9.816	11.194	13.728	13.4	13.7
Oilseeds and products	9.336	9.823	12.638	17.909	17.3	17.5
Vegetable oils	5.545	5.714	7.636	10.886	10.0	10.2
Horticulture products	75.767	75.833	86.144	97.203	99.3	100.3
Fruits, fresh	13.956	14.046	15.512	17.933	18.3	18.6
Fruits, processed	5.746	5.547	6.449	8.221	8.2	8.2
Fruit juices	2.193	1.819	2.141	2.907	2.7	2.7
Nuts, whole and processed	3.140	2.774	2.856	3.018	2.8	2.8
Vegetables, fresh	8.892	9.887	10.511	11.090	11.6	11.8
Vegetables, processed	5.426	5.779	6.504	7.463	7.7	7.8
Wine	6.570	6.189	7.481	7.835	8.1	8.2
Malt beer	5.499	5.443	6.376	6.716	6.9	7.0
Distilled spirits	9.056	8.447	9.794	12.040	12.1	12.3
Essential oils	4.198	4.061	4.416	5.166	5.3	5.3
Cut flowers and nursery stock	2.171	2.129	2.822	3.286	3.7	3.7
Sugar and tropical products	21.510	21.685	23.925	29.092	30.2	30.7
Sweeteners and products	4.514	5.124	5.378	6.757	7.1	7.2
Confections	1.922	1.907	2.213	2.701	2.6	2.7
Cocoa and products	4.808	4.950	5.355	5.961	6.0	6.1
Coffee and products	6.163	5.985	6.729	9.747	10.0	10.2
Other imports 1/	3.831	3.500	3.902	3.969	3.9	3.9
Total agricultural imports	141.437	143.404	163.341	193.977	197.0	199.0

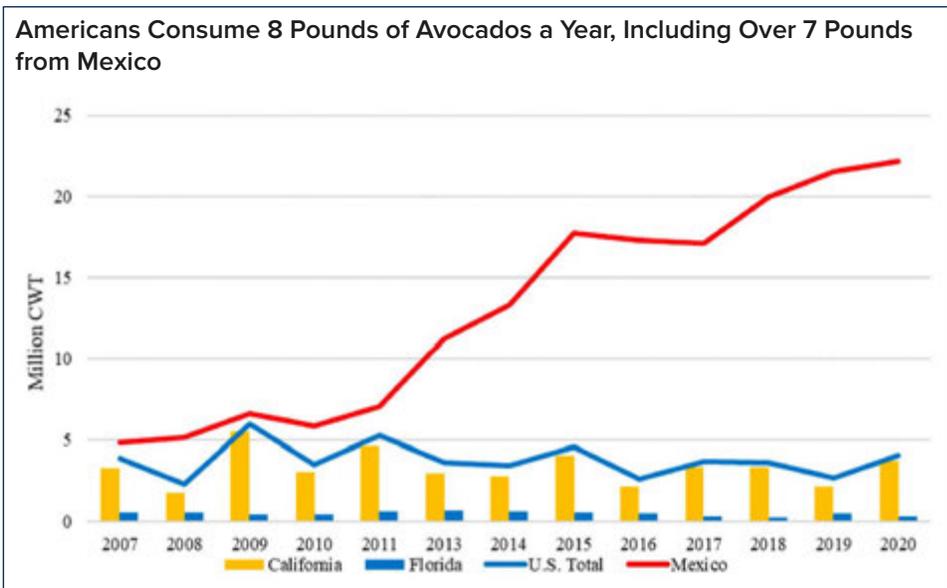
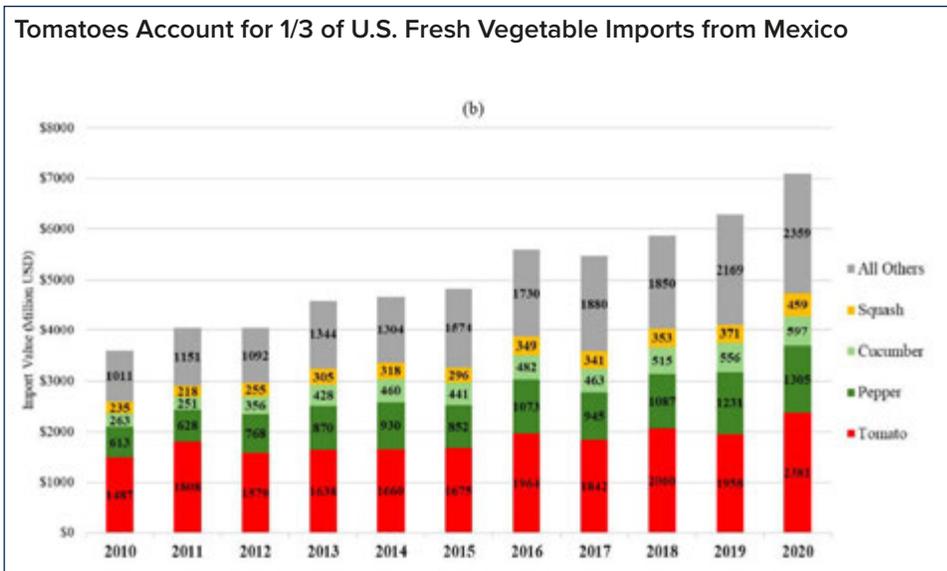
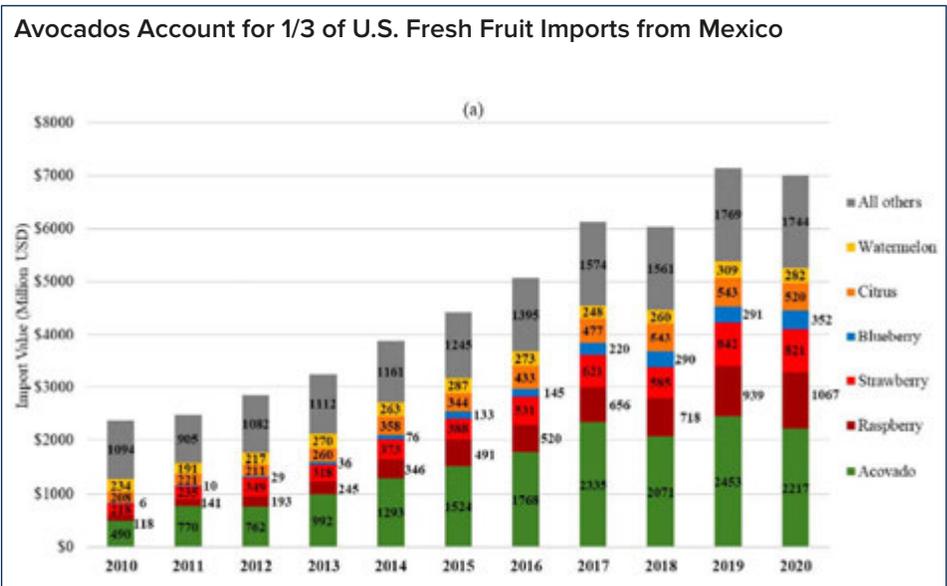
The U.S. has a Widening Deficit with Mexico in Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Trade



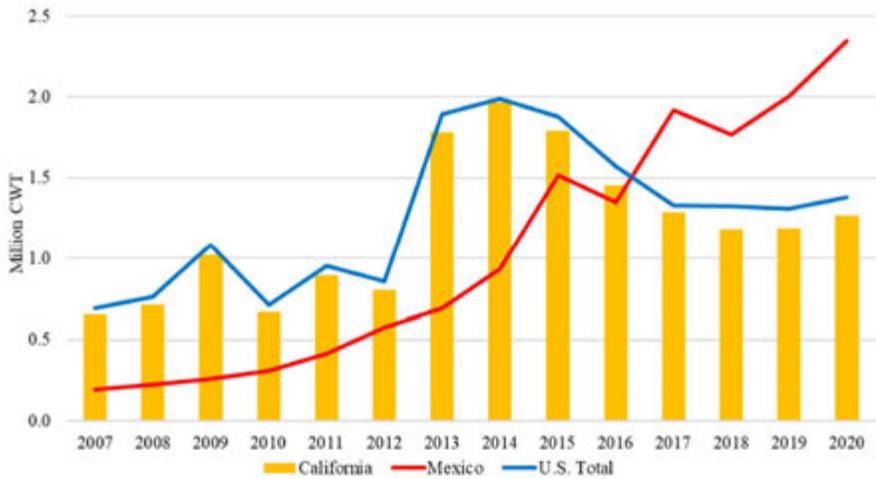
since 2007, and cucumber imports are rising while US production is falling.

For most of the fresh fruits and vegetables that are imported to the US, imports from Mexico account for 90 percent or more of both volume and value. The exceptions include blueberries, where imports from Mexico are a quarter of imports, and citrus, where imports from Mexico are half of import volume and 40 percent of import value.

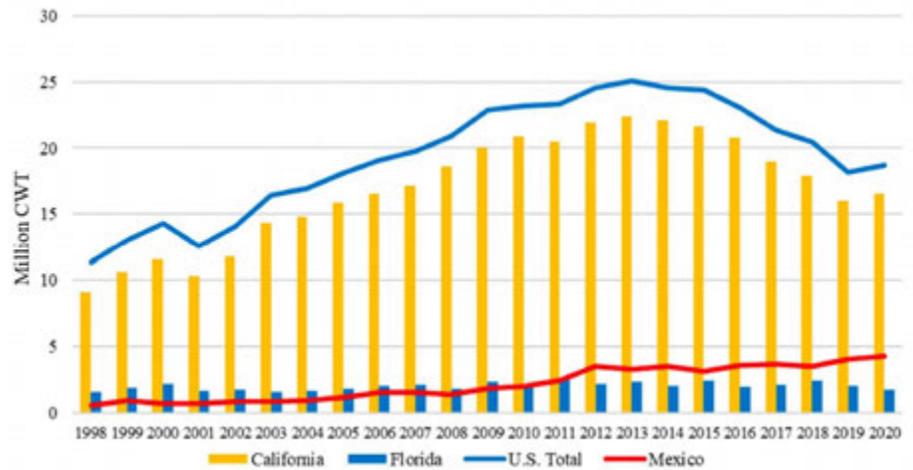
There are several major reasons for rising imports of fresh produce from Mexico. The first is free trade, including NAFTA since 1994 and USMCA since 2020, which reduced trade barriers. Second is a later-comer advantage that means many Mexican fruits and vegetables are produced in CEA structures that save on water and pesticides, facilitate organic production, and often mean higher quality commodities. Third are Mexican labor costs that average a tenth of US farm labor costs and relatively quick and cheap truck transport to US consumers.



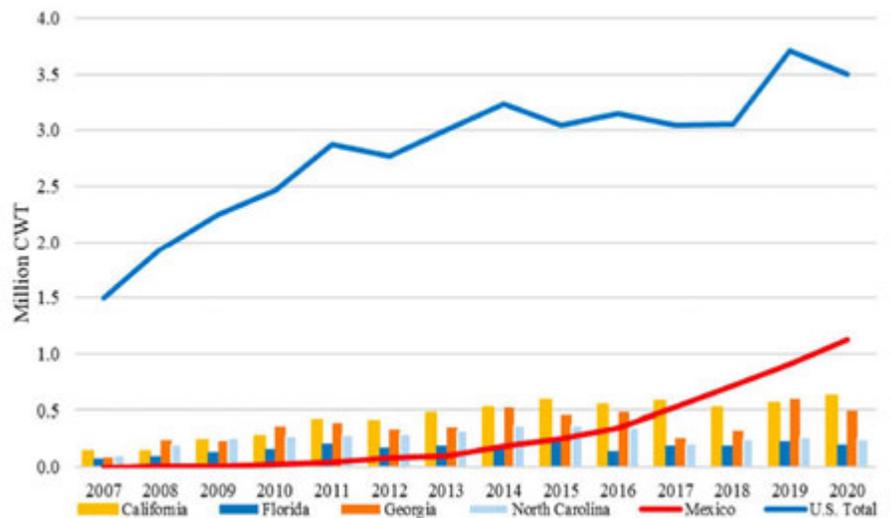
Mexico has Been the Major Source of U.S. Fresh Raspberries Since 2016



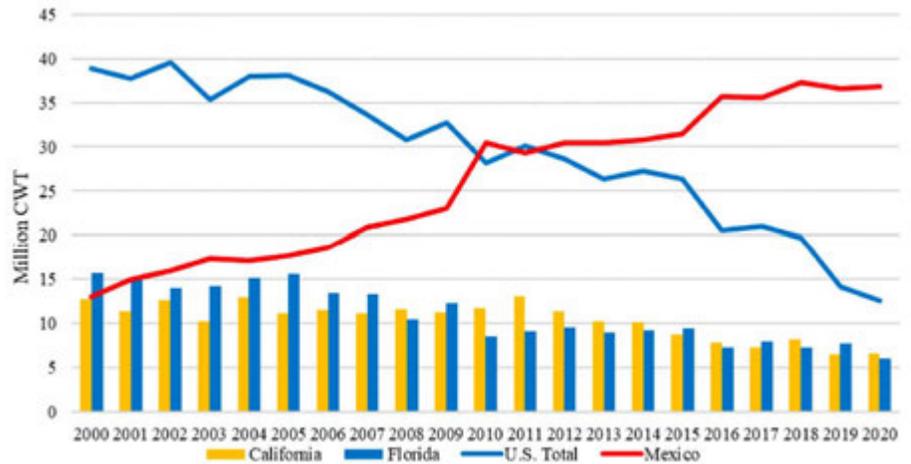
Most Fresh Strawberries are Produced in the U.S., but Imports from Mexico are Rising



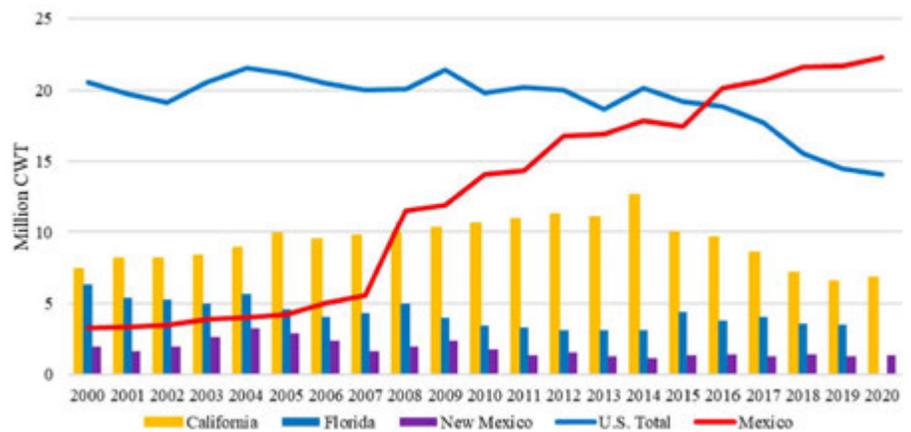
Mexican Exports of Fresh Blueberries to the U.S. Increased Rapidly



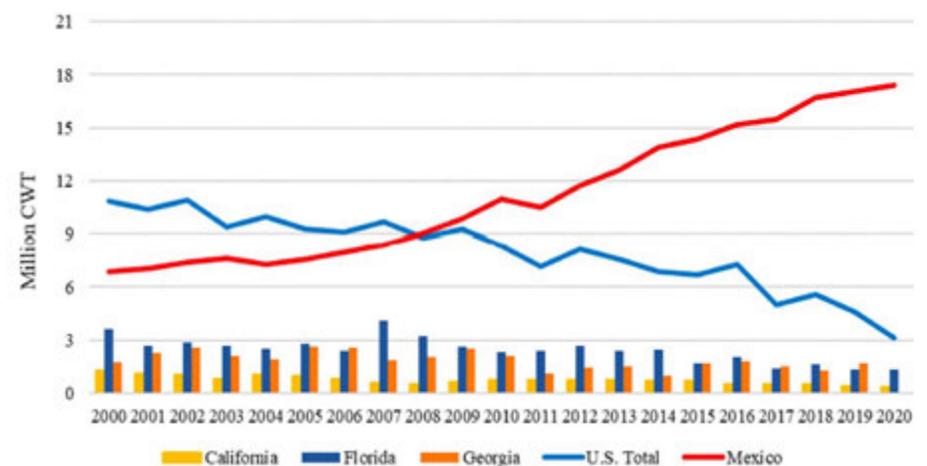
Over 60% of U.S. Fresh Tomatoes are Imported; Most Tomato Imports are From Mexico



Mexico Provides Most of the Peppers Consumed in the U.S.



Most U.S. Fresh Cucumbers are Imported from Mexico



Mexico Accounts for Over 90% of Many Fruit and Vegetable Imports

Table 1. Share of imports (%) of Mexican fruit and vegetable from 2000 to 2020.

Year	Avocado	Raspberry	Strawberry	Blueberry	Citrus	Watermelon	Tomato	Pepper	Cucumber	Squash
2000	17 (19)	25 (65)	96 (90)	0 (0)	53 (26)	93 (94)	81 (64)	100 (100)	90 (85)	98 (99)
2001	17 (22)	21 (47)	98 (95)	0 (0)	55 (31)	92 (93)	82 (67)	100 (99)	87 (83)	97 (99)
2002	23 (29)	29 (51)	97 (95)	0 (0)	62 (33)	90 (87)	84 (69)	100 (100)	85 (81)	97 (99)
2003	25 (33)	34 (60)	98 (96)	0 (0)	57 (31)	88 (91)	84 (73)	98 (94)	85 (80)	94 (97)
2004	27 (38)	36 (59)	99 (98)	0 (0)	64 (45)	86 (91)	84 (71)	97 (94)	78 (80)	92 (96)
2005	51 (67)	33 (56)	99 (98)	0 (0)	63 (39)	84 (90)	84 (73)	100 (99)	79 (77)	92 (95)
2006	57 (73)	50 (73)	99 (99)	0 (0)	62 (38)	86 (87)	85 (74)	99 (99)	82 (78)	92 (96)
2007	63 (80)	61 (79)	99 (99)	0 (0)	60 (39)	86 (89)	89 (79)	99 (98)	83 (80)	93 (96)
2008	74 (86)	75 (81)	99 (99)	0 (0)	65 (43)	90 (94)	88 (80)	85 (70)	83 (72)	94 (96)
2009	70 (81)	87 (91)	99 (99)	1 (1)	64 (40)	86 (93)	88 (80)	83 (68)	83 (71)	95 (96)
2010	77 (85)	93 (97)	100 (99)	1 (2)	61 (41)	89 (94)	90 (83)	84 (67)	85 (71)	96 (97)
2011	77 (84)	95 (98)	100 (99)	2 (3)	60 (43)	89 (90)	89 (85)	84 (67)	80 (65)	95 (96)
2012	86 (89)	96 (99)	100 (100)	4 (7)	63 (42)	87 (91)	90 (85)	85 (72)	81 (72)	96 (97)
2013	89 (91)	95 (99)	100 (100)	5 (8)	64 (41)	89 (92)	90 (83)	85 (72)	79 (70)	95 (96)
2014	83 (85)	96 (99)	100 (100)	8 (14)	63 (47)	87 (88)	90 (84)	84 (73)	81 (73)	94 (96)
2015	93 (93)	99 (100)	99 (99)	9 (21)	61 (40)	88 (89)	91 (86)	83 (69)	81 (72)	94 (95)
2016	91 (92)	98 (99)	99 (99)	11 (18)	62 (46)	84 (83)	91 (87)	83 (73)	79 (70)	95 (96)
2017	86 (88)	99 (100)	99 (99)	17 (26)	61 (44)	83 (81)	90 (85)	85 (71)	80 (68)	94 (95)
2018	87 (88)	99 (100)	99 (99)	18 (26)	55 (42)	83 (82)	91 (87)	86 (73)	80 (67)	95 (96)
2019	88 (89)	99 (100)	99 (99)	19 (23)	58 (44)	87 (84)	91 (85)	85 (73)	80 (67)	95 (96)
2020	90 (91)	99 (100)	99 (99)	23 (28)	56 (38)	85 (83)	91 (85)	84 (73)	79 (66)	96 (97)

Notes: The first number indicates the share of imports from Mexico over total U.S. imports from the world in terms of volume, and the number in parentheses is measured in terms of value. Sources: USDA FAS [11].

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