



A primer for researching tariffs

June 2025



Objectives and outline

Objective: *Provide the background and tools necessary to look up and interpret duties (including tariffs) and quotas for agriculture commodities.*

Sections include:

- Trade policy fundamentals
- Harmonized System codes
- Tariff databases
- Searching World Trade Organization data

Fundamentals - *duties*

- *Duties* are taxes levied imported goods.
- Countries apply duties to discourage the use of harmful products (excise duty), raise government revenue (custom duty), offset foreign subsidies (countervailing duty) or prevent dumping (anti-dumping duty).
- Duties can be applied as a percentage of the value of the product (ad valorem), a fixed amount based on physical characteristics like weight or volume (specific) or a combination of the two (compound or mixed).

Fundamentals - *tariffs and quotas*

- *Tariffs* are a type of customs duty generally intended to help protect domestic producers. Tariffs often change more frequently than other types of duties.
- *Quotas* set limits on how much of a good that can be imported or exported. Tariff rate quotas establish thresholds on imported goods, resulting in higher rates once the quota has been reached.

Fundamentals - *other concepts*

- *Most Favored Nations (MFN)* rates are duties applied to all countries not included in a Trade Agreement. It is intended to prevent discriminatory practices (applying different rates to different countries).
- *Trade Agreements* are agreements among two or more countries *that establish preferential duty rates on select goods.*
- *World Trade Organization (WTO)* is the organization through which trade policy and agreements are negotiated and disputes settled.

Harmonized System codes

- Researching international trade data requires us to understand how goods are labeled and categorized.
- Every good or commodity is assigned a Harmonized System (HS) code to create alignment across countries.
- HS codes are made up of a series of digits, with each subsequent pair providing more granularity into the type of product.
- Let's look at an example...

HS codes – *an example using softwood logs*

- The first two digits of HS codes identify the chapter.
 - 44 – Wood and Articles of Wood; Wood Charcoal
- The next two numbers identify the heading, and the consecutive numbers subheadings.
 - 4403 – Wood in the Rough, Stripped or Not of Sapwood
 - 440320 – Coniferous Wood in the Rough
 - 4403200025 – Ponderosa pine logs
 - 4403200040 – Douglas fir logs
 - Etc.
 - 440321 – Wood in the Rough of Pine, with cross-sectional dimensions of 15cm or more
 - Etc.

HS codes – *challenges*

- Product descriptions often vary by country.
- While not always the case, countries may apply different duties on similar products. *For instance...*
 - South Korea applies a flat 50% duty on oranges (HS Code: 080510), but a tariff rate duty on mandarins (HS Code: 08052190) where anything below the specified quota gets a 50% duty and anything above gets 144%.
- Exporters may choose HS codes that limit their exposure to duties.
- Consulting a trade lawyer is important when making trade related business decisions.

Tariff databases

- Various organizations track updates to U.S. trade policy. AgWest recommends ReedSmith's [Trump 2.0 tariff tracker](#) because it's updated frequently and easy to understand.
- WTO hosts a [database](#) that tracks tariffs by country and good. While data quality can vary based on the host country, there are no viable alternatives.
 - Many governments publish information on their trade policy, but they are not consistently available and/or provided in English.

Searching WTO data

- Select the country, year and tariff line.
 - Search for products by their HS code or description.
 - Only those applicable to the country will appear below the search line.
- Click **‘Search’**

FIND TARIFF & TRADE DATA

United States of America ▼

2025 ▼

Select a tariff line ^

Q oranges X

08051000 Fresh or dried **oranges**

08059001 Fresh or dried citrus fruit (excl. **oranges**, lemons "Citrus limon, Citrus limonum", limes "Citrus aurantifolia, Citrus latifolia", grapefruit, mandarins, incl. tangerines and satsumas, clementines. wilkins and

Searching WTO data

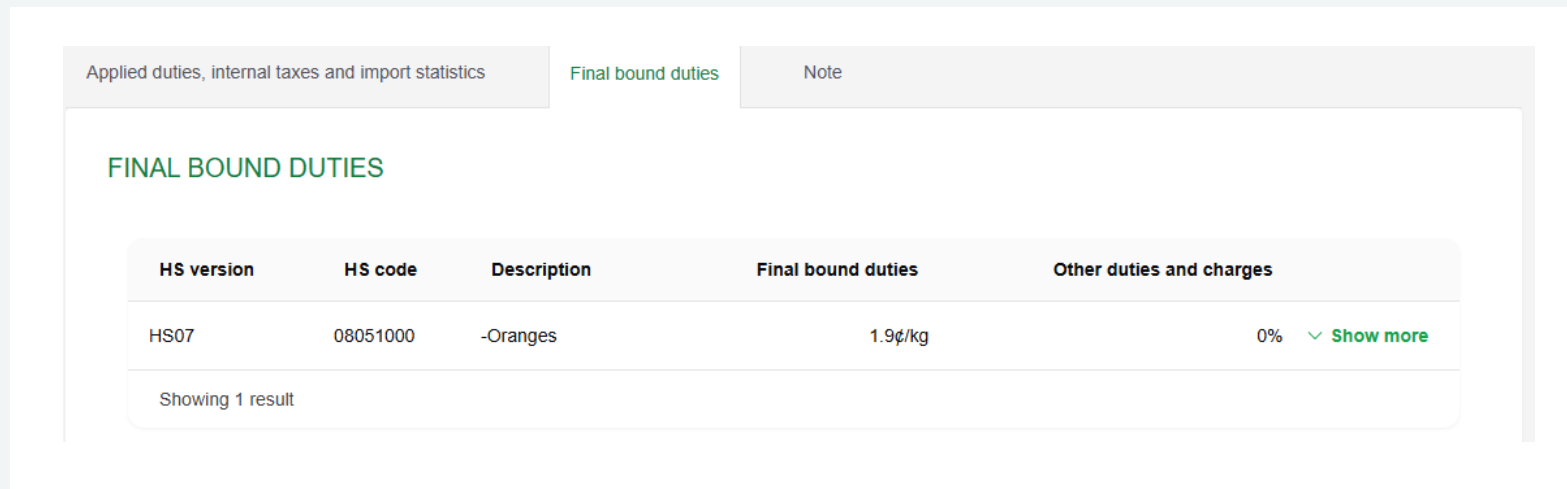
- Scroll down to view tariff rates.
- In the case of oranges, we see the U.S. applies a specific MFN duty at the rate of 19 cents per kilogram.
- We also see that the U.S. has trade agreements with many countries. These agreements take precedence over the MFN rate.

APPLIED DUTIES, YEAR=2025, HS 2022

TLS	Duty scheme	Partners	Duty rate
	MFN statutory (legal/autonomous) duty		1.9 cents/kg
	United States - Australia free trade agreement	Australia	0.0%
	Dominican Republic - Central America - United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR)	Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua	0.0%
	United States - Morocco free trade agreement	Morocco	0.0%
	United States - Peru free trade agreement	Peru	0.0%

Searching WTO data

- Additional information is provided in the ‘Final bound duties’ and ‘Notes’ tabs (*content varies by country and commodity*).



The screenshot displays the WTO tariff data interface. At the top, there are three tabs: 'Applied duties, internal taxes and import statistics', 'Final bound duties' (which is selected and highlighted in green), and 'Note'. Below the tabs, the heading 'FINAL BOUND DUTIES' is shown in green. A table with five columns is presented: 'HS version', 'HS code', 'Description', 'Final bound duties', and 'Other duties and charges'. The table contains one row of data for oranges. Below the table, it indicates 'Showing 1 result'.

HS version	HS code	Description	Final bound duties	Other duties and charges
HS07	08051000	-Oranges	1.9¢/kg	0% Show more

Showing 1 result

For more information,
visit WTO's [Get tariff data webpage](#).



thank you

