

ORIGINAL

Trade Opportunities between Argentina and Uruguay: Identification of Strategic Sectors Based on Export Indicators (2022-2024)

Oportunidades comerciales entre Argentina y Uruguay: identificación de sectores estratégicos en base a indicadores de exportación (2022-2024)

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Cite as: Candellero DL, Poncio J. Trade Opportunities between Argentina and Uruguay: Identification of Strategic Sectors Based on Export Indicators (2022-2024). Management (Montevideo). 2025; 3:239. <https://doi.org/10.62486/agma2025239>

Submitted: 04-08-2024

Revised: 02-02-2025

Accepted: 20-07-2025

Published: 21-07-2025

Editor: Ing. Misael Ron 

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: the trade relationship between Argentina and Uruguay, marked by productive complementarities and structural asymmetries, provides a favorable context for identifying strategic sectors that can strengthen Argentina's regional export insertion. Geographical proximity, institutional ties within MERCOSUR, and longstanding economic connections reinforce the need for indicator-based analysis.

Objective: this study aims to identify the strategic sectors with the greatest potential for Argentina's commercial insertion into the Uruguayan market during the 2022-2024 period. Based on a quantitative analysis using foreign trade indicators, the objective is to provide empirical evidence to guide both public policy and business decision-making, with the goal of strengthening regional integration, diversifying Argentina's export supply, and enhancing its competitive positioning within the framework of MERCOSUR.

Method: a quantitative and comparative methodology was applied using official foreign trade data for the period 2022-2024. The analysis focused on the 37 main tariff lines exported by Argentina to Uruguay, classified according to the MERCOSUR Common Nomenclature (at the 8-digit level), using four indicators: Herfindahl-Hirschman Index, Grubel-Lloyd Index, Trade Overlap Index, and the Symmetric Revealed Comparative Advantage Index. Additionally, the Trade Intensity Index and the Bilateral Trade Complementarity Index were calculated to contextualize the structural dynamics.

Results: findings confirm a predominantly inter-industry trade pattern, with moderate concentration and low structural overlap, revealing structural advantages for Argentina's export supply. Pet food was identified as a strategic sector due to its high revealed comparative advantage, limited domestic competition in Uruguay, and direct access to consumers. The analysis also showed exceptionally high bilateral trade intensity and moderate structural complementarity between the two economies.

Conclusions: the methodological approach proved effective in detecting export opportunities based on quantitative indicators. The findings provide evidence to support targeted trade promotion policies and offer a replicable framework for assessing strategic sectors in other regional markets.

Keywords: Bilateral Trade; Revealed Comparative Advantage; Trade Complementarity; MERCOSUR; Export Strategy; Argentina-Uruguay.

RESUMEN

Introducción: la relación comercial entre Argentina y Uruguay, marcada por complementariedades productivas y asimetrías estructurales, constituye un escenario propicio para identificar sectores estratégicos que potencien la inserción exportadora regional de Argentina. La cercanía geográfica, la integración en el

MERCOSUR y los vínculos económicos históricos refuerzan la necesidad de un análisis comercial detallado basado en indicadores.

Objetivo: El presente estudio tiene como objetivo identificar los sectores estratégicos con mayor potencial de inserción comercial para Argentina en el mercado uruguayo durante el período 2022-2024. A partir de un análisis cuantitativo basado en indicadores de comercio exterior, se busca proporcionar evidencia empírica que oriente tanto las políticas públicas como las decisiones empresariales, con el fin de fortalecer la integración regional, diversificar la oferta exportadora argentina y mejorar su posicionamiento competitivo en el marco del MERCOSUR.

Método: se aplicó una metodología cuantitativa y comparativa, utilizando datos oficiales de comercio exterior del período 2022-2024. El análisis se centró en las 37 principales partidas exportadas por Argentina a Uruguay clasificadas según la Nomenclatura Común del MERCOSUR (a 8 dígitos), mediante cuatro indicadores: índice de concentración Herfindahl-Hirschman, índice de comercio intraindustrial de Grubel-Lloyd, índice de superposición comercial e índice simétrico de ventaja comparativa revelada. Además, se calcularon índices de intensidad comercial bilateral y de complementariedad estructural para contextualizar la relación.

Resultados: los resultados confirman un patrón comercial interindustrial, con concentración moderada y baja superposición estructural, reflejando ventajas favorables a la oferta argentina. Se identificó al rubro alimentos para mascotas como sector estratégico, dada su alta ventaja comparativa, escasa competencia en Uruguay y acceso directo al consumidor. También se observó una intensidad comercial bilateral muy alta y una complementariedad estructural moderada.

Conclusiones: el enfoque metodológico permitió detectar oportunidades de exportación sobre bases cuantitativas. Los resultados aportan evidencia para orientar políticas de promoción comercial y replicar el modelo en otros mercados regionales.

Palabras clave: Comercio Bilateral; Ventaja Comparativa Revelada; Complementariedad Comercial; MERCOSUR; Estrategia Exportadora; Argentina-Uruguay.

INTRODUCTION

The trade relationship between Argentina and Uruguay has historically played an important role in the regional integration process of MERCOSUR. This dynamic is based on structural factors such as geographical proximity, institutional affinity, and historical ties between the two markets, although it is also conditioned by persistent productive and trade asymmetries. In this context, identifying strategic sectors capable of expanding and diversifying Argentine exports is particularly important for strengthening regional integration based on criteria of efficiency, complementarity, and sustainability.

An analysis of bilateral trade during the period 2022-2024, based on data provided by the Softrade platform,⁽¹⁾ reveals a high level of trade intensity, with values well above what would be expected given the relative size of both markets. Likewise, the trade structure shows a predominantly inter-industrial orientation, with low overlap between export baskets and a moderate concentration in a small set of leading items. These results suggest that, although there are sectors with consolidated performance, there is still significant room for selective expansion of goods with comparative advantages that have not yet been fully exploited.

The study of these trade opportunities is based on the evolution of international trade theory. From Ricardo's classic models of comparative advantage⁽²⁾ to the structural approaches based on factor endowments developed by Heckscher and Ohlin,⁽³⁾ the discipline has made significant progress. In particular, the introduction of economies of scale, product differentiation, and imperfect competition developed by Krugman,⁽⁴⁾ has provided insight into new configurations of intra-industry and regional trade. These contributions have enabled the development of quantitative indicators that capture specific patterns of specialization and structural complementarity between countries.

Among these analytical tools, the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) stands out, based on Hirschman's pioneering work on key product dependency;⁽⁵⁾ the Grubel-Lloyd Intra-Industry Trade Index (GL), which classifies trade relations according to the predominant type of exchange;⁽⁶⁾ and the symmetric revealed comparative advantage index (SRCAL), proposed by Laursen as an alternative to the Balassa index, with more stable and comparable properties.⁽⁷⁾ The combination of these indicators with complementary measures such as the trade intensity index (TI) and the bilateral trade complementarity index (BTCI) provides an interesting framework for analyzing bilateral trade between Argentina and Uruguay.

The present study aims to identify strategic sectors for Argentina's trade integration in Uruguay based on a quantitative analysis of the 37 main tariff positions exported during the period 2022-2024. The goal is to provide empirical evidence to guide public policies, trade promotion strategies, and business decisions focused on the regionalization of Argentine foreign trade. Thus, this study aims to characterize the structure of bilateral trade,

identify sectors with potential for expansion, and propose lines of action based on the results obtained.^(8,9)

METHOD

Study design

A quantitative, descriptive, and comparative approach was adopted, aimed at identifying strategic sectors for Argentine exports to the Uruguayan market. The unit of analysis consisted of the 37 tariff headings most exported by Argentina to Uruguay during the 2022-2024 period, selected on the basis of their cumulative FOB value and classified according to the eight-digit Mercosur Common Nomenclature (NCM). This level of disaggregation allowed for a precise and sectoral approach to the export profile.

Data sources

Official statistical sources from the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INDEC), the National Customs Directorate of Uruguay, Softrade, and the United Nations COMTRADE database were used. The triangulation of these sources ensured the consistency of the information and its comparability over time. In addition, MERCOSUR regulatory documents were incorporated to interpret market access conditions and the regimes applicable to intra-bloc exports.

Indicators used

The methodology was structured around the application of four indicators recognized in the international trade literature:

- Trade intensity index (TI): calculates whether bilateral trade is more intense than expected based on the global share of both countries in world trade.
- Bilateral trade complementarity index (ICCB): quantifies the degree of match between Argentina's exportable supply and Uruguay's import structure.
- Herfindahl-Hirschman concentration index (HHI): used to assess the degree of concentration of Argentine exports at the product level, identifying dependence on a small number of goods.
- Grubel-Lloyd intra-industry trade index (GL): applied to determine whether the bilateral relationship involves intra-industry (exports and imports of similar goods) or inter-industry flows.
- Trade overlap index (TO): measures the degree of overlap between the export structures of both countries, identifying the level of potential competition.
- Symmetrical revealed comparative advantage index (IVCRSX): calculates Argentina's relative export specialization in each product, using a symmetrical methodology that avoids distortions caused by products with low commercial values.

Analytical procedure

The indicators were calculated individually for each of the 37 selected tariff positions. Based on the results, comparative rankings were constructed and products were classified according to theoretical thresholds defined by the specialized literature. The analysis was carried out in two phases: a first general diagnostic stage, focused on the structural characterization of Argentina's export pattern to Uruguay; and a second stage of strategic targeting, aimed at identifying a priority sector with potential for deepening its trade integration.

RESULTS

Bilateral trade: main products and trade structure

During the period 2022-2024, bilateral trade between Argentina and Uruguay showed a high degree of stability and sectoral concentration. Analysis of the 37 main tariff headings exported by Argentina reveals a basket dominated by industrial, agro-industrial, and energy goods.

Among the most relevant products are:

- Crude petroleum oils (NCM 2709.00.10), with exports exceeding USD 140 million in 2024.
- Odoriferous mixtures for the food industry (3302.10.00).
- Corn for sowing (1005.10.00).
- Surfactant preparations (3402.50.00).
- Pet food prepared for retail sale (2309.10.00).
- Pharmaceutical products (3004.90.99 and 3004.90.23).

These items reflect a significant permanence in the export ranking throughout the three-year period. In 2024, the 25 main items accounted for 61,3 % of the total value exported by Argentina to Uruguay, compared to the average of 46 % for the period. In addition, 12 items individually exceeded USD 20 million per year in at least one of the three years.

In terms of sectoral diversity, 18 of the 37 items correspond to industrial manufactures, 11 to agribusiness,

and 8 to energy and intermediate chemicals. Among the items that gained relative importance are processed foods and pharmaceutical goods. On the other hand, some traditionally strong positions, such as cereal derivatives and plastic products, maintained their share without significant changes.

Intensity and complementarity of bilateral trade

The Trade Intensity Index (TI) showed exceptionally high levels during the three-year period, with the following values:

- 2022: 53,3
- 2023: 74,8
- 2024: 62,9

These results indicate that bilateral trade was between 50 and 75 times more intense than expected given the relative size of Argentina and Uruguay in world trade.

The Bilateral Trade Complementarity Index (ICCB), which measures the match between Argentina's export structure and Uruguay's import structure, averaged 0,6010 over the three-year period, implying a significant match between supply and demand.

Degree of trade concentration: Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI)

Table 1. Evolution of the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) applied to the 37 main items exported by Argentina to Uruguay (2022-2024)

Year	HHI on 37 items
2022	0,312
2023	0,327
2024	0,305
Source: Prepared internally based on Softrade ⁽¹⁾	

The highest level of concentration was recorded in 2023, when 52 % of Argentine exports were concentrated in just five items. In 2024, this concentration decreased slightly, as a result of the increase in the share of medium-scale industrial goods and processed foods.

The items with the highest relative weight in the export basket were:

- Crude petroleum oils (2709.00.10).
- Pet food (2309.10.00).
- Corn for sowing (1005.10.00).
- Odoriferous mixtures (3302.10.00).
- Pharmaceutical products (3004.90.99 and 3004.90.23).

These five items together accounted for between 41 % and 52 % of Argentina's total exports to Uruguay, depending on the year in question.

Trade structure: Grubel-Lloyd (GL) index

The Grubel-Lloyd (GL) Intra-Industry Trade Index showed a predominantly inter-industry structure. In more than 90 % of cases, the value was less than 0,10. In some isolated products—such as active pharmaceutical ingredients or intermediate chemical compounds—GL values above 0,15 were recorded, but never exceeding 0,30.

This configuration indicates that Argentine exports are not replicated by similar exports from Uruguay to Argentina or third countries, but rather respond to specializations that differ by country.

Trade overlap: Trade Overlap Index (TO)

The Trade Overlap Index (TO), applied to the export structures of both countries, showed a downward trend:

Table 2. Trade Overlap Index (TO) applied to the 37 main items exported by Argentina to Uruguay (2022-2024)

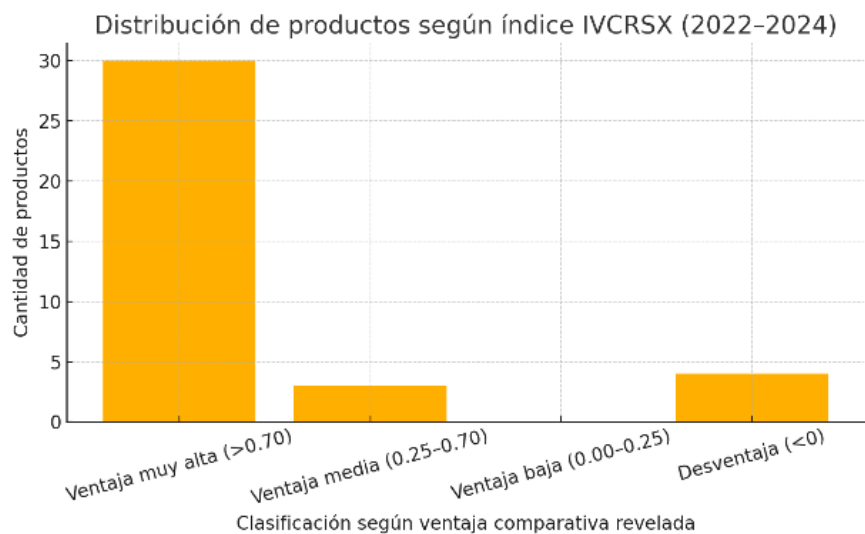
Year	TO
2022	0,52
2023	0,35
2024	0,27
Source: Prepared internally based on Softrade ⁽¹⁾	

The cumulative decline of more than 48 % over the three-year period indicates a progressive decrease in the structural coincidence of products exported by both countries to the global market.

Comparative advantages: Symmetric Revealed Comparative Advantage Index (IVCRSX)

The SSCRI was applied to the 37 main items exported by Argentina to Uruguay. The result was a marked concentration in high advantage ranges.

Table 3. Classification of products according to the IVCRSX index (2022-2024)	
IVCRSX classification	Number of products
High advantage (> 0,70)	30
Medium advantage (0,25-0,70)	3
Low advantage (0,00-0,25)	0
Disadvantage (<0)	4
Source: Prepared internally based on Softrade ⁽¹⁾	



Source: Prepared internally based on Softrade⁽¹⁾
Figure 1. Distribution of products according to the IVCRSX index (2022-2024)

Among the items with the greatest comparative advantage are:

- Pet food (2309.10.00).
- Prepared medicines (3004.90.99).
- Plastic packaging.
- Agro-industrial waste and food additives.

These items not only recorded high IVCRSX values, but also continuity over time and prominent positions in the export ranking.

DISCUSSION

The results obtained reflect a trade relationship between Argentina and Uruguay characterized by high intensity, a consolidated complementary structure, and a sectoral distribution with a predominance of industrial, agro-industrial, and energy goods. The permanence of the main items throughout the three-year period, together with the sustained level of indicators such as the Trade Intensity Index (IC) and the Bilateral Trade Complementarity Index (ICCB), allow us to affirm that the bilateral link operates on solid structural foundations, beyond external circumstances or shocks.

The CI, with values between 53,3 and 74,8, confirms that trade between the two countries was between 50 and 75 times more intense than would be expected based on their share of world trade. This data cannot be explained solely by geographical proximity: it reflects the consolidation of institutional channels, the common rules established by MERCOSUR, and a historical synergy between Argentine export supply and Uruguayan import demand. This sustained intensity also reveals commercial resilience, as it remained stable even in the face of internal and external fluctuations, reaffirming Uruguay’s role as a natural and strategic market for a

significant part of Argentina's export complex.⁽¹⁰⁾

The ICCB, with an average value of 0,6010, shows a moderate-high structural coincidence between Argentine exports and Uruguayan imports. This structural pattern indicates that more than 60 % of products exported from Argentina have a potential place in the Uruguayan consumption matrix, which represents a considerable advantage over other trading partners. The year-on-year stability of this index, without any abrupt breaks, suggests a predictable and reliable environment for the design of medium-term strategies.⁽⁸⁾

In terms of concentration, the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) remained within moderate ranges (between 0,305 and 0,327), allowing for a double strategic reading. On the one hand, the existence of well-positioned leading sectors (such as hydrocarbons, balanced foods, and pharmaceuticals) guarantees a solid export base. On the other hand, the relative stability of the index between years indicates that there have been no significant structural transformations, thus opening up opportunities for gradual diversification. This possibility is especially valuable for the SME segment, which can incorporate new products without threatening established sectors.⁽¹¹⁾

The predominance of an inter-industry trade pattern, as evidenced by the Grubel-Lloyd (GL) Index, reinforces the idea of structural complementarity between the economies. In more than 90 % of export items, the index value was less than 0,10, meaning that there is no reciprocal trade within the same categories. Argentina exports what Uruguay does not produce or export, thus configuring an exchange of specializations rather than a trade in varieties.⁽⁶⁾

The decline in the Trade Overlap Index (TO), which fell from 0,52 in 2022 to 0,27 in 2024, reinforces this pattern. The low overlap between the export baskets of both countries implies a low degree of direct competition and greater freedom of sectoral positioning for Argentine companies. This divergent specialization—primary goods in Uruguay, higher value-added goods in Argentina—generates a complementary, non-conflicting trade relationship.

The Symmetric Revealed Comparative Advantage Index (IVCRSX) confirms that Argentina's export penetration in the Uruguayan market is not circumstantial, but structurally competitive. Eighty-one percent of exported products have a high revealed advantage ($> 0,70$). This structure shows that Argentina has a solid supply, validated by Uruguayan demand and aligned with national production capacities.^(7,11,12)

The choice of Uruguay as the initial market for internationalization responds to its compatible scale, institutional stability, and predictable regulatory environment. It also allows for the validation of export models and the accumulation of operational experience that can be replicated in more complex markets such as Chile, Paraguay, or Bolivia, as recommended by recent studies on progressive regional integration.^(10,13)

From a public policy design perspective, this assessment suggests an evidence-based trade agenda that combines consolidation strategies for products with high advantages, targeted promotion for those with medium advantages, and restructuring for those with persistent disadvantages. Tools such as market intelligence, export consortia, specific credit lines, and international country brand positioning can play a key role.

In addition to trade issues, it is important to consider the operational and technological challenges faced by Argentine SMEs when exporting: logistical efficiency, traceability, regulatory adaptation, health certifications, and digitization. Strengthening technical and institutional capacities can make a difference in the sustainability of these operations.^(12,15)

The growing importance of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) criteria in international trade poses new demands for sectors such as agribusiness and food. Incorporating sustainable practices, biodegradable packaging, and environmental traceability is no longer an option, but a condition for competing in more demanding international markets.

At the regional level, the results of this study are in line with the agendas of organizations such as ALADI, ECLAC, and MERCOSUR, which promote the articulation of value chains, regulatory harmonization, and non-competitive productive integration. The Argentine-Uruguayan case can serve as a basis for advancing along this path, especially in medium-scale and highly specialized sectors.^(13,14)

From an academic perspective, this multidimensional approach—which integrates indicators of intensity, complementarity, concentration, overlap, and comparative advantage—contributes to the debate on how to measure the structural quality of the international integration of intermediate countries. The methodology used can be applied in comparative studies between regional partners or to evaluate the sectoral evolution of exporting provinces.⁽¹²⁾

The integrated application of quantitative indicators to the 37 main items exported by Argentina to Uruguay during the period 2022-2024 made it possible to identify sectors with sustained comparative advantages, low structural competition, and favorable conditions for expansion. Among these, the category of dog and cat food, prepared for retail sale (NCM 2309.10.00) stood out as the most promising from a strategic perspective, which is why it was selected as a priority sector for an advanced phase of sectoral analysis and the formulation of recommendations.

This selection is not based on arbitrary criteria, but on a solid empirical convergence between the main indicators used. First, the IVCRSX index for this item was above 0,70 throughout the three-year period, evidence

of a high and sustained revealed comparative advantage, confirming Argentina's strong specialization in this segment. This positioning reflects not only a high share of exports to Uruguay, but also above-average global performance, in line with the country's agro-industrial capabilities.

The Grubel-Lloyd (GL) intra-industry trade index for this item was close to zero, indicating a strictly inter-industry relationship: Argentina exports, Uruguay imports, with no evidence of reciprocal flows or significant local production oriented toward exports. This structural asymmetry reduces competitive pressures and favors the consolidation of a dominant position by Argentine exporters.

In turn, the trade overlap index (TO) reinforces this reading. Given the low degree of overlap between the export baskets of both countries and the absence of Uruguayan exports in this category, the market presents a configuration of structural complementarity rather than rivalry. This situation gives Argentine firms a *first-mover* advantage in a growing segment that is still underdeveloped in Uruguay from the point of view of local supply.

The dynamism of the market also supports this prioritization. In recent years, there has been a global and regional trend toward the humanization of pets, accompanied by an increase in demand for premium foods, functional formulations (digestive, hypoallergenic, organic), and options differentiated by ingredients, nutritional quality, and brand values. These transformations open up space for differentiation strategies, leveraged by innovation, sustainability, packaging design, and emotional marketing.

From an operational standpoint, this is a mass consumer good with direct access to the end consumer, which allows Argentine companies to implement D2C (*direct-to-consumer*) strategies, combining traditional channels (*retail*, veterinarians) with e-commerce platforms and digital positioning campaigns. This feature is especially valuable for export-oriented SMEs, which can build brand awareness and audience loyalty without relying on conventional intermediaries.

The sector also stands out for its capacity for adaptive innovation, especially in the development of differentiated lines according to life stage, animal size, nutritional composition, and consumer cultural preferences. This enables segmentation strategies that can be capitalized on both in the Uruguayan market and in other destinations with similar demand structures.

Argentina has already demonstrated competitive performance in this area in other Latin American markets, such as Chile, Paraguay, Peru, and Bolivia, providing external evidence that the business model is scalable. This accumulated experience can reduce learning costs and increase the speed of entry into Uruguay, especially in terms of logistics, health regulations, and consumer habits.

The role of Argentine SMEs in this sector is particularly relevant, given that many of them have idle capacity, flexible structures, and an emerging export vocation. Through consortium programs, collective brands, or participation in international fairs, these firms can coordinate to improve their visibility and penetration in the Uruguayan market with a differentiated value proposition.

In terms of regional integration, the sector could be a pilot case for light production integration schemes, where final packaging, fractionation, or digital *fulfillment* are carried out in Uruguay, increasing local content and improving compliance with regulatory requirements or public tenders. These initiatives could receive support from both national agencies and MERCOSUR itself.

Compared to other non-selected sectors, such as fuels or primary products that also weigh heavily in the export balance, the pet food sector offers a unique combination of stability, scalability, and low regulatory risk. Unlike hydrocarbons, which are subject to volatile prices and government-to-government agreements, the pet food market is expanding, with lower barriers to entry and opportunities for brand positioning.

Furthermore, Argentina has institutional capacities that can be mobilized to support this process. SENASA already has protocols and health cooperation agreements with Uruguay.⁽¹⁵⁾ In addition, institutions such as the Argentine Investment and International Trade Agency, provincial governments, and public banks can generate specific lines of credit, promotion, and training to support exporters in this sector.

The sector's potential is also projected in terms of country brand positioning, combining attributes such as health, nutrition, animal care, and agro-industrial quality. These values are in line with *premium*, sustainable, and responsible consumption trends, enabling origin campaigns that associate "Argentine pet food" with international standards, animal welfare, and certified traceability.

On the geopolitical front, integration into MERCOSUR offers additional advantages. Uruguay, as a stable market and gateway to other regional markets, can become a distribution platform for third countries. Furthermore, as intra-bloc trade, the product enjoys tariff preferences and more flexible customs conditions that can boost its competitiveness vis-à-vis competitors outside the zone.

Finally, it must be recognized that the sector's development is not without challenges. Issues such as dependence on imported inputs (such as vitamins or additives), logistical cost pressures, and the need for specific certifications could hinder expansion if not addressed through active policies. However, these risks are manageable and do not overshadow the sector's potential, which combines export maturity with opportunities for innovation, a valuable rarity in Argentine-Uruguayan bilateral trade.

Beyond sectoral analysis, it is necessary to highlight the role of institutional coordination in consolidating the trade link between Argentina and Uruguay. Coordination between national agencies (such as the Argentine Investment and International Trade Agency) and provincial or sectoral actors is key to translating the comparative advantages revealed into sustained internationalization strategies. Likewise, bilateral regulatory agreements—for example, on health or logistics—must be updated periodically to reduce transaction costs and ensure predictability.^(12,14)

It is also important to incorporate the dimension of diversification of exporters. Although the data in this study are aggregated by tariff heading, business concentration may be high, with a few firms accounting for a significant volume of bilateral trade. Encouraging the participation of new SMEs, cooperatives, or regional companies would contribute to a more inclusive and resilient export matrix. To this end, it is essential to improve access to finance, simplify customs procedures, and provide sector-specific technical assistance tailored to each export profile.^(11,14)

One risk looming in the medium term is the fragility of Uruguayan demand in the face of external shocks or structural changes in its economy. Although the bilateral link has shown resilience, overdependence on a single market—even a reliable one—may limit Argentina’s export development. Uruguay should therefore be seen as a gateway or learning platform, but not as a single destination. Successful experiences there should be documented, systematized, and projected toward other markets of similar size or regulatory requirements.^(12, 13)

In line with the above, it is crucial to incorporate a perspective of export scalability. Not all sectors or products that work in Uruguay will do so equally well in other contexts, but the process of accumulating capabilities—commercial, logistical, health, regulatory—can generate a dynamic advantage. Sustained exports to Uruguay can be considered “phase one” in an international learning curve, where replicable institutional and business skills are developed.^(11,14)

Competitive differentiation, meanwhile, is another key vector that must be strengthened. The study identified sectors where Argentina has revealed comparative advantages, but in many cases global competition is also on the rise. Therefore, in addition to price, Argentine companies must invest in value added that is perceptible to consumers: design, presentation, certifications, functional attributes, emotional marketing, and traceability. Uruguay, due to its sociocultural conditions, can be a testing ground for these strategies, especially in the middle and high consumption segments.^(12,16)

It is important to reflect on the role of applied knowledge in the design of commercial strategies. The combination of quantitative analysis—such as that carried out in this study—with market intelligence, consumer studies, and organizational learning can significantly strengthen the quality of business and public policy decisions. Along these lines, it is desirable that universities, technology centers, and business chambers actively participate in the construction of evidence-based sectoral export agendas, articulating analytical capacities with the concrete needs of the productive fabric.^(12,14)

Finally, although the results are solid, the study has limitations: no data disaggregated by company is available, and variables such as logistics times, technical licenses, or Uruguayan consumer perceptions were not analyzed. Future research could address these qualitative dimensions through interviews, surveys, or case studies to enrich the diagnosis and formulate more operational recommendations.

CONCLUSIONS

Bilateral trade between Argentina and Uruguay during the period 2022-2024 revealed much more than an intensified exchange due to geographical proximity or historical ties. The structured analysis of the main tariff headings, accompanied by specific technical indicators, identified that the trade link operates on a logic of functional specialization, with low competitive overlap and a high degree of complementarity between supply and demand. This structure is not circumstantial, but rather expresses a stable configuration with the capacity to be deepened and replicated.

One of the main contributions of this research was to demonstrate that it is possible to construct strong, consistent trade diagnoses using disaggregated quantitative tools, without losing sight of the strategic dimension. The approach used integrated multiple variables—from intensity to revealed comparative advantage—which made it possible not only to describe the current state of bilateral trade, but also to anticipate possible trajectories. This methodology is therefore a useful tool for other studies of international integration, at the country, provincial, and sectoral levels.

From a strategic perspective, the results suggest that Uruguay can be much more than a destination market: it can operate as a space for validation, testing, and learning for the international integration of Argentine value-added goods. This is particularly relevant for small and medium-sized enterprises, which require accessible scales, predictable regulatory frameworks, and fluid institutional channels to advance their internationalization processes. In this sense, the relationship with Uruguay offers a real laboratory for the development of export capacities.

In addition, the study allows inferences to be drawn about the role that Argentine trade policy should play

in the coming years. Instead of focusing exclusively on volume or the largest destinations, strategies could also be geared toward the quality of trade links, the exploitation of structural advantages, and the consolidation of dynamic sectors with regional growth potential. This implies a shift in focus: from a generic export policy to one based on evidence, segmented by product and destination, with differentiated instruments according to the type of advantage or disadvantage revealed.

The prioritization of the pet food sector is not based on intuition, but on the empirical convergence of technical indicators with regional consumption trends and available production capacities. This coincidence is key: only when technical evidence meets real material conditions is it possible to design viable export strategies. In this case, a window of opportunity is opening up to position Argentine products with added value, both in the Uruguayan market and in other areas of MERCOSUR, taking advantage of accumulated experience, current regulations, and opportunities for differentiation.

In turn, this experience invites us to rethink the role of public-private cooperation in export development. International integration cannot rely solely on the capabilities of companies: it requires an institutional framework that acts as a facilitator, generator of commercial intelligence, coordinator of actors, and promoter of quality standards. In this regard, coordination between national agencies, provincial governments, business chambers, and universities appears to be an essential condition for transforming opportunities into sustained internationalization processes.

The research also shows that the sustainability of an export strategy cannot be measured solely in terms of the present. It is necessary to project scenarios for evolution, identify structural risks, and build capacities that transcend the governments in power. The stability of indicators such as complementarity or trade intensity shows that the basic conditions exist to move in this direction, but it also highlights the need for active policies to keep regulatory frameworks, logistics systems, and promotion mechanisms up to date.

The study also confirms that there is no contradiction between scale and quality. Sectors with relatively low volumes can be strategic if they meet certain conditions: low demand elasticity, local installed capacity, potential for differentiation, and alignment with global trends (such as sustainability, traceability, innovation, or health). In this sense, prioritizing “smaller” sectors does not mean giving up impact, but rather focusing efforts where the margins for success are highest.

The link with Uruguay should be understood as part of a broader regional strategy. MERCOSUR, with its limitations and potential, continues to offer institutional tools, tariff preferences, and common regulatory frameworks that should be taken advantage of. The challenge, then, is to move from a logic of passive opportunity to a logic of strategic construction, where each prioritized sector is part of a larger narrative of smart, responsible, and sustainable integration into international markets.

The articulation between empirical evidence, institutional capacities, and business strategies identified in the Argentine-Uruguayan case can offer a replicable model for strengthening Argentina's international integration in other regional markets. This methodological and operational potential should be considered when designing internationalization policies with a broader territorial and sectoral scope.

The path to sustainable international integration does not depend solely on data, but on the ability to convert that information into strategic, collaborative, and territorially meaningful decisions.

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FUNDING

The authors did not receive funding for the development of this research.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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