

AN ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF THE COMPETITIVENESS OF DATES AND THEIR ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL MARKETING IN IRAQ FOR THE PERIOD 2005-2019

R.T. Al-Wasity
Assist. Prof.

Dep. of Agricultural Economics/
Coll. of Agric. Engin. Sci.
University of Baghdad
raja.t@coagri.uobaghdad.edu.iq

A. F. Ahmed
Assist. Prof.

Dep. of Agricultural Economics/ Coll.
of Agric. Engin. Sci. University of
Baghdad
dr.aidafawzi@coagri.uobaghdad.edu.iq

S. A. Albadawi
Researcher

Plant Protection Dep.
Iraqi Ministry of Agric.
saadzeddin@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The development of exports in an open economic environment is the best solution in accelerating the pace of economic growth. The research evaluates the competitiveness of Iraqi dates exports based on a set of quantitative indicators and shows the role of Trade activities represented by international marketing that ensures the flow of goods and services from production until they reach the consumer. The research found a competitive advantage for Iraq in its exports of dates, as the Revealed Comparative Advantage - RCA showed a remarkable rise during the years of study and reached 26.98 in 2008, as for the Concentration Index (H), which represents the concentration of exports in a product or a limited number of products. More than 0.5 came in all the years of the study and it reached 0.91 in 2010. That means, the concentration of Iraqi agricultural exports with a large percentage in dates exports, which means placing agricultural exports and the agricultural trade balance in a difficult position if crop production is exposed to shocks that affect the quality and quantity of production, such as epidemic pests, bad weather or price disturbances in global markets. The research recommended using the comparative advantage that distinguishes Iraq in the production of dates and working to increase the market share by finding new marketing channels.

Keywords: competitive, agricultural exports, revealed comparative advantage, concentration index

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تحليل اقتصادي لتنافسية التمور ودورها في التسويق الزراعي الدولي في العراق للمدة 2005 – 2019

سعد عبد القهار البدوي

باحث

دائرة وقاية المزروعات

وزارة الزراعة العراقية

عائدة فوزي احمد

أستاذ مساعد

قسم الاقتصاد الزراعي – كلية علوم

الهندسة الزراعية – جامعة بغداد

رجاء طعمة الواسطي

أستاذ مساعد

قسم الاقتصاد الزراعي – كلية علوم

الهندسة الزراعية – جامعة بغداد

المستخلص

تشكل تنمية الصادرات في بيئة اقتصادية مفتوحة الحل الأفضل في تسريع وتيرة النمو الاقتصادي، ويقوم البحث بتقييم القدرة التنافسية لصادرات التمور العراقية اعتماداً على مجموعة من المؤشرات الكمية، وتبين دور الأنشطة التجارية المتمثلة بالتسويق الدولي الذي يضمن تدفق السلع والخدمات من الإنتاج لغاية وصولها بالشكل المطلوب الى المستهلك، وتوصل البحث الى وجود ميزة تنافسية للعراق في صادراته من التمور، اذ بين مؤشر الميزة النسبية الظاهرية ارتفاعاً ملحوظاً خلال سنوات الدراسة وصلت الى 26.98 في عام 2008، اما مؤشر التركيز والذي يمثل تركيز الصادرات في منتج او عدد محدود من المنتجات فقد جاء اكثر من 0.5 لجميع سنوات الدراسة ووصل الى 0.91 في عام 2010 أي تركيز الصادرات الزراعية العراقية وبنسبة كبيرة في التمور مما يعني وضع الصادرات الزراعية والميزان التجاري الزراعي في موقف صعب في حال تعرض انتاج المحصول الى صدمات تؤثر في جودة وكمية الإنتاج كالأفات البوائية وسوء الأحوال الجوية او الاضطرابات السعرية في الأسواق العالمية. اوصى البحث باستغلال الميزة النسبية التي يتميز بها العراق في انتاج التمور والعمل على زيادة الحصة السوقية منها عن طريق إيجاد مسالك تسويقية جديدة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تنافسية، صادرات زراعية، الميزة النسبية الظاهرية، مؤشر التركيز.

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INTRODUCTION

Iraq has important agricultural potentials that could make it a regional agricultural economic power. However, agricultural exports do not live up to these ingredients, and dates constitute a large part of it, and the contribution of agricultural exports to total exports is very weak. Therefore, we seek through this research to highlight the importance of competitive advantage and the role of international agricultural marketing in promoting these exports, and any country strives to develop and diversify its sources of national income, as the case of Iraq, as development plans aimed to diversify sources of income and reduce dependence on oil as the main source of national income due to severe fluctuations and the unexpected in its prices, and its negative impact on the development process and the budget deficit, which led to seeking to upgrade exports of sectors other than the oil sector, such as agricultural exports. Marketing agricultural products to foreign markets differ from domestic markets, due to the difference and complexity of the international business environment and the multiplicity of variables affecting it, as well as the intensification of competition. The behaviour of the international consumer differs from the behaviour of the local consumer, which calls for the need to study their needs and desires and meet them in the required manner, place and time. Besides, attention must be paid to the issue of promotion and advertisement to define products and to ensure their easy and easy disposal and distinguish them from competitors' products. This is what increases the importance of international agricultural marketing day after day, as it is the right start to storm foreign markets, especially in light of the intensity of international competition and the survival of the strongest, to increase the volume of agricultural exports. Therefore, the research study: Does Iraq has a competitive advantage in dates? and how does foreign agricultural marketing contribute to the development of agricultural exports in Iraq? and what is the role that international marketing can play in supporting the agricultural sector through agricultural exports? and thus, the research aims to achieve a set of goals represented in

measuring the competitiveness of Iraqi dates, assessing the reality of dates exports and providing a theoretical framework that defines the concepts related to international agricultural marketing, as well as highlighting the role and contribution of international agricultural marketing to agricultural output. The importance of the research lies in the fact that the agricultural sector can represent one of the most important sectors contributing to the national income, and according to the national income indicators represent 3.7 billion dollars annually of the gross domestic product, Iraq possesses the agricultural ingredients to make it an agricultural economic power in the region, but the proportion of the contribution of agricultural exports in total exports remain very weak, which calls for highlighting the most important exported agricultural commodities and knowing their competitiveness in global markets through some important indicators in this area. The topic of competitiveness at the level of foreign trade has been studied by many researchers. We include a number of them: Mustafa studied in 2005 “The competitiveness of the Palestinian food industries and the prospects for their development” The researcher's goal is to develop a vision for food processing and the means to support and develop it, by estimating the competitive performance indicators as well as the method analyzing the competitive potentials and efforts, and the researcher reached high competitiveness in food industries based on the RCA scale compared to all other manufacturing industries, as it was found that these industries are the highest value of this scale compared to all these industries (19). Abdmoulah and Alabbas in 2013 assessed the competitiveness of Arab exports in international markets using trade indicators, by applying a set of quantitative indicators and using foreign trade data detailed to the third level for the years 2000 and 2006. The research concluded that it is impossible to maintain the competitiveness of the export sector due to backward industrialization, slow structural transformation, weak supply of basic commodities, increased dependence on natural resources and a low level of integration into global production chains (1). Hawari in 2016 also dealt with the comparative advantages of

exports outside the oil sector between the possibilities of specialization and the opportunities to diversify the Algerian economy for the period 2001-2014, by collecting and analyzing data on exports statistics out of the oil using the RCA and the concentration index. The results showed that some exported products have comparative advantages, but it represents only small percentages of the value of exports. Others have potential advantages that can be specialized, such as food and industrial products, to diversify the variety of exports (15).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

International agricultural marketing: there are several definitions of international agricultural marketing, some of which we address:

-Agricultural marketing is defined as "An achievement of business activities that include the flow of goods and services from the point of arrival of crops and products until they arrive in any form to the last consumer" (7). Agricultural marketing also means "This flexible system aimed at facilitating the flow of agricultural goods and related services from where they are produced to places where they consume appropriate and acceptable conditions, prices and quality from all parties to the agricultural process" (13). National and international agricultural marketing is similar in that they care and satisfy consumers more efficiently than competitors, but they differ in the following points (2):

-Internal differences between the two market environments, which require different marketing practices

-Foreign markets require cross-border work and therefore have different issues and problems

-Each has a separate approach and tools.

From previous definitions, agricultural marketing, both national and international, can be defined as all marketing activities aimed at delivering agricultural products to the consumer in the form and the quality they want, the place and time they want, but the means and tools used in international marketing activities are different from those used locally due to the complexity of the international business environment. For

example, the needs and tastes of the outside consumer are different from the local consumer.

Role of international agricultural marketing in the development of agricultural exports

Experience has shown that the absence of an efficient marketing system is one of the main constraints in increasing production and export development (9). Therefore, the effective and efficient application of marketing activities is the key to access to foreign markets and the development of agricultural exports, the most important of which are:

1. International marketing research

It is intended for scientific analysis based on the collection and interpretation of data and information on problems associated with foreign markets to enter and market products and highlights the need for international marketing research because of the different elements facing export institutions in foreign markets compared to local markets, and the most important points that call for international marketing research (11):

-The severity of international competition and the need to read and study international competition and its degree and ways to overcome it

-Help avoid making improper management decisions before recognizing the international market environment

-Contribute to adapting to the changes in foreign markets

2. Analysis of international consumer behaviour

: The consumer is considered the cornerstone of successful marketing activity where the desires and characteristics of consumers determine the parameters of an effective marketing strategy, and the study of consumer behaviour is one of the most important marketing activities in the organization due to the intensification of competition and the expansion of the size and type of alternatives available to the consumer on the one hand and change of needs and desires on the other hand (17).

3. Planning the production process

This activity is concerned with developing different products, identifying the image of the products in the market, the brand, the way they are packaged and the various specifications related to them such as the specifications (20).

4. International promotion: It is a process of communication between the exporter and the importer, i.e. conveying a message from the exporting institution to the importer or brokers to convince them and make them more receptive to the products of the institution, and the declaration is considered one of the most common and used methods by international marketers, and when considering the use of advertising on an international level must take into account the most important influences that take into account, these influences can be identified in economic, social, competitive and other factors (11).

Agricultural Exports of Iraq

Agricultural foreign trade in Iraq is characterized by high volatility due to its many factors, political and economic, linked to the economic conditions of the major partners, making it vulnerable to severe fluctuations in international commodity prices and the vagaries of the world economy (18). Exports are important indicators for measuring the volume and level of foreign trade, the higher their proportion is reflected in the trade balance, as exports represent a flow of income, adding new purchasing power to the total cash flow stream, as well as attracting foreign capital to work in the production of export commodities and expanding marketing capacity by opening new foreign markets to national products through cost and quality competition (3). Iraq exports a large number of agricultural products, the most important of which are dates, livestock skins, peanut oil, chicken meat, cigarettes, molasses, fatty acids, various prepared fruits, preserved olives, etc. We explain below the most important characteristics of the last three decades concerning Iraq's exports from the agricultural sector. The imposition of economic sanctions on Iraq in the early 1990s restricted exports and imports to all goods, including agricultural commodities, and the reality of the export situation in its large part became restricted by Security Council resolutions, resulting in the suspension of the bulk of exports and imports, and after the signing of the memorandum of

understanding - MoU in 1996, the import of foodstuff became linked with the ration card, Iraq has resorted to eliminating all duties on the import of goods in general and food in particular (i.e. encouraging the import of the private sector) by motivating suppliers to enter the largest amount of food commodities to meet domestic demand (16). For the period (2005-2019), agricultural exports constitute a good share of commodity exports in Iraq. It reached high rates of 81% in 2016, 40% in 2009, and 36% in both 2008 and 2014. While agricultural exports witnessed an increase in the years 2018 and 2019, reaching 122.8 and 116.8 million dollars, respectively, as a direct result of the increase in the volume of dates exports in them, as shown in table 1. Although, the lowest value of agricultural exports was in 2006, a reflection of the difficult security conditions that the country was going through. The annual growth rate of agricultural exports reached 9% during the studied period, due to dates exports, which represent 60%-80% of them, as the general situation of dates production has improved in recent years as a result of the state's interest in this vital sector represented by the agricultural initiative and the control campaigns implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture for epidemic pests that affect palms such as Dubas Bug (*Ommatissus*), Humera Bug (*Batrachedra amydraula*) and date Palm stem borer beetle (*Oryctes Elegans*) etc. Which reflected positively on production and therefore export. Dates exports have progressed significantly at an annual growth rate of 8.3%, with sharp annual fluctuations reaching a peak of \$63.1 million in 2008, the lowest value in 2006 of approximately \$49.5 million as shown in Table 1. The relative importance, dates were and continue to be the most important agricultural commodity in terms of exports and individually, as the relative importance of dates reached very high rates in some years which about 88% in 2009 and 90% in 2010. This puts this crop in the ranks of the strategic crops on which the country relies in tilting the agricultural trade balance in its favour.

Table 1. commodity, agricultural, dates and leather exports in Iraq for 2005-2019 (1,000 \$)

Year	Commodity exports	Agricultural exports	(%) of Commodity exports	Dates	(%) of Agricultural exports	Leather	(%) of Agricultural exports
2005	118,500	30,480	26	20,530	67	1,291	8
2006	150,240	16,970	11	9,110	54	1,647	3
2007	181,987	49,660	27	42,600	86	1,320	2
2008	200,300	73,110	36	63,140	86	4,284	8
2009	136,900	54,850	40	48,320	88	821	2
2010	195,900	40,420	21	36,320	90	1,292	2
2011	219,700	57,370	26	46,850	82	2,634	4
2012	294,000	73,470	25	55,240	75	10,637	13
2013	339,300	81,730	24	54,290	66	17,075	24
2014	202,700	72,350	36	39,860	55	26,216	41
2015	191,200	63,980	33	42,180	66	18,280	25
2016	90,260	73,170	81	57,760	79	13,532	18
2017	291,870	76,000	26	50,960	67	12,932	11
2018	1,025,420	122,840	12	95,670	78	11,515	10
2019	3,264,000	116,850	4	73,194	63	9,116	14
Average	460,152	66,883		49,068		8,839	
Annual Growth (%)	12.6	9		8.3		20	

Source:

-Ministry of Planning/ Central Statistics Organization

-FAO website: <http://www.fao.org/faostat>

Table 2 shows the top 10 agricultural products exported from Iraq for the years 2005 to 2019, dates dominated the values of agricultural exports, followed by leather in second place, and other products alternated to appear in the list of exports intermittently. The scarcity of natural resources on the one hand and the orientation of the Iraqi economy towards openness to the global economy, on the other hand, are factors that call for the necessity of redistributing local trade and non-tradable factors of production within the agricultural sector towards specialization and reliance on the comparative advantage and its strengthening towards the competitive advantage concerning its agricultural exports.

In preparation for Iraq's accession to the World Trade Organization (4). From here, the study of the revealed comparative advantage represents an important point in clarifying the picture for agricultural policy-makers, taking into consideration supporting date producers and exporters by all means. As nearly fifty countries in the world are exported with limited dates, and Iraq's position varies within the first ten countries from year to year, which gives a clear vision of the weight of Iraq in this matter, and Table 3 shows Iraq's total exports and dates in addition to total exports and dates worldwide. The growth rate of dates exports is 8.3% and 10.7% in Iraq and the world, respectively, which are relatively high growth rates due to the interest of the exporting countries in this important product, on top of them (Tunisia, Iran and the UAE).

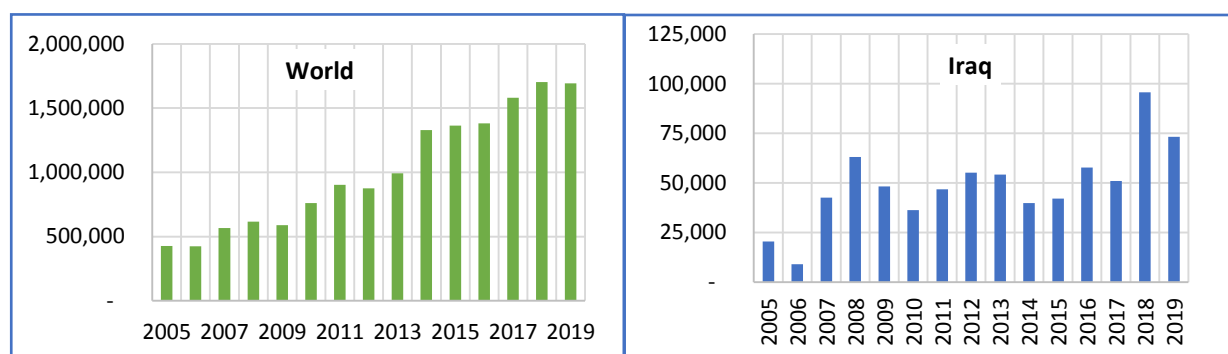
Table 2. Values of Iraq most important agricultural exports for 2014-2019 (1,000\$)

2019		2018		2017	
Commodity	Value	Commodity	Value	Commodity	Value
Dates	73,194	Dates	95,675	Dates	50,960
Oil, groundnut	11,452	Hides, cattle, wet salted	9,539	Hides, cattle, wet salted	12,038
Hides, cattle, wet salted	7,992	Fruit, prepared nes	2,760	Crude materials	1,670
Meat, chicken	2,169	Oil, groundnut	2,510	Cotton lint	1,284
Cigarettes	2,167	Skins, sheep, with wool	1,976	Fruit, prepared nes	1,121
Molasses	1,736	Molasses	1,749	Cigarettes	964
Fatty acids	1,614	Meat, chicken	1,703	Skins, sheep, with wool	894
Skins, sheep, with wool	1,124	Crude materials	1,195	Molasses	888
Fruit, prepared nes	1,110	Wool, degreased	610	Wool, degreased	658
Olives preserved	1,066	Fatty acids	601	Sugar confectionery	496
2016		2015		2014	
Commodity	Value	Commodity	Value	Commodity	Value
Dates	57,760	Dates	42,180	Dates	39,860
Hides, cattle, wet salted	11,132	Hides, cattle, wet salted	9,652	Hides, cattle, wet salted	14,616
Skins, sheep, with wool	2,400	Skins, sheep, with wool	8,628	Skins, sheep, with wool	11,600
Crude materials	1,584	Crude materials	2,168	Crude materials	4,813
Sugar confectionery	146	Juice, fruit nes	976	Juice, fruit nes	925
Molasses	104	Sugar confectionery	279	Sugar confectionery	463
Wool, greasy	30	Molasses	48	Molasses	72
Pastry	13	Vegetables, fresh or dried	36	-	-
Tobacco products nes	1	Beverages, non-alcoholic	17	-	-

Source: FAO website: <http://www.fao.org/faostat>**Table 3. Values of total and dates exports in Iraq in contrast of total and dates exports in the world (1000\$)**

Year	Iraqi dates exports	Iraqi total exports	Global dates exports*	Global total exports
2005	20,530	23,809,000	427,021	10,495,000,000
2006	9,110	29,361,000	424,029	12,120,000,000
2007	42,600	41,267,900	566,703	14,012,000,000
2008	63,140	61,264,400	616,339	16,132,000,000
2009	48,320	41,791,700	589,145	12,531,000,000
2010	36,320	52,482,600	760,340	15,254,000,000
2011	46,850	79,681,000	902,189	18,339,000,000
2012	55,240	94,391,600	875,561	18,513,190,000
2013	54,290	89,741,900	993,102	18,950,640,000
2014	39,860	84,506,100	1,438,819	19,007,210,000
2015	42,180	49,400,000	1,268,997	16,555,700,000
2016	57,760	43,774,000	1,451,999	16,043,200,000
2017	50,960	60,022,400	1,659,805	17,737,660,000
2018	95,675	85,181,800	1,701,849	19,468,140,000
2019	73,197	83,101,000	2,001,634	18,888,800,000
Average	49,068	61,318,427	1,013,659	16,269,836,000
Max	95,670	94,391,600	1,701,849	19,468,140,000
Min	9,110	23,809,000	424,029	10,495,000,000
Growth Rate %	8.3	6.1	10.7	3.3

Source: -Ministry of Planning/ Central Statistics Organization /Annual Dates Export Reports -FAO website www.fao.org/faostat

**Figure 1. Value of Iraq's and the world's exports dates for the period 2005-2019.**

Source: by researchers based on table 3

Iraqi dates exports fluctuate during the period studied, with a minimum of 9.1 million dollars in 2006, and a higher limit of 95.6 million dollars in 2018, and the issue may be partly due to the phenomenon of fluctuation in agricultural production, but the high growth rates indicate interest in this product and the improvement of production and exports, which need for a study of the comparative advantage of Iraqi date exports.

Competitive advantage: The concept of competition or competitiveness is used in the same sense. However, the literature states that there is a difference between the two concepts, as competitiveness is the ability of the organization to conduct business or products (goods or services) at the local or international level. market (6). To reach an accurate definition of international competitiveness, this concept faces some difficulties, as it overlaps with other concepts such as growth and economic development, as well as the fact that this concept is dynamic and linked to the development of countries' economies. The definition of the concept of competitiveness was split between the school of economists and the school of administrators, where the last school focused on Costs and productivity, while the school of economists focused on foreign trade and its role in the growth and achieving the well-being of society based on sustainable economic growth, and linking competitiveness to growth has its justifications related to managing advanced economies whose growth is hindered by the size of the local market on the one hand and the difficulty of disposing of their products on the other hand, and the concept of competitiveness. In general, it is represented in how the institution or the state can use measures and procedures that lead to its distinction from its competitors and achieve for itself superiority and distinction over them. The competitiveness has limitations through which its concept can be understood more comprehensively (21):

a. Production costs: These costs depend on the prices of production inputs and raw materials, the cost of the labour force, its availability, the level of training and absorption of modern technology, as well as the cost of production requirements. Competitiveness is inversely linked to

production costs, as the lower the production costs in the country.

b. Quality and goodness: Raising the quality of products and services and improving their fineness through the care of production inputs, their quality, the level of skills of workers and their level of productivity, whenever qualitative distinction is achieved through the efficiency of marketing and distribution

c. Role of the government: The government plays an effective role in raising competitiveness through specific measures such as providing support infrastructure services to the commodity and service sectors, following balanced and interdependent economic, financial, monetary and tax policies and flexible administrative procedures. Hence, the comparative advantage refers to the ability of an economy to produce the commodity at a lower cost than any other economies, through the productive factors available in it, and the comparative advantage expresses a certain acquired capacity enjoyed by individuals, societies and institutions (8). The research will aim to use one of the important criteria in this field, which is the (Balassa) index, to verify whether Iraq has a comparative, revealed comparative advantage for the date crop, or not.

1. Balassa index (revealed comparative advantage - RCA): It is one of the oldest and most famous revealed comparative advantage indices. It was developed by the Hungarian economist Béla Alexander Balassa in 1965 (12). And then developed in 1977 to measure the comparative advantages after the completion of their occurrence, which he called the revealed comparative advantages, and in which he reviewed the measures of competitive performance that were mainly concerned with the value of the RCA index. This index is broad because it gives a wide range of measures of the commercial base. The comparative advantages referred to by Balassa are relatively evident through the increase in the market share of the exporting industry, sector, or economy, and on the contrary, the low relative advantages through the decrease in the share of that industry or that sector in the exporting market. The general formula for this index is (19):

$$RCA = \frac{\frac{x_{ij}}{x_{it}}}{\frac{x_{wj}}{x_{wt}}} == \text{Where:}$$

RCA: Revealed Comparative Advantage.

X_{ij}: The value of exports of product j in the state i

X_{it}: The Value of total exports of country i

X_{wj}: The value of world exports of product j

X_{wt}: The value of total world exports

RCA index ranges from 0 to infinity with 1 as a break-even point, and RCA value of less than 1 means that the product has no revealed comparative advantage, while the value above 1 indicates that the product has a revealed comparative advantage, and through this indicator, performance can be assessed at global and regional levels.

2. Market share index

Market Share Index (*MS*) measures the share of the country's exports of a particular commodity in world markets from the world's total exports of the same commodity (14):

$$MS = \frac{x_i}{m_i} * 100$$

Where:

x_i: Exports of the commodity(*i*) of the country to the target market.

m_i: Total world exports of the commodity (*i*).

3. Concentration index (*H*)

It is known as the Hirschman Index and measures the level of market concentration of the state's share of world exports/ imports in a specific commodity or commodity group or its diversity between more than one commodity and a commodity group. The value of the index ranges from 0 to 1, the minimum values of the index indicate lower concentrations for both exports and imports, while higher values indicate greater concentrations, and can be calculated from the following simplified equation (1):

$$H_i = \sqrt{\left[\sum \left(\frac{x_i}{x_t} \right)^2 \right]}$$

Where:

x_i: State exports of goods(*i*).

x_t: The country's total exports (*t*)

i: The gross goods can be exported

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 4 shows that the value of the Balassa index was greater than 1 during all the years of the study, which means that Iraq has revealed

a competitive advantage of these goods in the world, and its highest value reached 26.98 in 2008, which is the year in which the value of Iraqi dates exports in the world was 63.1\$ millions, While MS was 10.2%, and this percentage is the highest among the years of study, in terms of the MS market share index. whereas the lowest point for this indicator was 2.1 in 2006.

Table 4. Indicators of The Competitive Advantage of Iraqi Dates Exports

Year	RCA	MS	H
2005	21.19	4.8	0.73
2006	8.87	2.1	0.58
2007	25.52	7.5	0.86
2008	26.98	10.2	0.87
2009	24.59	8.2	0.89
2010	13.88	4.8	0.91
2011	11.95	5.2	0.83
2012	12.37	6.3	0.77
2013	11.54	5.5	0.69
2014	6.74	3.0	0.61
2015	10.36	3.1	0.69
2016	15.34	4.2	0.80
2017	9.53	3.2	0.74
2018	12.85	5.6	0.81
2019	8.80	4.3	0.85

Source: Calculated by researchers based on tables 1, 2 and 3

figure 2 shows the volatility of the MS market share index during the study years, with its highest value in 2008 being 10.2% and a low of 2.1% in 2010, indicating the instability of dates exports and competition between exporters affecting market shares.

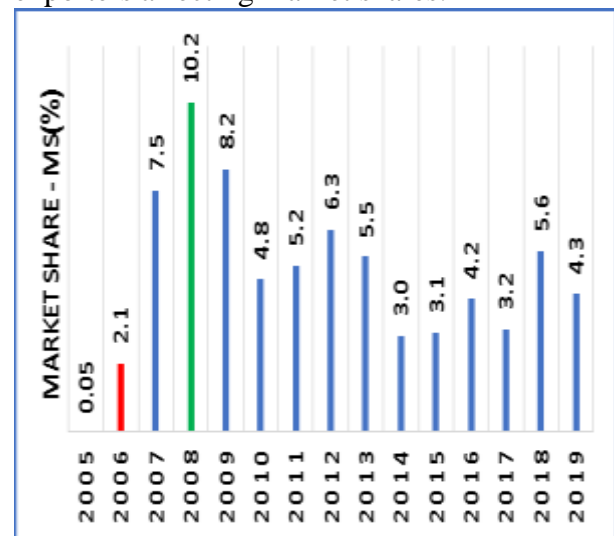


Figure 2. Index of market share of Iraqi dates exports

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on table 4.

From these two indicators, it becomes clear that Iraq can compete strongly in the global dates market, and that it needs to increase government initiatives to encourage its production locally and to support its exporters in possible ways so that it can maintain an advanced position in exporting dates and even return to the top of the list of the most producing countries in the world. The way to do that is to raise the efficiency of international marketing agencies, especially in terms of advertising, which contributes to increasing the international demand for dates. The lack of information related to foreign markets in terms of the volume of demand, desired items, size of packages and packaging forms and the standard specifications in the importing country causes a reduction in the global demand for local products and thus reduces the country's share of the global market demand, especially in light of the remarkable increase in growth rates in global exports of the product that reached to 10.3%, which reflects the growth rate of demand for it. As for the concentration index, which is an obvious negative indicator, which means the concentration of exports in one product or a limited number of products, came more than 0.5 in all years of study and reached 0.91 in 2010, that means Iraqi agricultural exports contains concentration, and a large proportion in dates exports, which means that agricultural exports and the agricultural trade balance are in a difficult position if crop production is subject to shocks affecting the quality and quantity of production such as epidemic pests, bad weather or price disruptions in world markets. What is generally noted about the situation of agricultural exports in Iraq is weak and fluctuating, and this is due to several reasons, as we found at the forefront of quality, which the source has to guarantee before entering the foreign markets, and this is why it is necessary to know the international standards of quality and to observe them, knowing that quality standards vary from country to another. Looking at the list of commercial partners of Iraqi dates, we note that there is a kind of commercial stability for some countries such as Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates, as well as Ukraine, and

they represent Iraq's most important trading partners as importing countries for Iraqi dates with their various varieties and situations (fresh, dried, treasured, stuffed and wet) (5). The export of agricultural products abroad requires knowing the size and type of international demand, what consumer desires and consumer culture are, and it is also necessary to know how to export because selling to foreign markets is not like selling to local ones, as it requires an enormous amount of information and accuracy, as well as experience and confidence, which is important for the success of the export process, because the international environment is complex and different from the internal environment. Hence the importance of adopting international agricultural marketing to ensure access to foreign markets and the development of agricultural exports (10). Since dates are important agricultural commodities in Iraq because of their comparative advantage in their production, the role of dates export revenues remains disproportionate to the volume of Iraqi dates marketed. It also became clear through this research that although agricultural exports have improved from the 1990s, their contribution to total exports remains weak, and dates are the reliable crop for most agricultural exports through their contribution to total agricultural exports. This is mainly due to insufficient attention and the effective application of international agricultural marketing activities, as the latter is imperative for entering foreign markets and developing agricultural exports. To achieve this, we recommend: Taking advantage of Iraq's comparative advantage in producing dates and increasing its market share by creating new marketing routes and increasing the list of trading partners for this crop. Consumers have several alternatives and options as a result of intense international competition, requiring competition in terms of the quality and characteristics of their products and the marketing strategies and policies of these products to develop an appropriate competitive strategy to counter and overcome competitors and create an important competitive position in the market. Also, Iraqi's exporters need to create brands of agricultural products because of their

importance in distinguishing national products from those of competitors and working to create and promote a positive mental image among consumers around them through international promotion. Finally, reducing procedures, facilitating customs and banking transactions and reducing bureaucracy, allowing products to be kept from damage and corruption and access to consumers promptly, in addition to obtaining their funds by exporters, ensuring that they pay their obligations and engage in their activities smoothly.

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