



Burlap & Barrel: Flavor Without Borders Under Fire: How Tariffs Threaten a Small American Spice Company Built on Global Partnerships

Burlap & Barrel, a small American online spice retailer that sources unique ingredients directly from farmers around the world, has joined a lawsuit challenging federal tariffs that dramatically increase the cost of importing spices. The company says the tariffs threaten American businesses that rely on global agriculture to bring products to consumers at home.

For nearly a decade, Burlap & Barrel has built a reputation as one of America's fastest-growing, innovative and highest quality spice companies. Burlap & Barrel partners directly with smallholder farms around the world to build equitable, transparent, and sustainable spice supply chains. Their spices have been featured on Shark Tank and The Bear on Hulu, and last year, they delivered over 1,000,000 jars of spices directly to home cook and chefs nationwide.

But now, the company's future faces a growing threat.

Recent tariffs on imported goods have dramatically increased the cost of bringing many of Burlap & Barrel's spices into the United States—putting pressure on a small business whose entire mission depends on global agriculture.

“These spices grow in very specific places, under very specific conditions,” said co-founder Ori Zohar. “We can't simply buy them domestically. Many of them are not grown in the United States at all.”

Burlap & Barrel was founded after chef Ethan Frisch encountered remarkable spices while doing humanitarian work overseas. The flavors were vibrant and complex—far richer than the spices typically available in American grocery stores.

Frisch realized that American consumers rarely experience spices the way they taste when freshly harvested and grown in their native environments.

Together with longtime friend and entrepreneur Ori Zohar, he launched Burlap & Barrel with a simple goal: to connect American kitchens directly with the farmers growing the world's best spices.

The company bypasses traditional commodity brokers and instead works directly with smallholder farmers who grow heirloom varieties using traditional methods. By shortening the supply chain, Burlap & Barrel is able to pay farmers significantly more than typical commodity prices while delivering fresher, more flavorful spices to customers in the United States.

Like wine grapes or coffee beans, spices are deeply tied to the regions where they grow.

Cinnamon thrives in tropical climates such as Sri Lanka and Vietnam. Pepper vines flourish in humid regions of Southeast Asia. Vanilla orchids grow in places like Madagascar and Mexico.

Because of these natural realities, many spices cannot be grown commercially in the United States.

“Spices are one of the most global ingredients in the world,” Zohar explained. “You simply can’t recreate them somewhere else.”

The Tariff Impact

The new tariffs are already creating serious challenges for Burlap & Barrel's business:

- **Import costs have risen sharply:** Nearly every spice the company imports is now subject to additional tariffs.
- **Innovation is slowing:** The company has had to delay investments in new products and partnerships with chefs and food companies.
- **Supply chains are under strain:** Tariffs increase pressure throughout the company's network—from farmers abroad to U.S. packaging, warehousing, and shipping partners.

And because tariffs must be paid when goods enter the United States, the financial burden falls directly on American importers like Burlap & Barrel—not foreign governments.

For a small business built around global sourcing, those costs add up quickly.

A Small Business Built on Relationships

Despite these challenges, Burlap & Barrel remains committed to the farmers it works with around the world.

Many of those partnerships have developed into long-term relationships built on trust and shared success. By paying farmers well above commodity prices and showcasing their harvests to American consumers, the company has helped create more transparent and equitable supply chains.

What started as a small experiment between two friends has grown into a thriving company serving restaurants, retailers, and home cooks across the United States.

“This business has always been about relationships,” Zohar said. “The farmers we work with, the chefs who use our spices, the customers who cook with them at home. That connection is the whole point.”

Tariffs that disrupt those global connections don't just affect trade policy—they affect the small businesses, farmers, and consumers who rely on them every day.



Why Burlap & Barrel Joined the Lawsuit

Burlap & Barrel joined this lawsuit because the company believes the tariffs at issue were imposed without meeting the legal requirements established by Congress.

For a spice company, importing ingredients from around the world is not a strategic choice—it is simply the nature of the business.

By participating in the case, Burlap & Barrel hopes to protect its ability—and the ability of other American small businesses—to continue bringing products from around the world to American consumers.

The company's story began with a discovery in a mountain market thousands of miles away. Today it is fighting to ensure that American businesses can continue connecting global farmers with kitchens across the United States.

Burlap & Barrel at a Glance

Founded: 2016, Ori Zohar and Ethan Frisch

Headquarters: New York

Industry: Specialty food and spices

Website: www.burlapandbarrel.com

Business model

- Direct partnerships with smallholder farmers around the world
- Single origin spices grown using traditional techniques
- Premium spices sold to home cooks, chefs, and retailers
- Burlap & Barrel is a Public Benefit Corporation, a for-profit company structured to balance business success with a mission of supporting farmers and transparent supply chains.

Scale

- Works with farmers in more than 22 countries [Argentina, Barbados, Canada, Columbia, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, France, Grenada, Guatemala, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria, Peru, Spain, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Turkey, Vietnam]
- Ships roughly 100,000 orders annually
- Delivers more than one million units of spices each year

Key Quote

“Spices are one of the most global products in the world. Importing them isn’t outsourcing—it’s simply how the spice trade has worked for centuries.”

Country	Approx. U.S. Goods Trade Balance Surplus / Deficit	
Afghanistan	+\$0.05–0.1B	Surplus
Argentina	+\$2–3B	Surplus
Barbados	+\$0.4B	Surplus
Canada	–\$50–60B	Deficit
Colombia	+\$3–4B	Surplus
Costa Rica	–\$3–4B	Deficit
Ethiopia	+\$0.1–0.2B	Surplus
France	–\$15–20B	Deficit
Grenada	+\$0.05B	Surplus
Guatemala	–\$1–2B	Deficit
Hungary	–\$3–5B	Deficit
Iceland	–\$0.5B	Deficit
India	–\$50–55B	Deficit
Indonesia	–\$15–20B	Deficit
Mexico	–\$140–150B	Deficit
Nepal	+\$0.1B	Surplus
Nigeria	–\$1–2B	Deficit
Peru	–\$3–4B	Deficit
Spain	–\$8–10B	Deficit
Sri Lanka	–\$2–3B	Deficit
Tanzania (incl. Zanzibar)	–\$0.3–0.5B	Deficit
Turkey	–\$1–2B	Deficit
Vietnam	–\$100–120B	Deficit

INTERNAL USE ONLY

Canada – The U.S. runs a deficit with Canada largely because it imports large volumes of Canadian energy products, especially crude oil, along with autos and industrial materials.

Costa Rica – The deficit is driven mainly by imports of medical devices, electronics, and agricultural products produced in Costa Rica’s export-oriented manufacturing sector.

France – The deficit largely reflects U.S. imports of French aerospace components, pharmaceuticals, luxury goods, wine, and cosmetics.

Guatemala – The U.S. imports agricultural products such as coffee, bananas, sugar, and apparel manufactured in Guatemala’s textile industry.

Hungary – The deficit is primarily due to imports of automobiles, auto parts, and electronics produced by European manufacturing facilities located in Hungary.

Iceland – The imbalance mainly reflects imports of seafood, aluminum products, and specialty industrial materials produced in Iceland.

India – The deficit is driven by imports of pharmaceuticals, jewelry, textiles, machinery, and increasingly electronics manufactured in India.

Indonesia – The U.S. imports large quantities of palm oil, rubber, footwear, textiles, and other commodity-based products produced in Indonesia.

Mexico – The large deficit reflects deep North American supply chains, especially imports of automobiles, auto parts, electronics, and agricultural products manufactured in Mexico.

Nigeria – The deficit primarily arises from U.S. imports of crude oil and petroleum products, though this has fluctuated in recent years.

Peru – The imbalance is driven by imports of minerals, metals, agricultural products, and specialty foods from Peru.

Spain – The deficit largely reflects imports of pharmaceuticals, automobiles, olive oil, wine, and industrial machinery.

Sri Lanka – The U.S. imports apparel, textiles, rubber products, and tea from Sri Lanka’s export-focused manufacturing sector.

Tanzania (including Zanzibar) – The deficit reflects imports of agricultural goods such as coffee, spices, and minerals.

Turkey – The imbalance is largely due to imports of vehicles, machinery, steel products, and textiles manufactured in Turkey.

Vietnam – The very large deficit is driven by imports of consumer goods manufactured in Vietnam, including electronics, furniture, apparel, and footwear.