



UAE FOOD & AGRICULTURE

Food production and agriculture are key pillars of UAE's National Food Security Strategy 2051, focusing on sustainable farming technologies and local production to reduce import dependency and enhance resilience. These offers ample opportunities for innovation, technology adoption, and investment in both F&B services and modern food production, positioning UAE as a regional hub in this sector.



Opportunities for Singapore Companies

Singapore companies can tap into UAE's growing focus on food security by **contributing expertise in urban farming, smart agriculture, and sustainable food technologies.**

The **UAE's Food Tech Valley** serves as a key hub, fostering public-private partnerships and attracting global investors to advance agritech solutions. It **provides controlled environments for piloting innovations**, as well as **access to incentives, financing, and regional markets.**

Industry platforms such as **Gulfood Manufacturing** in Dubai further connect producers with buyers, supply chain partners, and technology providers, **offering opportunities to showcase solutions and build partnerships.**



Support & Grants

Singapore

- Market Readiness Assistance (MRA) Grant
- Enterprise Singapore Overseas Centres
- Digital Economy Partnership Agreement (DEPA)

UAE

- Free Trade Zone Incentives
- Pro-Business Policies
- Gateway to Middle East, Africa, and Asia

BREAKING INTO THE UAE MARKET

(Insights curated from focus group discussions)



FREE TRADE ZONES

- A common approach is direct setup with 100% ownership and control.
- Every free trade zone in the UAE guarantees 100% foreign ownership for businesses, making them an attractive option for foreign investors.
- UAE offers plug-and-play office set-ups with furnished, ready-to-use workspaces including utilities and IT infrastructure.
- However, free trade zone companies can only operate within their designated zones or export to overseas markets and cannot conduct business directly in UAE without a local partner.



GRANTS & INCENTIVES

- Programmes such as the Young Entrepreneurs Grant typically target individuals between the ages of 18 and 35 and focus on supporting start-ups in their early stages.
- Grants tailored specifically for traditional food production are relatively limited, but the government supports the sector through targeted financing and agri-tech innovation programmes.
- While direct grants may be limited, support is often provided in the form of tax advisories and other facilitative measures rather than financial subsidies.



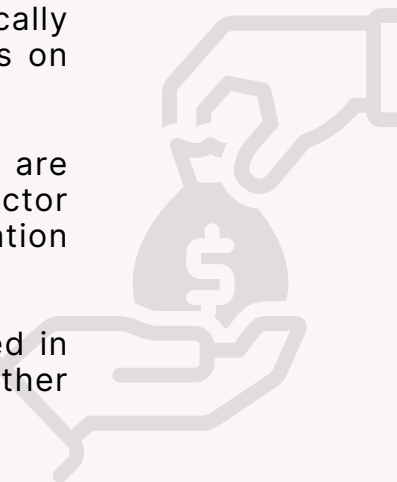
- Forming partnerships with a bigger company help to gain faster access to UAE market and build credibility.
- Establishing trust takes time, as clients are reluctant to switch providers without compelling reasons. Word-of-mouth and local partnerships can greatly enhance success.

PARTNERSHIPS



TRADE LICENCE

- Recently, a new law allows companies in Dubai free trade zone to operate and trade within Dubai (beyond their free zone boundaries), without a local partner, by obtaining a specific mainland trade license or permit from the Department of Economy and Tourism (DET).
- Free trade zone companies must have the correct mainland license or permit and comply with regulatory requirements to operate on the mainland.



THRIVING IN THE UAE MARKET

(Insights curated from focus group discussions)

01.

CHALLENGES



Emiratis often expect higher salaries and benefits, posing challenges for SMEs. Hence, businesses tend to hire foreigners. Managing a multicultural team adds operational challenges.



Residency and work permits are fixed at two years; companies must cover visas, medical, air tickets, and training, which would add to the operational cost for start-ups and prove to be a challenge.



Costs of raw materials and ingredients in food production are increasing.

02.

SUPPORT NEEDED



Trade Associations and Chambers can provide valuable connections and financial incentives, helping to offset initial setup costs. Their support can bridge market entry gaps and offer strategic guidance for Singapore-linked businesses.



Singaporean-owned but UAE-based companies often lack a direct nexus to Singapore and are ineligible for local grants; tailored incentives for such firms would be beneficial.

03.

TIPS & ADVICE



Visit during the hotter months (Apr–Sep), when business activity is slow, to better understand the local work environment.



While Dubai and Abu Dhabi are highly international, other emirates may use less of the English language. Success requires flexibility, resilience, and cultural sensitivity, rather than relying solely on a Singaporean mindset.



The “Singapore brand” is respected and associated with quality. Partnering with local firms can further ease market entry.

CASE STUDY:

Food Manufacturing & Production Company

- Operates on a **B2B business model**.
- Entry into the market through **acquisition**.
- **Niche sector with high barriers** to entry, hence optimistic about future growth.
- **100% ownership and control in a hybrid free trade zone**, allowing for broader activities beyond pure export and has received support such as tax advisory and government service advisory.



IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL PARTNERS

It's very beneficial to have a strong local partner in the UAE. They can help new companies move faster, gain opportunities, and attract customers. A reliable partner who has already navigated the market and learned from mistakes saves you a lot of time and resources.

SUCCESS FACTORS

- A strong local partner with 30 years in the UAE helped gain business contacts and open doors.
- Build strong B2B relationships with customers.
- Highlight how your product adds value. For example, offering personalised and complex solutions / products that larger companies may not provide.
- Understand work culture and work ethics to ease hiring and management.

TIPS / ADVICE

- Singapore companies can explore UAE free trade zones for hydroponics, setting up production and exporting directly back to Singapore.
- Use AI to streamline operations, save time, and boost efficiency. While labour is abundant in the UAE (unlike in Singapore), tech adoption provides long-term gains.





FOR MORE INFORMATION

SUPPORT SCHEMES & PROGRAMMES

- Singapore Global Enterprises initiative
- Market Readiness Assistance Grant
- Enterprise Development Grant
- Enterprise Financing Scheme

Initiatives such as **GlobalConnect@SBF**, **Scale-up SG** and **iTalent Solutions Map** enable companies in their journey towards internationalisation.

Visit [SBF Singapore Business Institute \(SBI\)](#) for the list of available training for your respective areas of interest.

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