

EGYPTIAN FOREIGN TRADE FOR AGRICULTURAL GOODS WITH COMESA

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ABSTRACT

The objective of study is to explore the evolution of foreign trade concerning specific agricultural commodities between Egypt and various economic blocs. Additionally, the research aims to identify optimal economic directions for these exports, which could be advantageous for policymakers in the Egyptian economic sector. The findings indicate that the average value of Egypt's agricultural exports to the COMESA is approximately \$454.82 million, while the average contribution of COMESA to Egypt's agricultural imports from around the world amounts to \$286.78 million. Through SWOT analysis of the external agricultural trade dynamics between Egypt and the COMESA nations, the study proposes several strategies to enhance opportunities, leverage strengths, and mitigate weaknesses and threats. These strategies include initiating collaborative projects, training programs, and workshops with COMESA countries to improve the skills of the Egyptian agricultural workforce and strengthen bilateral relations, utilizing the Suez Canal and Egypt's strategic location to establish logistics support projects for shipping, importing foreign technologies and expertise to enhance the quality of export-ready agricultural products, focusing on exports to politically and economically unstable countries, and enhancing the training framework for the workforce.

Keywords: Agricultural trade, SWOT analysis, COMESA, Exports, Economic Bloc, Imports.

Preface:

Countries strive to integrate into large economic entities as a result of the numerous benefits they gain from economies of scale and productive specialization based on the comparative advantages enjoyed by each country within the bloc. This enhances the competitiveness of these countries' products, whether agricultural or industrial (**Kasem, et al., 2023, 69-84**), thereby increasing their economic growth rates, providing more job opportunities, and reducing unemployment rates. Additionally, they benefit from improved trade terms and the facilitation of the movement of goods, services, individuals, capital, and technical knowledge (**Al-Khashan, 2020, 361-368**).

In addition to being a general framework through which economic blocs can coordinate the economic policies of their member states in its final stages, this approach enables facing external challenges that confront such a bloc, thereby providing the negotiating capacity to secure rights and advantages that positively reflect on the economic position of its members. This is particularly evident during multilateral economic and trade negotiations involving massive economic blocs and major economic powers, where individual countries find it difficult to obtain advantages that enable them to withstand large economic entities.

Trade agreements are considered one of the most important objectives of economic blocs and may even be the sole purpose behind their formation. Opening markets to agricultural exports and increasing the relative and competitive capabilities of national products is a goal shared by countries across different systems and intellectual orientations. This is because exports are the driving force of economic development, being one of its most crucial financing sources. When countries establish trade agreements, their ultimate aim is to open markets and enhance the penetrability of their products (**Mohamed, 2022**).

The Egyptian foreign trade sector is concerned with increasing exports in general and agricultural exports in particular in light of the agreements Egypt makes with global economic blocs. This sector is considered one of the most important economic sectors contributing to the economic development process, especially in developing countries (EISayed, 2012). The development of agricultural exports is one of the main objectives of economic policy planners in Egypt, characterized by the expansion and diversification in the production and export of crops in which Egypt has a competitive advantage in global markets. The revenue from these exports can be used to bridge the gap or deficit in the Egyptian trade balance (Abdelkader, 2021, 16).

Research Problem:

The Egyptian trade balance suffers from a continuous deficit in certain agricultural commodities; therefore, it is necessary to promote and develop Egyptian exports in general and agricultural exports in particular to address this deficit. This is not only due to the trade balance deficit that impedes Egyptian economic development, but also because Egypt lacks significant expertise in agriculture, which negatively impacts the Egyptian environment. Hence, there was an urgent need for this study.

The research problem is to examine the economic and environmental impact of the COMESA on Egyptian agricultural commodities. The study will focus on the developmental changes occurring in the economic and environmental sphere of the Egyptian agricultural sector as a result of Egypt's integration into certain economic blocs. This will be achieved by studying the environmental constraints in these agreements on the Egyptian agricultural sector and analyzing the structure of Egyptian trade with these blocs regarding agricultural commodities.

Research Objective:

The study aims to identify the development of foreign trade concerning certain agricultural products between Egypt and economic blocs in various sectors through the examination of secondary objectives, which include understanding the current status of agricultural production and export, as well as identifying the geographical distribution of these Egyptian agricultural exports and attempting to reach the optimal economic direction for these exports, in order to arrive at a set of recommendations that can benefit Egyptian economic policymakers in this field.

Research Methodology:

To achieve the study's objectives, a descriptive analytical statistical approach will be followed to identify its economic implications and reach the most important indicators for achieving the goal, using some mathematical methods. Additionally, secondary data sources will be utilized from the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, the Ministry of Agriculture and Trade, the National Planning Institute, and foreign trade models, along with some research and studies related to the study's topic, and primary data for the SWOT analysis with approximately 88 purposive sample units.

Research hypotheses:

- 1- There is a direct relationship between Egypt's integration into African economic blocs and the increase in Egyptian agricultural exports.
- 2- There is an inverse relationship between Egypt's integration into African economic blocs and the decrease in Egyptian agricultural imports.

- 3- There is a direct relationship between the increase in Egyptian agricultural exports as a result of its integration into African economic blocs and the improvement of the Egyptian agricultural environment in particular and the Egyptian environment in general.

Theoretical framework:

Origin and Development of COMESA:

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) includes 21 member African countries that have come together to enhance regional integration through trade and the development of natural and human resources to achieve mutual benefits for the peoples of the member states. COMESA was established in 1981 as the Preferential Trade Area for Eastern and Southern Africa (PTA) under the Lagos Plan of Action of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the Lagos Final Act. The Preferential Trade Area transformed into COMESA in 1994. The Preferential Trade Area was created to take advantage of the larger market size. COMESA is one of the eight regional economic groups recognized by the African Union.

Egypt signed the COMESA agreement on June 29, 1998, and the implementation of customs exemptions by the other member states began on February 17, 1999, based on the principle of reciprocity, and for goods accompanied by a certificate of origin certified by the relevant authorities of each country.

Review of Literature:

The Study (**Driyak, 2019**) examined the concept of economic integration, its stages, the origins of COMESA, and the wars that impacted it. The study's problem statement highlighted the persistent poor economic conditions in most African countries. It aimed to clarify the challenges related to regional economic integration in Africa, focusing on the COMESA region. The study also aimed to elucidate the key internal challenges hindering development and economic integration in COMESA member states, namely conflicts and wars, which lead to instability and negatively impact the economy. An analytical approach was employed, utilizing a historical perspective to trace African attempts at achieving economic integration since COMESA's formation, and an institutional approach to examine COMESA's institutional framework through which member states strive for integration. The study concluded that civil conflicts predominantly affect the economic fate of regional economic groupings through their negative impact on regional integration, global trade, and regional trade intensity. The study recommends focusing on addressing and containing civil wars in the region, placing them at the forefront of the grouping's agenda, and seeking appropriate solutions before implementing development and integration plans.

The study (**Adam, 2020**) addressed the flow of trade between Egypt and COMESA, and the agricultural foreign trade between Egypt and the COMESA. There are many internal challenges facing the Egyptian economy, represented by high population growth rates and the imbalance in the economic production structure. The study also pointed to external challenges related to trade agreements and economic blocs. Therefore, the research problem lies in the fact that the volume of trade exchange between Egypt and COMESA countries is relatively weak and unstable. Additionally, there is difficulty in reducing the increase in the trade balance deficit and obtaining the necessary foreign currency to drive economic development, which indicates the limited penetration of Egyptian products into COMESA. The study aimed to shed light on the intra-trade between Egypt and COMESA countries.

Economic descriptive and quantitative analysis methods were relied upon to analyze the intra-trade data between Egypt and the COMESA using the gravity model, applying spatial analysis methods, general time trend equations, relative importance, and time series analysis. The study concluded that an increase in per capita GDP in Egypt leads to an increase in Egypt's exports to COMESA. Additionally, an increase in geographical distance results in a decrease in Egypt's exports to COMESA, indicating that as the per capita income of citizens in COMESA countries rises, the import of Egyptian products decreases, as these goods are considered inferior. The study recommends establishing a stable national strategy for Egyptian trade and increasing investment between Egypt and the bloc countries by creating a common investment area among COMESA countries, along with providing investment incentives for investors in fields that do not deplete natural resources, particularly water resources.

The study by **Ahmed (2020)** addressed the structure of agricultural trade between Egypt and COMESA. The problem of the study was the low volume of trade exchange between Egypt and COMESA countries, which represents 2% of the total trade exchange between Egypt and the world, despite the existence of many trade agreements between them. Additionally, the competitiveness of most agricultural exports between these countries is low, and the volume of investments, whether from COMESA countries in Egypt or Egyptian investments in those countries, is weak. The trade balance, especially in agriculture, is biased in favor of COMESA countries, indicating the weak impact of COMESA on international trade between these countries, especially in light of recent global changes and developments. The study aimed to understand the economic importance of foreign trade between Egypt and COMESA countries and how to benefit from joining these countries. The study relied on the gravity model and found that approximately 71% of the changes occurring in Egypt's agricultural exports are attributed to the model's variables. It also became clear that about 81% of the changes occurring in Egypt's agricultural imports from those countries are due to the model's variables. The study recommends encouraging a balanced and coordinated production and marketing structure among the member countries of the COMESA, and cooperating to create a suitable environment for local and foreign investment.

Results and discussion:

I: The contribution of the COMESA to Egypt's agricultural exports and imports to the world:

1- The contribution of the COMESA to Egypt's agricultural exports to the world:

It is evident from Table (1) and Figure (1) that the contribution of the COMESA to Egypt's agricultural exports to the world was approximately 8.20% in 2003, while it was around 7.47% in 2022, with an average of about 10.33% over the period. The contribution of the COMESA to Egypt's agricultural exports to the world ranged from a minimum of approximately 5.37% in 2004 to a maximum of about 18.15% in 2010.

Table 1. The contribution of the COMESA to Egypt's agricultural exports and imports to the world during the period 2003-2022

Units: Million \$

Year	Egypt's exports value to COMESA	Egypt's exports value to world	COMESA contribution to Egypt's exports to world %	Value of Egypt's imports from COMESA	Egypt's imports value from world	COMESA contribution to Egypt's imports from world
2003	77,439	944.53	8.20	138.94	2648.36	5.25
2004	69,699	1297.78	5.37	80.55	2885.33	2.79
2005	135.172	1175.55	11.50	73.12	3920.35	1.87
2006	101.197	1098.82	9.21	65.70	3883.91	1.69
2007	192.824	1514.89	12.73	99.54	5404.53	1.84
2008	390,789	3268.95	11.95	299.14	9658.43	3.10
2009	620.352	4485.09	13.83	305.41	8085.71	3.78
2010	932.303	5137.71	18.15	348.98	10103.31	3.45
2011	693.03	5278.19	13.13	511.12	14736.10	3.47
2012	614,519	4685.85	13.11	413.07	15423.41	2.68
2013	575.126	5079.78	11.32	352.66	11963.86	2.95
2014	517,908	4958.85	10.44	433.00	14826.83	2.92
2015	477.545	4848.98	9.85	367.52	14222.23	2.58
2016	549.828	4908.70	11.20	349.68	13768.15	2.54
2017	529.248	4925.66	10.74	278.10	12524.96	2.22
2018	583.381	5030.59	11.60	346.66	13511.51	2.57
2019	558,639	5464.24	10.22	430.56	14236.23	3.02
2020	449.507	5275.14	8.52	279.87	11916.92	2.35
2021	507.802	6352.08	7.99	254.39	12193.28	2.09
2022	520.157	6964.67	7.47	307.63	16264.92	1.89
Average	454.82	4134.80	10.83	286.78	10608.92	2.75
Maximum	932.303	6964.67	18.15	511.11	16264.92	5.24
Minimum	69,699	944.53	5.37	65.69	2648.355	1.69

Source: International Trade Centre Database: <https://www.trademap.org>

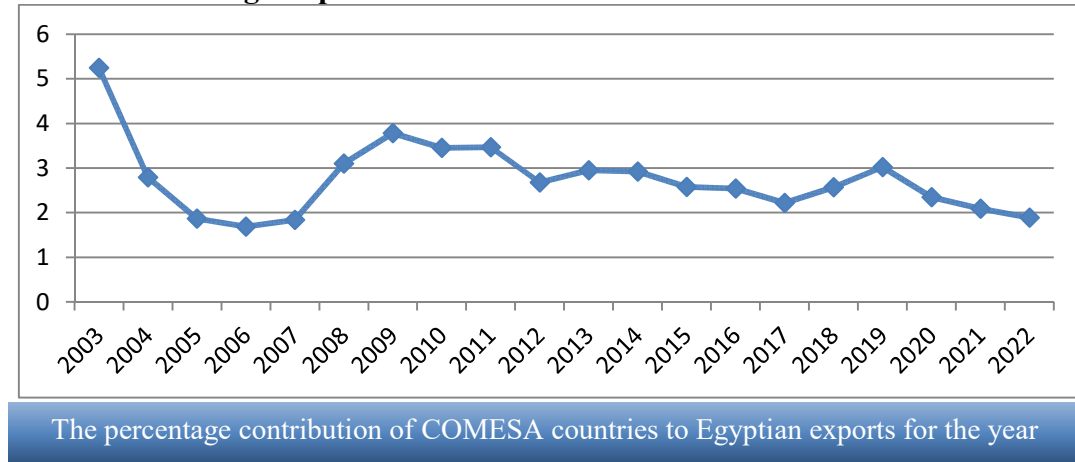
As shown in the data from Table (1), the value of Egyptian agricultural exports to COMESA countries in 2003 was approximately \$77.44 million, then reached about \$520.16 million in 2022, with an average of approximately \$454.82 million during this period, a minimum of about \$69.70 million in 2004, and a maximum of about \$932.30 million in 2010. By studying the general time trend equation for the development of Egyptian agricultural exports to the COMESA, equation number (1) shows that the value of exports increases annually by a statistically significant amount of approximately \$21.6 million, representing about 4.7% of the overall average during that period, which is approximately \$454.82 million. Additionally, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was about 0.31, indicating that approximately 31% of the changes in total agricultural exports are attributed to changes reflected by the time factor.

$$\hat{Y} = 227.99 + 21.6 x \dots (1)$$

(2.51)* (2.85)**

R²= 0.31, F= 8.14**, Annual change rate = 4.7%

Figure 1. The contribution of the COMESA to Egyptian agricultural exports to the world during the period 2003-2022



Source: Data Table 1.

2- COMESA bloc's contribution to Egypt's agricultural imports from the world

The contribution of the COMESA to Egypt's agricultural imports from the world It is evident from Table (1) and Figure (2) that the COMESA bloc's contribution to Egypt's agricultural imports from the world was about 5.25% in 2003, while it was about 1.89% in 2022, with an average of approximately 2.75% over the period. The COMESA bloc's contribution to Egypt's agricultural imports from the world ranged from a minimum of about 1.69% in 2006 to a maximum of about 5.25% in 2003. It was also found that the value of Egypt's agricultural imports from COMESA countries in 2003 was approximately \$138.94 million, and it reached about \$307.63 million in 2022, with an average of approximately \$286.78 million during this period, a minimum of about \$65.70 million in 2006, and a maximum of about \$511.12 million in 2011.

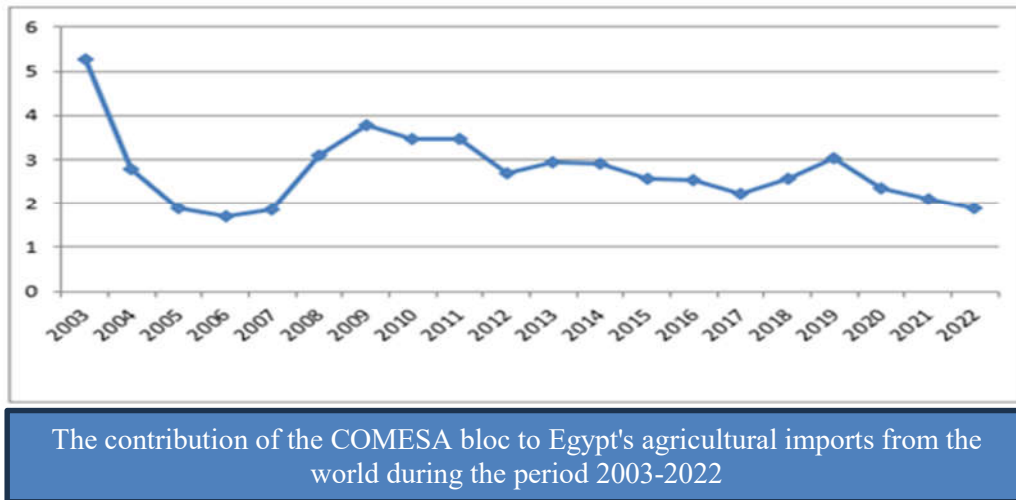
By studying the general time trend equation for the development of Egyptian agricultural imports from COMESA countries, it was found in equation number (2) that the value of imports increases annually by a statistically significant amount of approximately \$12.51 million, which represents about 4.3% of the overall average during that period, amounting to approximately \$286.78 million. The coefficient of determination (R²) was about 0.32, indicating that approximately 32% of the changes in total agricultural imports are attributed to changes reflected by the time factor.

$$\hat{Y} = 155.4 + 12.51 x \dots (2)$$

(3.00)** (2.90)**

R²= 0.32, F= 8.42**, Annual percentage change = 4.3%

Figure 2. The contribution of the COMESA to Egypt's agricultural imports from the world during the period 2003-2022.



Source: Data Table 3.

3- The geographical structure of the most important COMESA future markets for Egyptian agricultural exports:

It is essential to point out the geographical structure of the most important COMESA markets for future Egyptian agricultural exports as an average for the period (2003-2022), due to the significant importance of these markets belonging to the COMESA countries for Egyptian agricultural exports as follows:

Table 2: The geographical structure of the main COMESA markets for Egyptian agricultural exports during the period 2003-2022

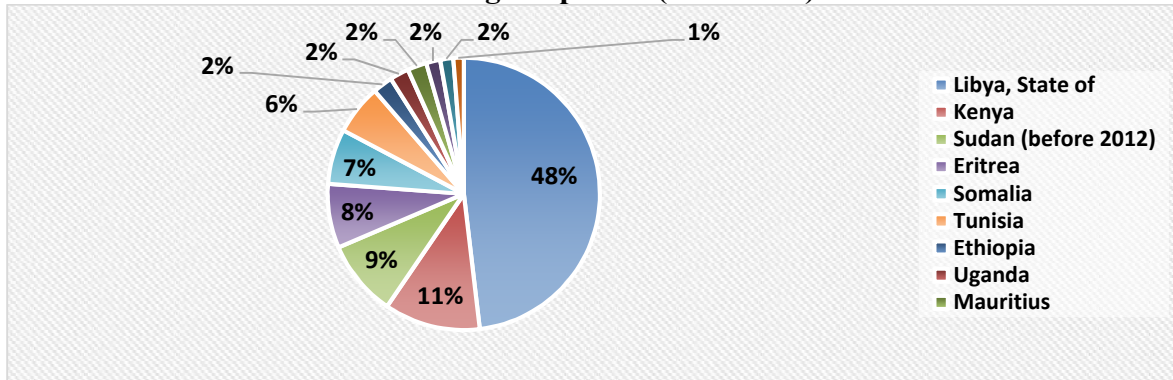
The State	Average (million \$)	Contribution to average (%)
Libya, State of	213.00	46.92
Kenya	50.49	11.12
Sudan (before 2012)	39.94	8.80
Eritrea	33.68	7.42
Somalia	29.05	6.40
Tunisia	26.25	5.78
Ethiopia	10.33	2.28
Uganda	10.14	2.23
Mauritius	9.97	2.20
Djibouti	7.47	1.64
Rwanda	6.83	1.50
Madagascar	5.46	1.20
Total Bloc.	454.82	100

Source: International Trade Centre Database: <https://www.trademap.org>

It is evident from the data and results in Table (2) and Figure (3) that the main components of the geographical structure of Egyptian agricultural exports to the COMESA, on average during the period 2003-2022, are as follows: Libya ranked first with a contribution of approximately 46.9% of Egypt's agricultural exports to the COMESA countries. Kenya ranked second with a contribution of approximately 11.1% of Egypt's agricultural exports to the COMESA countries. Sudan ranked third with a contribution of approximately 8.80% of

Egypt's agricultural exports to the COMESA countries. Eritrea ranked fourth with a contribution of approximately 7.42% of Egypt's agricultural exports to the COMESA countries. Somalia ranked fifth with a contribution of approximately 6.40% of Egypt's agricultural exports to the COMESA countries.

Figure 2. Geographical structure of Egyptian agricultural exports to the most important COMESA markets during the period (2003-2022)



Source: Data Table 2.

4- The geographical structure of the most important COMESA future markets for Egyptian agricultural imports:

It is essential to point out the geographical structure of the most important COMESA markets for future Egyptian agricultural imports as an average for the period (2003-2022), due to the significant importance of these markets belonging to the COMESA countries for Egyptian agricultural imports as follows:

Table 3. The geographical structure of the main COMESA markets for future Egyptian agricultural imports during the period 2003-2022

The State	Average (million \$)	Contribution from the average (%)
Kenya	192.00	67.13
Malawi	22.36	7.82
Sudan (before 2012)	18.00	6.29
Tunisia	15.52	5.43
Ethiopia	14.07	4.92
Djibouti	8.62	3.01
Zimbabwe	7.10	2.48
Uganda	4.52	1.58
Libya, State of	1.74	0.61
Eritrea	1.30	0.45
Madagascar	1.04	0.36
Somalia	0.86	0.30
Total Bloc.	286.78	100

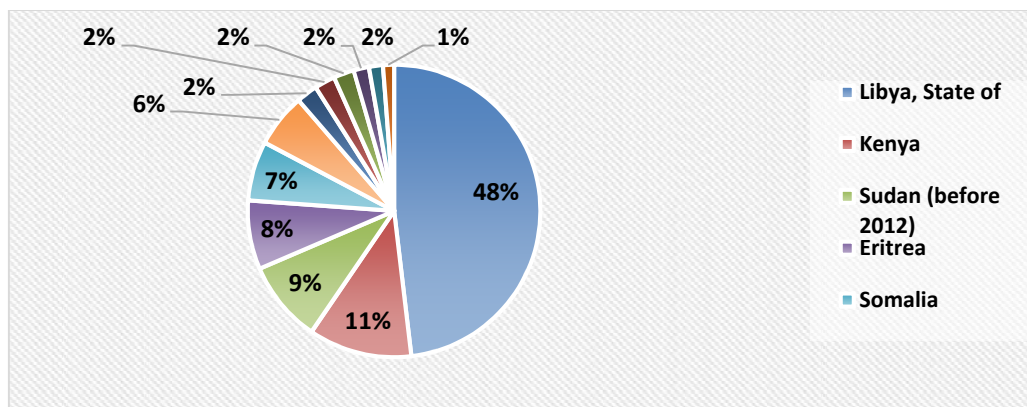
Source: International Trade Centre Database: <https://www.trademap.org>

It is evident from the data and results in Table (3) and Figure (4) that the main components of the geographical structure of Egyptian agricultural imports from the

COMESA, on average during the period 2003-2022, are represented by Kenya, with a contribution rate of approximately 67.13% of Egypt's agricultural imports from the COMESA countries. Malawi ranked second with a contribution rate of approximately 7.82%, Sudan ranked third with a contribution rate of approximately 6.29%, Tunisia ranked fourth with a contribution rate of approximately 5.43%, and Ethiopia ranked fifth with a contribution rate of approximately 4.92%.

The Republic of Congo ranked last among the bloc's countries, as it did not contribute any percentage to Egypt's agricultural imports from the bloc's countries.

Figure 4. The geographical structure of Egyptian agricultural imports from the most important COMESA markets during the period from (2003-2022)



Source: Data Table 3.

II- SWOT analysis of the environmental and economic aspects of agricultural goods between Egypt and COMESA.

SWOT analysis is one of the most important stages of the planning process and subsequent decision-making, due to the environmental, economic, social, and political changes that the internal or external environment is exposed to, which affect Egyptian policies related to foreign trade with the outside world, especially with COMESA countries. Since the development of foreign trade between Egypt and any of the world's countries grows and increases based on the decisions of Egyptian economic decision-makers and Egyptian economic sectors, it can also grow based on the conditions of other sectors related to that sector, whether those sectors are directly or indirectly linked to the Egyptian trade sector.

SWOT analysis is used to evaluate policies adopted by institutions or projects. It is also employed in evaluating programs or decisions made by decision-makers within an organization or a country, aiming to find solutions to problems they face. The analysis provides decision-makers with a clear vision to improve performance and achieve more effective goals. This vision or strategy is formulated by maximizing strengths and opportunities, and mitigating weaknesses and threats. The aim of SWOT analysis is not limited to highlighting strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; it extends to providing strategic alternatives based on the analysis's results, bringing decision-makers

closer to achieving their desired objectives. Alternative strategies (TOWS) are formulated by combining strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

1- Study Sample:

The study sample was composed of economists concerned with Egyptian foreign trade, with a sample size of 88 economists distributed as follows: ("1" former Minister of Trade and Industry – "5" employees of the Ministry of Trade and Industry – "5" professors from the Desert Research Center "Department of Economics" affiliated with the Ministry of Agriculture – "1" expert from the Egyptian Customs Authority "Chief Inspector" – "1" expert "Deputy Governor of the Suez Canal" – "10" faculty members specialized in economic affairs at Egyptian universities, both public and private – "13" employees in the field of import and export in various export companies – "32" researchers in the field of foreign trade at commerce faculties in various Egyptian universities – "18" researchers in the field of foreign trade at Arish University – "1" agricultural engineer).

Two professors with expertise in the research field were consulted to review the questionnaire before it was distributed to the respondents. Subsequently, the final list of the most important opportunities, threats, strengths, and weaknesses was presented to ten experts with knowledge of foreign trade between Egypt and the COMESA.

Table 4. Distribution of respondents and experts participating in SWOT analysis

Item	Category	No.
Internal environment	- Former Minister of Trade and Industry.	1
	- Experts from the Ministry of Trade and Industry.	5
	- Chief Inspector at the Egyptian Customs Authority.	1
External environment	- Professors at the Desert Research Center "Department of Economics" affiliated with the Ministry of Agriculture.	5
	- Expert at the Suez Canal.	1
	- Members of the teaching staff at Egyptian universities.	10
	- Employees in the import and export sector at various export companies.	13
	- Researchers in the field of foreign trade at business faculties in universities.	32
	- Researchers in the field of foreign trade at Al-Arish University.	18
	- Agricultural engineer.	1
Total		88
Experts	- Economics professors at Zagazig University.	2

Source: Collected and calculated from the field study of Egyptian foreign trade with COMESA countries.

2- Results of the SWOT analysis.

Following the collection of respondents' opinions, a final list for the SWOT matrix was determined. This comprised ten points of strength and weakness, representing the internal environment, and ten points of opportunities and threats, representing the external environment. These points received the highest weighting from the respondents. This final matrix was then presented to ten experts with experience in foreign trade. They were asked to

rate each point in the SWOT matrix according to its importance and the effectiveness of Egyptian foreign trade institutions' response to it in relation to COMESA member states. This rating was based on a five-point scale, where 5 represented a strong response and 1 a weak response. Each point in the SWOT matrix was also given a weight representing its importance, ranging from 0 (not important) to 1 (very important).

Table 5. Analysis of the internal strategic transactions of the Egyptian foreign trade environment with COMESA member countries.

Items	Internal factors	Weight (0-1)	Degree (1-5)	Weighted Average	Priorities
Strengths	The state's political leadership recognizes the significance of fostering initiatives aimed at sustainable economic development.	0.16	5	0.8	1
	The state's endeavor to enhance the exportation of agricultural products to the COMESA nations.	0.12	5	0.6	2
	The prominent geographical site of the Egyptian state.	0.11	4	0.44	3
	The availability of research centers and institutions is essential for conducting studies on the progression of agricultural products and for meticulously documenting the results that are realized.	0.07	3	0.21	4
	Ongoing and continuous training is essential for improving the effectiveness of the technical personnel within Egypt's agricultural workforce	0.04	3	0.12	5
Weaknesses	The employment of rudimentary agricultural production methods for the creation of products aimed at export to COMESA member states.	0.13	2	0.26	2
	Utilizing unskilled seasonal agricultural workers at certain times negatively influences both the production efficiency and the quality of goods prepared for export	0.04	1	0.04	5
	The tardiness of donor organizations in delivering prompt assistance to the agricultural sector in Egypt.	0.13	2	0.26	2
	The current framework of university education and postgraduate learning fails to meet the targets set for technological development and the improvement of the agricultural sector in Egypt.	0.08	2	0.16	4
	The means of promoting Egyptian agricultural products in the COMESA area are significantly lacking in effectiveness.	0.12	2	0.24	1
	Total	1		3.13	

Source: Data was gathered and analyzed from the field research concerning Egyptian foreign trade with the COMESA.

Then, the weighted scores for each point are calculated by multiplying the score of each point by its respective weight, leading to the optimal strategy for both the external and internal environments, as well as alternative strategies, as follows:

To analyze the strategic factor of the internal environment, it was found that the main strengths are (the political leadership's conviction of the importance of supporting sustainable

economic development efforts, the state's interest in expanding the agricultural export sector to COMESA countries, Egypt's distinguished geographical location, and the presence of institutions and research centers through which research on agricultural product development can be conducted and achievements recorded). Continuous and ongoing training to enhance the efficiency of the technical staff of the Egyptian workforce in the Egyptian agriculture sector.

The main weaknesses were represented in (the use of non-advanced production methods in the production of agricultural products intended for export to COMESA countries, reliance on untrained temporary agricultural labor at certain times, which affects the production process and the quality of the product intended for export, university education systems and post-university training do not keep pace with the targets of technological development and methods of developing the Egyptian agricultural sector, the delay of donor agencies in providing timely support to the Egyptian agricultural sector, and the weak promotion of Egyptian agricultural products within COMESA countries).

To analyze the strategic factor of the external environment for the foreign trade of Egyptian agricultural goods with COMESA member countries, it was found that the most important opportunities for improving and developing foreign trade of agricultural goods between Egypt and the studied COMESA countries are represented in (encouraging a training system for workers in the Egyptian agricultural sector through Egyptian cooperation protocols with COMESA countries, benefiting from the expertise of foreign countries in improving the quality of agricultural products intended for export, the state's direction towards activating the role of scientific research by providing the application of research results, studies, and foreign expertise, benefiting from opportunities to increase the area of cultivated land within COMESA countries, and seizing Egypt's unique location and exploiting it as an intermediary market between the markets of COMESA member countries and European and Asian markets).

The threats that hinder the trade of agricultural goods between Egypt and the COMESA include (the lack of security stability in some COMESA countries, the increasing competition between Egyptian products and those from other foreign markets, the political unrest in some COMESA countries and its impact on trade exchanges, the weak institutional framework managing agreements and treaties between Egypt and COMESA countries, and the gap between Egyptian market products and COMESA market requirements).

Table (5 - 6) illustrates the analysis of internal and external strategic transactions for the Egyptian agricultural foreign trade environment with COMESA countries. Through the table, the weighted scores for each variable have been collected. If the weighted score is less than 2, it means that the officials do not have sufficient awareness of the strengths and weaknesses. If the weighted score reaches or approaches 3, it indicates that the performance of the officials in charge of foreign trade is average and that they have sufficient awareness of the strengths and weaknesses, thus increasing the opportunities for development in this field. If the weighted scores reach 5, it indicates that the officials have a sufficient level of awareness of the strengths and weaknesses.

If the weighted score is less than 2.5, this means that the officials responsible for the agricultural foreign trade file do not have the ability to comprehend the external

environmental variables of opportunities and threats. However, if the weighted score ranges between 2.5 and 3.5, this indicates that the response or comprehension of the officials responsible for the Egyptian agricultural foreign trade file towards the opportunities and threats faced by this file is moderate, thus increasing the chances of development in this area. If the weighted score ranges between 4 and 5, this indicates that the institution's ability to respond to and comprehend changes in external factors is strong.

Table 6. Analysis of the external strategic transactions of the Egyptian foreign trade environment for agricultural commodities with the COMESA countries

Item	External factors	Weight (0-1)	Degree (1-5)	Weighted Average	Priorities
Opportunities	Fostering a training initiative for agricultural workers in Egypt through partnership protocols established with COMESA member states.	0.07	5	0.36	1
	Leveraging the expertise of foreign countries in the enhancement of the quality of agricultural products intended for export.	0.10	5	0.48	2
	The initiative by the state to bolster the role of scientific research includes the integration of research findings, studies, and foreign experiences into practical applications.	0.07	4	0.28	3
	It is essential to capitalize on opportunities to increase the acreage of arable land in the countries of the COMESA region.	0.09	3	0.28	4
	Egypt's advantageous geographical position can be utilized to serve as a conduit for trade between the markets of COMESA member countries and those in Europe and Asia.	0.17	3	0.50	5
Threats	The security instability presents in certain COMESA member states.	0.17	2	0.34	2
	A heightened level of competition between products originating from Egypt and those from various external markets.	0.04	1	0.04	5
	The ramifications of political unrest in specific COMESA countries for the dynamics of trade exchanges.	0.11	2	0.22	2
	A lack of robustness in the institutional framework governing the agreements and treaties between Egypt and the member states of COMESA is evident.	0.06	2	0.13	4
	There exists a divergence between the products present in the Egyptian market and the needs of the COMESA markets.	0.11	2	0.21	1
	Total	1.00		2.85	

Source: Data was gathered and analyzed from the field research concerning Egyptian foreign trade with the COMESA.

The total weighted scores for the internal environment strategy were approximately (3.13), while the external environment strategy scored around (2.85). This indicates that the performance of those responsible for the Egyptian agricultural foreign trade file with

COMESA countries is average, and that economic policymakers have sufficient awareness of strengths and weaknesses and the ability to absorb and respond to changes that may occur in the external environment, whether these changes are opportunities to be utilized or threats to be avoided. This strongly suggests that there is a significant opportunity to develop Egyptian foreign trade in agricultural goods with COMESA countries by working on enhancing physical and human resources, as well as the laws and regulations governing foreign trade between Egypt and COMESA countries.

3- Developing alternative strategies (TOWS) using the SWOT analysis matrix to enhance the foreign trade of agricultural goods between Egypt and the COMESA bloc.

TOWS matrix strategies can be developed as shown in Figure (6), where the matrix consists of 4 strategies as follows in Figure (5):

Figure 5. Analysis of the internal strategic transactions of the Egyptian foreign trade environment with COMESA member countries



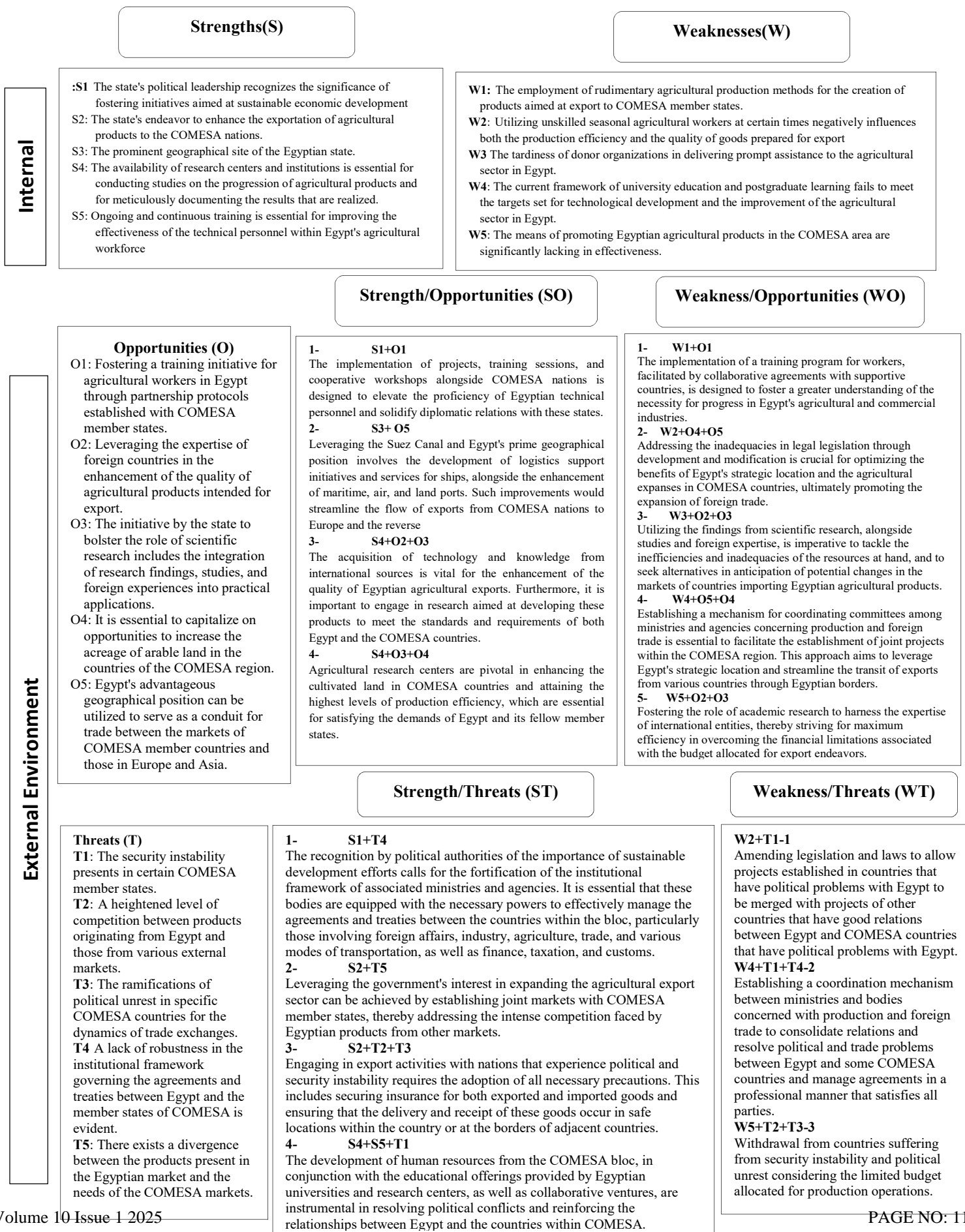
The findings of this study suggest a range of strategies that can be adopted to enhance opportunities, reinforce strengths, and alleviate weaknesses and threats in the foreign trade of agricultural goods between Egypt and the COMESA region. The most prominent strategies are:

1. Establishing projects, training courses, and joint workshops with COMESA member countries to enhance the efficiency of the technical staff of the Egyptian agricultural workforce and strengthen relations with these countries.

2. Taking advantage of the Suez Canal and Egypt's strategic location by establishing projects and logistical support services for ships, and enhancing the efficiency of sea, air, and land ports to facilitate the passage of exports from COMESA countries to Europe and vice versa.
3. Importing technology and expertise from foreign countries in the field of improving the quality of agricultural products prepared for export and conducting research to develop them in accordance with the capabilities and requirements of Egypt and COMESA member states.
4. The role of research centers, especially agricultural ones, in expanding the cultivated areas in COMESA countries and achieving maximum production efficiency that meets the requirements of Egypt and the member states.
5. The political leadership's conviction in the importance of sustainable development efforts necessitates strengthening the institutional framework of the relevant ministries and bodies with full authority to manage agreements and treaties between COMESA member states, especially the ministries of foreign affairs, industry, agriculture, trade, land, sea, and air transport, finance, taxes, and customs.
6. Taking advantage of the state's interest in expanding the export sector by establishing joint markets with COMESA countries to overcome the intense competition between Egyptian products and competing products from other markets.
7. Paying attention to exporting to countries with political and security instability by taking all necessary precautions, such as securing exported and imported goods and delivering and receiving goods in safe areas within the country or at the borders of neighboring countries.
8. Training personnel from COMESA member states, educational opportunities at Egyptian universities and research centers, and joint projects are all factors capable of dissolving political problems and strengthening relations with COMESA member states.
9. Exploiting the training system for workers through cooperation protocols with friendly countries to increase adequate awareness of the importance of developing the Egyptian industrial and agricultural sectors.
10. Developing and amending the shortcomings in legal legislations to align with and benefit from Egypt's strategic location and the cultivated areas within the COMESA countries, and to increase the growth of foreign trade in agricultural goods.
11. Applying the results of scientific research, studies, and foreign expertise to overcome the inefficiency and inadequacy of available resources and to find alternatives to address any potential developments in the countries importing Egyptian agricultural products.
12. Establishing a mechanism for coordinating committees between ministries and authorities regarding the production and foreign trade of agricultural goods to facilitate the establishment of joint projects within COMESA member countries, leveraging Egypt's strategic location, and facilitating the passage of COMESA member countries' exports through Egyptian borders.

13. Activating the role of scientific research to benefit from the expertise of foreign countries to achieve maximum production efficiency at the lowest possible costs to overcome the limited budget allocated for production operations.
14. Amending legislations and laws to allow projects established in countries with political issues with Egypt to be merged with projects from other countries that have good relations with Egypt and COMESA countries that have political issues with Egypt.
15. Establishing a mechanism for coordination between ministries and bodies concerned with the production and foreign trade of agricultural goods to strengthen relations and resolve political and commercial issues between Egypt and some countries in the bloc, and to manage agreements in a professional manner that satisfies all parties.

Figure 6. TOWS matrix for alternative strategies to develop foreign trade of agricultural goods between Egypt and COMESA countries (internal environment).



Recommendations:

1. Establishing projects, training courses, and joint workshops with COMESA countries to enhance the skills of Egyptian agricultural workers and strengthen relations with these countries. Establishing projects, training courses, and joint workshops with COMESA member countries works to enhance the technical skills of the Egyptian agricultural workforce and strengthen relations with these countries.
2. Taking advantage of the Suez Canal and Egypt's strategic location by establishing projects and logistical support services for ships, and enhancing the efficiency of maritime, air, and land ports to facilitate the passage of exports from COMESA countries to Europe and vice versa. Taking advantage of the Suez Canal and Egypt's strategic location by establishing projects and services for logistical support to ships and enhancing the efficiency of maritime, aerial, and land ports to facilitate the passage of exports from COMESA countries to Europe and vice versa.
3. Importing technology and expertise from foreign countries in the field of improving the quality of agricultural products prepared for export and conducting research to develop them in accordance with the capabilities and requirements of Egypt and the COMESA countries. Importing technology and expertise from foreign countries in the field of improving the quality of agricultural products prepared for export and conducting research to develop them in accordance with the capabilities and requirements of Egypt and the COMESA countries.
4. Convincing political leadership of the importance of sustainable development efforts necessitates strengthening the institutional framework of the relevant ministries and authorities with full powers to manage agreements and treaties between COMESA member states, including the ministries of foreign affairs, industry, agriculture, trade, land, sea, and air transport, finance, taxes, and customs. The conviction of political leadership in the importance of sustainable development efforts necessitates strengthening the institutional framework of the relevant ministries and bodies with full authority to manage agreements and treaties between COMESA member states, particularly the ministries of foreign affairs, industry, agriculture, trade, land, sea, and air transport, finance, taxes, and customs.
5. Taking advantage of the state's interest in expanding the export sector by establishing joint markets with COMESA countries to overcome the intense competition between Egyptian products and competing products from other markets. Taking advantage of the state's interest in expanding the export sector by establishing joint markets with COMESA countries to overcome the intense competition between Egyptian products and competing products from other markets.
6. Paying attention to exporting to countries with unstable security and political situations by taking all necessary precautions, such as securing exported and imported goods and delivering and receiving goods in safe areas within the country or at the borders of neighboring countries. Paying attention to exporting to countries with political and security instability by taking all necessary precautions, including

securing exported and imported goods and delivering and receiving goods in safe areas within the country or at the borders of neighboring countries.

7. Training personnel from COMESA member states and providing educational opportunities at Egyptian universities and research centers, as well as joint projects, are all factors capable of melting away political problems and strengthening relations with COMESA member states. Training personnel from COMESA member states, educational opportunities at Egyptian universities and research centers, and joint projects are all factors capable of dissolving political problems and strengthening relations with COMESA member states.
8. Exploiting the training system for workers through cooperation protocols with friendly countries to increase awareness of the importance of developing the Egyptian industrial and agricultural sectors. Exploiting the training system for workers through cooperation protocols with friendly countries to raise sufficient awareness of the importance of developing the Egyptian industrial and agricultural sectors.
9. Developing and amending the shortcomings in legal legislations to align and adapt to the utilization of Egypt's strategic location and the cultivated areas within the COMESA, and to increase the growth of external trade in agricultural goods. Developing and amending the shortcomings in legal legislations to align with and take advantage of Egypt's unique location and the cultivated areas within the COMESA countries, and to increase the growth of foreign trade in agricultural goods.
10. Establishing a mechanism for coordination between ministries and authorities concerned with the production and foreign trade of agricultural goods to strengthen relations and resolve political and commercial issues between Egypt and some countries in the bloc, and to manage agreements professionally to satisfy all parties. Establishing a mechanism for coordination between ministries and bodies concerned with the production and foreign trade of agricultural goods to strengthen relations and resolve political and commercial issues between Egypt and some countries of the bloc, and to manage agreements in a professional manner that satisfies all parties.

Conclusion:

The study underscores Egypt's potential to strengthen its agricultural trade ties with COMESA by leveraging its strategic location, improving agricultural practices, and fostering bilateral cooperation. Overcoming institutional and market-specific challenges through policy reforms, targeted investments, and enhanced collaboration is critical for maximizing trade benefits. The findings provide actionable insights for policymakers to enhance Egypt's competitiveness and capitalize on opportunities within the COMESA.

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