PLASTICS
INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

2026

Global Trends



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

U.S. Plastics Industry:

A Global Trade Powerhouse

$147.5 billion in trade connecting U.S. plastics to markets around the world

TOP EXPORT MARKETS IN 2025

Leading destinations for U.S. plastics exports



LEADING GLOBAL TRADE SURPLUSES

U.S. plastics industry's strongest trade partners in 2025



ROBUST RESIN MANUFACTURING

STEADY TRADE SURPLUS IN 2025

+$23.6B

Consistent with 2024 performance





EXPORT SNAPSHOT

$73.6B

Key segments driving U.S. plastics exports

RESIN EXPORTS

$40.3B

PLASTIC PRODUCTS EXPORTS

$31.7B

MOLDS EXPORTS

$480M

MACHINERY EXPORTS

$1.0B

Globally Competitive

U.S. PLASTICS INDUSTRY:

Ranked #2 in 2025 Global Plastics Ranking®

Executive Summary

The U.S. plastics industry is a major player in world trade. This edition of the Plastics Industry Association's annual Global Trends study analyzes U.S. trade data for 2025, both for the industry as a whole and for its individual segments. It also provides a perspective on the global plastics industry in 2026 and beyond.

The report is divided into six sections. Section I covers exports, imports, and the trade balance for the industry and its six segments—resins, recyclable plastics, plastic products, molds, machinery, and "other plastics"—and measures trade flows as a percentage of domestic shipments. Section II analyzes apparent consumption and market shares for the industry and its segments. Section III examines "contained trade" (trade in goods that incorporate resins and plastic products) and measures "true consumption," which accounts for plastics embedded in other products and services. Section IV presents forecasts through 2030 for world trade, U.S. general trade, U.S. plastics trade, and U.S. plastics shipments and apparent consumption. Section V highlights U.S. plastics trade during the first half of 2026. Section VI places the industry in a global context, covering world production, consumption, and trade; providing snapshots of five key U.S. trading partners; and presenting PLASTICS' annual Global Plastics Ranking® of the countries that most shape the global plastics industry.

Key findings include:

INDUSTRY-WIDE TRENDS

1. The U.S. plastics industry nearly returned to a trade surplus in 2025, posting a trade deficit of only $0.4 billion.

2. This improvement was driven by a 5.4% decrease in imports, while exports fell by a smaller 3.3%.

3. Mexico and Canada remained the largest export markets, with U.S. exports totaling $19.2 billion to Mexico and $13.5 billion to Canada. The industry's largest trade surplus—$10.8 billion—was with Mexico.

4. China was the third-largest export market ($5.7 billion in U.S. exports) but also the largest source of the industry's trade deficit, accounting for $9.4 billion.

5. Domestic shipments rose an estimated 1.2% in 2025 to $358.4 billion. Exports accounted for 20.5% of shipments, down from 21.5% in 2024.

6. Apparent consumption of plastics industry goods increased 0.7%, from $356.3 billion in 2024 to $358.8 billion in 2025.

7. True consumption—which includes resins and plastic products contained in imported goods—grew even faster, underscoring that underlying U.S. plastics demand remains robust and that U.S. markets for plastic resins and products are larger and expanding more quickly than domestic production alone would suggest.

RESIN TRENDS

1. The U.S. resin industry recorded a $23.6 billion surplus in 2025, roughly unchanged from 2024.
2. Thanks to abundant low-cost feedstocks made possible by advances in drilling techniques, U.S. resin producers continued to enjoy a cost advantage over most foreign producers.
3. U.S. resin exports fell 5.1% in 2025, while imports declined 11.3%. The industry posted a $7.4 billion surplus with Mexico and a $3.3 billion surplus with China. Trade deficits with Germany ($1.2 billion) and South Korea ($1.0 billion) partially offset these gains.
4. Resin exports accounted for 38.7% of domestic shipments, while imports represented 16.1%.
5. Apparent consumption of resins fell 3.0%, from $83.3 billion in 2024 to $80.8 billion in 2025. Resin prices realized by U.S. producers fell 1.4%, as measured by the Producer Price Index, implying a 1.6% decline in apparent consumption in volume terms.
6. U.S. resin producers held a 79.2% market share of apparent consumption in 2025, up from 77.3% in 2024.
7. The estimated value of resins contained in exported goods was $24.0 billion, while the estimated value of resins contained in imported goods was $62.9 billion, resulting in a $38.8 billion deficit in contained resin trade.

RECYCLABLE PLASTICS

1. U.S. trade in recyclable plastics has been relatively balanced in recent years, alternating between deficits and surpluses. In 2025 the sector posted a $27 million surplus, reversing a $28 million deficit in 2024.
2. Exports of recyclable plastics fell 8.2%, while imports dropped 29.9%.
3. The largest surplus was with India ($14 million); the largest deficit was with Mexico ($13 million).

PLASTICS PRODUCTS TRENDS

1. The country's deficit in plastic products decreased from $22.0 billion in 2024 to $20.1 billion in 2025, as exports decreased 0.6% and imports decreased 3.9%.
2. The U.S. had its largest plastic products surplus with Mexico, totaling $2.9 billion, while China accounted for the largest trade deficit in plastic products at $12.3 billion.
3. In 2025, exports of plastic products were 12.8% of domestic shipments, and imports were 20.9%.
4. Apparent consumption of plastic products rose 1.7%, from $263.2 billion in 2024 to $267.6 billion in 2025. Prices of plastic products realized by U.S. producers, as measured by the Producer Price Index, increased by 0.8% in 2025, suggesting that apparent consumption rose by just 0.9% in real terms.
5. U.S. producers of plastic products held an 80.6% market share of apparent consumption, up from 79.5% in 2024.
6. The estimated value of plastic products contained in exports was $30.7 billion in 2025, and the estimated value contained in imports was $74.9 billion, giving the U.S. a $44.2 billion deficit in contained plastic products trade.

MOLDS TRENDS

1. The U.S. moldmaking industry recorded a $1.4 billion trade deficit in 2025, up from $1.3 billion in 2024. Mold exports fell 4.0%, while imports edged up 0.2%.
2. The industry had its largest surplus with Mexico ($252 million); its largest deficit was with Canada ($688 million).
3. Exports accounted for 18.6% of domestic shipments, while imports represented 71.7%.
4. Apparent consumption of molds for plastics rose 3.5%, from $3.8 billion in 2024 to $4.0 billion in 2025.
5. U.S. moldmakers held a 53.2% market share of apparent consumption in 2025, up from 51.6% in 2024.

MACHINERY TRENDS

1. The U.S. plastics machinery industry recorded a $2.5 billion trade deficit in 2025, up from $2.3 billion in 2024, as exports fell 10.4%, and imports rose 1.9%.
2. The industry had its largest surplus with Mexico ($203 million); its largest deficit was with Germany ($926 million).
3. Exports of machinery accounted for 26.1% of domestic shipments, while imports made up 91.1%.
4. Apparent consumption of plastics machinery rose 6.4%, from $6.0 billion in 2024 to $6.4 billion in 2025, while domestic shipments increased 5.5%.
5. U.S. machinery producers held a 44.8% share of apparent consumption in 2025, up from 42.3% in 2024.

FORECASTS

1. Trade is critical to the U.S. plastics industry. Trade volumes (exports plus imports) have been flat recently, while the industry's trade balance has improved.
2. Following the trade surge during the globalization period that ended around 2011–2012, world trade volumes have grown little when adjusted for inflation. The era of globalization has given way to an age of nationalism and bilateralism.
3. U.S. plastics industry trade correlates fairly well with manufacturing trade as a whole. The authors expect the plastics industry trade balance to improve from 2026 through 2030, reaching a projected surplus of $3.4 billion by 2030.
4. U.S. manufacturers have been losing share in their own domestic market to imports for decades. This decline persisted through 2025 despite reshoring efforts over the last 15 years. In manufacturing, it is difficult to compete with low-cost labor.
5. Apparent consumption of plastics in the U.S. closely correlates with gross domestic product (GDP), declining during recessions and increasing during recoveries, though with somewhat higher volatility. Consumption undershot in 2023 through 2025, perhaps as inventories were worked off, leading to the predicted declines observed in those years. The authors expect the apparent consumption of plastics to grow nominally at a 5.3% annual rate between 2025 and 2030. This projection assumes annual inflation of 3.3% (as measured by the GDP deflator) and annual real GDP growth of 2.5%.

U.S. PLASTICS TRADE IN FIRST SIX MONTHS OF 2026

1. During the first half of 2026, the U.S. plastics industry trade balance improved to a $1.4 billion surplus, compared with a $145 million deficit in the first half of 2025.
2. Plastics industry exports rose 0.3% in the first six months of 2026 versus the same period in 2025, while imports declined 3.7%.
3. Resin exports increased 0.5% in the first half of 2026, while imports fell 7.8%, widening the industry's customary resin trade surplus.
4. The U.S. plastics products trade deficit narrowed by 5.3% in the first six months of 2026, driven by a 0.8% rise in exports and a 1.5% drop in imports. This may indicate that some plastics processing is being reshored to the United States.
5. Exports of molds for plastics declined 17.4% in the first half of 2026, while imports fell 19.3%, resulting in a 19.9% decrease in the molds trade deficit.
6. Plastics machinery exports dropped 12.1% in the first six months of 2026, while imports decreased 6.7%, leading to a 4.6% reduction in the machinery trade deficit.

INTERNATIONAL PLASTICS INDUSTRY

The international plastics industry continues to grow and evolve. Global producers compete with the United States for both overseas markets and within the U.S. domestic market. In the years ahead, price fluctuations and trade policy will largely determine the competitiveness of plastics firms worldwide. Consequently, this transitional period could present opportunities for smaller players to emerge as significant industry participants.

Production and Consumption

1. China remains the largest producer of rubber and plastics. In 2025, Chinese production reached $773.5 billion—more than twice the size of U.S. output.
2. Plastic and rubber consumption in a country is determined by its population size, level of economic development, and the strength of its manufacturing sector. In 2025, several countries consumed greater than $1,200 per-capita, including South Korea, the United States, Italy, and Germany.
3. Although India's manufacturing sector continues to expand, its per-capita consumption of rubber and plastics remained relatively low at $65 in 2025.
4. China's per-capita consumption, supported by growth of its middle class, has risen sharply. Apparent consumption per capita has increased nearly 150% between 2010 and 2025, rising $471.

Trade

5. The United States remained the largest exporter of resins in 2024, although its growth rate was outpaced by China. China was the largest exporter of plastics products in 2024, trailed by Germany and the U.S.[1]
6. In 2024, the U.S. maintained the largest trade surplus in resins, valued at $23.0 billion. This included large surpluses with Mexico, China, and Belgium.
7. China had the largest trade surplus in plastics products in 2024, which included large surpluses with the United States, Vietnam, and Mexico.

GLOBAL PLASTICS RANKING®

Now in its ninth year, PLASTICS has released its annual Global Plastics Ranking®. The ranking is based on trade volume estimates—exports plus imports—across four broad classifications that collectively comprise the plastics industry: plastics machinery, molds for plastics, materials and resins, and plastics products. In 2025, China, the U.S., and Germany remained the leaders of the global plastics trade. Vietnam moved up in rankings, surpassing the U.K. and India, to enter the top 20 and is likely to surpass Canada in 2026.

1 Some sections are based on UN Comtrade data that lag by one year due to data availability.

PLASTICS
INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

plasticsindustry.org

1425 K Street, NW, Suite 500
Washington, D.C. 20005
202.974.5200

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