

Meet Albert Berisa

The long game: almost 170 years of trust in global trade

With almost 170 years of history, Catz International is one of the most enduring names in the global trade of spices, dried fruits, and plant-based ingredients. That longevity is no accident, it's the result of genuine partnerships, long-term thinking, and the discipline to stay relevant across generations of market change.

Managing Director, Albert Berisa has spent 31 of those years inside the company. We sat down with him to find out why Catz International continues to thrive.

Catz has a rich history spanning nearly 170 years. What does Catz have that others don't?

Longevity in this business isn't just a number, it's a statement of trust. We've been operating through wars, crises, and complete market transformations. We know the markets not just from data, but from experience across generations. Our suppliers and customers know that when they work with Catz, they're working with a trusted and sustainable partner.

You've been with Catz for 31 years. What keeps you here?

The diversity in every day. Every day is different. The world changes constantly; geopolitics, climate, consumer trends and this business moves with it. I've never felt like I was standing still. And then there's the team. The right people in the right positions. People who stay, who grow, who understand this business from the inside out. There's no need to explain the context, so decisions happen fast.



Your mission is 'creating peace of mind for our partners'. What does that mean?

It means our customers never have to worry about the supply of raw materials. They can buy in advance - sometimes up to three years ahead - at a fixed price, with monthly deliveries. We hold the inventory. We carry the risk. We act as a risk manager for our customers.

So, when a market suddenly spikes and prices jump 10 to 30 percent overnight, our customers are protected. They can focus on running their business, not on hedging commodity risk. That's the peace of mind we're talking about.

Catz spans the entire chain, from origin to customer . Where does the real value get created?

The value is in the connections and in the judgment calls you make along the way. We're not just a middleman. We're an importer, a distributor, and we perform the risk management for you. We inspect quality at origin, we manage logistics, we absorb price volatility.

But if I had to pick one place where the real value is created, it's the relationship with the supplier. Being trusted at origin - having suppliers and processors who want to work with you - determines everything downstream. Without that, you're just another buyer.

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**When the market spikes,
our customers sleep well**

Catz is the world's largest single buyer of desiccated coconut. How did Catz grow to that scale?

Step by step, over a very long time. It starts with showing up consistently. When prices are high, you still buy. When quality is irregular, you work with the supplier to fix it rather than walking away. Over the years, that builds a reputation. Producers know you're serious, that you'll pay on time, that you're a reliable partner. Once you have that position, scale follows naturally.

For products like coconut but also pepper, cinnamon, and cardamom, we've built sourcing relationships that simply took decades to develop. That's not something you can replicate quickly.

The plant-based food market is growing. What does that mean for Catz?

Many of our core ingredients like coconut, spices, seeds, nuts and dried fruits sit right in the heart of plant-based nutrition. As demand grows, volumes grow, and our role becomes more important.

You call this a people business. What do you mean by that in a sector driven by spreadsheets and price fluctuations?

The spreadsheet tells you what happened. The people tell you what's about to happen. We read markets through sentiment as much as through data.

When you talk to a grower in Sri Lanka or a processor in Vietnam, you pick up on signals that no algorithm captures. That is the human element that we bring.



Is there apprehension about the harvest? Is someone sitting on more stock than usual? Those conversations give us a feel for the market that purely data-driven competitors simply don't have. And in a volatile world, that feeling is often the difference.

In the past, commerce used to be about price arbitrage. Now it's about food safety, traceability, and compliance.

What's changed?

What's changed is the level of professionalism required. The bar for documentation, certification, and traceability has risen enormously. Consumers and regulators expect it. What hasn't changed is the need for trust at the foundation.

No compliance framework replaces a supplier who genuinely wants to deliver quality. The paperwork confirms it; the relationship creates it.

Geopolitical disruptions are increasing. How does Catz stay resilient?

Flexibility. That's always been our answer. The conflict in Iran is a good example; higher oil prices, rising freight rates, shipping routes being rerouted overnight. Those are real disruptions that hit our cost base and our planning.

But when trade routes shift, when a conflict affects

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freight costs, when a new regulation changes sourcing options, we adapt. In an uncertain world, Catz creates peace of mind for our customers.

We don't wait for disruptions to resolve themselves. We look for the solution while everyone else is still assessing the problem. That mindset is deeply embedded in our culture.

Which product in your portfolio deserves more attention than it gets?

Cardamom. It's extraordinary, complex, aromatic and deeply rooted in culinary traditions from the Middle East to Scandinavia. It's gaining ground fast but still feels underappreciated in many Western markets.

The consumption curve is only going upward. I'd love to see more food companies discover what they can do with this exceptional spice.

