

Behind the Scenes:

Pre-Season Preparation With CAC's Foodservice Team

The California Avocado Commission's (CAC's) foodservice program is designed to demonstrate the value and versatility of California avocados. Featuring usage concepts that reflect the latest trendsetting culinary applications, CAC's foodservice team showcases the unique promotional opportunities available to foodservice operators who partner with the Commission.

The prior year's foodservice programs are evaluated for effectiveness with a focus on three key areas: foodservice advertising and public relations activities (PR), industry events and chain promotions. Foodservice print and digital ads and PR activities are reviewed utilizing print magazine *Readership Studies*, digital ad response data and ad click-through results. Industry events provide the opportunity to demonstrate CAC's leadership, strengthen existing partner relationships and secure new foodservice operator partners. Utilizing the tiered-account approach in reviewing prior year foodservice operator partnerships, the team calculates each chain's promotion cost against the number of pounds used during the promotion period and evaluates each chain's prospects for the upcoming season.

Foodservice operators look to the Commission for menu applications that will appeal to their unique audience and set them apart from their competitors. To that end, the Commission's foodservice team re-

LET'S TALK ABOUT ... menu ideation

LET'S TALK TO DAVE WOOLLEY ABOUT ... menu ideation

What is menu ideation?

Menu ideation is the process that conceptualizes and formulates new menu items on a chain restaurant menu. Depending on the size of the chain, new menu creations may involve several players, such as the F&B/culinary team, the marketing team and the purchasing/distribution team. It always includes three key components: ideas (marketing), need (purchasing/distribution) and innovation (culinary R&D).

What are the stages of menu ideation?

While each chain takes a different approach to ideation, every ideation session has "stage gates." At the first gate, initial menu concepts are conceived, discussed and approved. Then, marketers test menu concepts in predetermined locations/operations to assess whether the proposed item fits into the chain's menu structure, pleases customers, and adapts profitability to existing operational, purchasing and distribution structures.

Where does inspiration come from?

In my capacity as an external resource, I approach new menu items from several points of view. I always include some items that take the brand in new directions based on current and global trends. More importantly, I immerse myself in the chain's brand identity, going back of the house to understand what the kitchens can realistically produce, identify underutilized ingredients and look for break-the-mold opportunities.

What makes a successful ideation session?

Ideation sessions generally gather representatives from the principal departments: R&D, marketing and purchasing. My job is to encourage the participants to think about their menu/products from new angles, and to understand how ingredients can combine and please in trend-forward, unexpected ways. Often, the session focus is to develop a limited time offer (LTO), but occasionally, a hit will migrate to the permanent menu.

What skills/experience are important for an R&D chef?

My route to menu concept and development began traditionally—culinary program, apprenticeship and fine dining kitchen experience. I was approached by a recruiter to head a chain R&D kitchen, and initially rejected moving into high-volume production. Fortunately, I realized that as a chef, I had many different creative avenues to explore.

What's your favorite R&D accomplishment?

Successfully introducing a chain's R&D team to the versatility and menu potential of a new ingredient has got to top my list. For example, demonstrating how a chain can integrate a new fresh item—such as California avocados—is a real challenge. Every angle has to be explored (availability, purchasing, storage, handling, waste) before we even start talking menu applications. But when the avocado menu item is in the stores and sales are skyrocketing, that's a huge thrill.



Your advice for chefs interested in menu R&D?

Understand your customer's business inside and out, including how trends impact its core and LTO menus. Keep an open mind. Cultivate the ability to work with all participating departments: R&D, marketing and purchasing/distribution. 🍌

DAVE WOOLLEY HEADS CO-CULINARY APPROACH, DENVER, WHERE HE SERVES AS A MENU DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE FOR FOODSERVICE SUPPLIERS, INCLUDING THE CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION, IRVINE, CALIFORNIA, AND HIGH VOLUME FOODSERVICE OPERATORS.

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CAC's Foodservice PR program engages media to educate and inspire their readers with California avocado messages and operator success stories.



Chef Dave Woolley works on new menu concepts that balance foodservice operators' need to develop new menu items with on-trend ingredients and flavor pairings with operational considerations.

views trend forecasts to identify ingredients, flavoring/spices and cuisines that are making headlines in industry publications and on social media channels.

Once CAC identifies the target accounts and themes it will communicate throughout the season, Chef Dave Woolley develops a series of new California avocado menu concepts that reflect those trends and can be showcased at industry events. The team also develops season and trend-specific talking points that will be used throughout the year for public relations purposes, in discussions with foodservice repre-

sentatives, during media grove tours and integrated into the Commission's print and digital ad campaigns.

The Commission also holds one-on-one menu ideation sessions and on-site demonstrations with targeted chains, showcasing menu items specifically created by Chef Woolley for that chain. Once CAC has secured a partnership, the team develops a brand-specific promotional plan that includes showcasing the California Avocados brand logo and mouth-watering photos of the California avocado-centric dishes on in-store POS pieces. 🥑

FUTURE 50: EMERGING BRANDS

Restaurant Business magazine's annual ranking of the fastest-growing small chains in America

FUTURE 50: EMERGING BRANDS

THE MATADOR



Contemporary Tex-Mex chain The Matador offers a design-focused atmosphere with scratch-made tortas and enchiladas, and a massive tequila selection. Owners...

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ROCCO'S TACOS AND TEQUILA BAR



From multiconcept operator Big Time Restaurant Group, Rocco's features a party-like atmosphere with upbeat music and bright colors. To further the...

FUTURE 50: EMERGING BRANDS

BARTACO



The goal: make diners feel like they are at a stylish beach resort, eating tacos and sipping tequila. Named as one of the best tacos in America by...

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NORTH ITALIA



The upscale Italian chain from restaurateur Sam Fox's Fox Restaurant Group is known for its handmade pastas and pizzas, made from scratch daily. Across its...

By identifying emerging foodservice brands within targeted markets, CAC can select partners whose menus complement California avocados.