

South Africa: Up Close and Personal

In her role as the 2012/13 Produce Marketing Association (PMA) chairman of the board, CAC Vice President of Marketing Jan DeLyster recently had the opportunity to tour agricultural production areas and meet with representatives in the South African produce industry.

“I was very impressed with the innovation, the use of technology and the hospitality of everyone I met,” she said after her mid-August visit. “The vertical integration of the companies we had the opportunity to meet with is noteworthy. Many of the organizations have nurseries, growing operations, packing facilities and even processing capabilities.”

DeLyster was in South Africa representing PMA at a Fresh Connections conference and also was a speaker at the produce industry event with more than 300 in attendance. Her presentation highlighted the industry’s success in expanding demand for California avocados in an increasingly competitive market while achieving grower value. She addressed U.S. trends and consumer interest in local production with an interest in knowing who, how and where the food they eat is produced. Though South Africa has a mature avocado industry, per capita consumption within the country is low. In fact, South Africa has the lowest consumption rate of any of the top 15 avocado exporting nations in the world. The country exports about 60 percent of their avocado production



as its per capita consumption is less than 1 kg annually.

“Their consumption is very different from the U.S. where the Hass variety represents more than 95 percent of consumption. In South Africa the preferred varieties are the green skin varieties and the industry acknowledges it has a tremendous education opportunity/challenge when it comes to the Hass variety with their domestic consumer,” DeLyster said. “They export the great majority of their Hass production around the world.”

South Africa has filed for access to ship Hass avocados to the U.S.

marketplace. DeLyster said grower representatives are working with their government officials as well as the U.S. Department of Agriculture to establish protocols under which the fruit can be exported to the United States. If and when that happens, South Africa’s season pretty much mirrors California’s season.

During her visit, DeLyster met with South African avocado association leaders and had the opportunity to tour the facilities of several different avocado companies including Westfalia, ZZ2 and AFRUPRO. “In December Westfalia built and opened a value-added packing and ripen-



world. DeLyser said that based on her meetings she felt the companies have well thought out global strategies to increase their participation in the world market.

DeLyser and the PMA team also had the opportunity to visit a number of retail stores, a retail warehouse and the Cape Town Wholesale Market. She said it was interesting to see how South African retailers promote and sell green skin varieties. DeLyser said it was timely as CAC begins exploration of the possibilities to extend California's availability in the U.S. market with some of the heritage avocado varieties. She noted the different packaging and number of SKU's many retailers offered; from a poly bag sold by weight, to bulks displays with mixed varieties as well as overwrapped tray-packed avocados with one, two, three or four count options. Another unique aspect of the South African retail industry is the "walker markets". These alternative markets have grown to third in volume delivery of fruits and vegetables to consumers in the country and demonstrate resourcefulness and entrepreneurial spirit. These markets literally take the product to the street corners and are popping up throughout South Africa.

"The trip was a great opportunity to learn about their industry and discuss opportunities for possible cooperation in production research moving forward with cultivars and



ing facility in Johannesburg for the purpose of enhancing their service level to one of their key retail accounts while looking to expand their business in the area. Westfalia also produces avocado oil as well as frozen and fresh guacamole under their brand name," she said. "I met with their marketing team in Johannesburg, toured the new facility and they presented their consumer and trade marketing programs. The following day we were in Tzaneen and had the opportunity to meet with their operations and research folks at their headquarters."

These firms are committed to finding innovative uses for avocados and in developing byproducts for use in South Africa and around the

root stocks to maximize investment through trials," according to DeLyser." The South African plant researchers are doing extensive tests on root rot and salinity resistant rootstocks and there appears to be ample opportunity for collaboration as growers around the world try to solve various cultural problems." The CAC marketing executive also saw several new varieties being tested that show promise and witnessed some experiments with high density plantings. 🥑

**BEFORE WE PICK
OUR PRODUCE, WE
PICK OUR FARMERS**

This photo was taken in a South Africa retail produce department.