

# The Splane Perspective

**S**ince joining the California Avocado Commission in mid-March, I have been immersing myself into learning about the avocado category, the price-less growers, retail and foodservice customers, AMRIC handlers and of course internal staff and various supporting agencies. Despite my vast background in various marketing leadership positions with Consumer Packaged Goods companies primarily focused in the foodservice channel, there has been a lot to learn and absorb. You might ask, why the change to the California Avocado Commission and transition to the produce category? Two primary reasons – a love for farming and a belief in plant-forward whole food healthy eating.

My love for farming comes from a family heritage of wheat and barley farming in eastern Washington where my mom grew up and my grandparents owned several thousand acres of land. Many fond childhood memories on the farm ultimately allowed me to be a hired hand during harvest time working long but rewarding days supporting the family business. Experiences few have and that I'll never forget.

A common thread I have observed from the produce industry overall, and especially with those supporting the California avocado business, is a culture of passion, commitment, and an authentic drive to deliver the absolute best avocados to the consumer.

One of the areas the marketing team has been focusing on is fine tuning our messaging hierarchy. There are so many great messages surrounding avocados, but we need to get manically focused on messaging that elevates and differentiates California avocados. Why is this so important? By establishing a clear messaging hierarchy, a brand can convey a unified identity, build trust and establish a differentiated emotional connection with consumers and a motivating one with the trade that ultimately drives demand, loyalty and premium positioning.

Three of our go-forward messages have been a part of our marketing mix for quite some time. They are: premium quality and preference, locally grown and now in season. While these are not new, there will be an intense focus on ensuring these are the differentiating messages included in all consumer touch points. We identified these messages by utilizing consumer insights to determine what drives consumer purchase behavior and brand loyalty.

What's being strategically added to California avocado messaging for incremental brand value is sustainability. No new practices are necessary in the grove; we are simply getting



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credit for and leveraging the great and conscientious work California growers are keenly focused on already. Sustainability as a brand purchase driver continues to pick up momentum every year. This is true with all consumer demographics, but especially with younger consumers who are making this messaging important today and also well into the future. A recent report shows that 71% of Millennials and 75% of Gen Z state that sustainability is more important when making purchase decisions than actual product brand names.

The depth of our sustainability messaging is well rounded and can be adjusted to a particular communication objective and audience. The following points showcase the copy direction that has been approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for all communications.

California avocados; grown locally, farmed responsibly:

- Sustainably grown
- Environmentally friendly farming
- Locally grown = less transport = fewer carbon emissions
- Ensured worker safety and well-being
- Ethically sourced

While we have begun to include these powerful messages in some of our communications this year, we will amplify their presence even more as we build out our communications strategy for next year. 🍷