



Summer Fun

Avocados Garner Much Consumer Attention This Year

By Tim Linden

The avocado, specifically the California avocado, received a lot of attention this summer for a variety of reasons — ranging from an acute shortage and a freak heat wave in California avocado country to a cutting-edge social media campaign.

As temperatures in California soared to 105 to 115 degrees in late June, damage in groves was extensively reported. Dozens of stories fed to consumers also focused on a potential heat-induced avocado shortage. In late June, *Time* magazine headlined a story, “A Major Avocado Shortage Might Hit for 4th of July Weekend.” An on-line story on

a popular Pennsylvania website, *PhillyVoice.com*, specifically blamed the warm temperatures: “California heat wave leads to avocado shortage” screamed the headline. Though some articles — including the *Time* magazine piece — did report that Mexico’s avocado growers’ miscalculation of the market this year also had an impact, from the consumer’s viewpoint, heat was the main culprit.

The “Handler’s Report” in this issue accurately reflects all of the factors that led to the summer shortage of avocados, with the heat wave, on balance, playing a relatively minor role. There was a shortage of avocados during much of June,

July and August, which is when the California avocado is at peak supply and demand. In fact, the 4th of July period has become the number one avocado consumption holiday of the year. While there were challenges this year because of the supply demand equation, the California Avocado Commission (CAC) moved forward with its promotions and retailers followed suit.

California avocado volume for the 4th of July consumption event exceeded 48.7 million pounds, which is the largest on record for California, even exceeding a recent 500 million pound crop year. "With demand exceeding supply from mid-May into August, traditional promotional opportunities such as the 4th of July took on new meaning," said Jan DeLyster, vice president of marketing for CAC. "We were pleased to see our core customers continue to prominently display California avocados and feature them in their ads throughout the summer months."

Though f.o.b. prices were high and sustained that level for about three months, retailers continued to promote, albeit at a higher retail price than is typical. There were ads and displays with retailers throughout the region, supported by point-of-sale materials and CAC's *American Summer Holidays* recipe booklet. Retail highlights included sales contests with Gelson's and Mollie Stone's, July demos with Walmart and Sam's Club, digital coupons with Kroger and social media programs with retailers including Fairway.

Part of the branding strategy of the new promotional campaign launched this year is to align California avocados with iconic California images. The consumer marketing campaign is centered on associating avocados with the California lifestyle. Using iconic California images, such as the beach and the mountains, the campaign makes the connection between avocados and California.

As part of the campaign, the MullenLowe agency utilized a "show and share" strategy that encourages millennials and others to snap pictures of themselves in front of strategically-located California avocado posters in the state's larger urban markets and share those images with their friends. Early in the season, posters were placed in high traffic areas of the country's largest market for avocados, Los Angeles, and through its social media postings, CAC encouraged people to "show and share" themselves in photos with those posters.

CAC and its agency took that strategy one step further



Artist John van Hamersveld and CAC's Jan DeLyster in front of the San Francisco mural as it was being painted.

with the production of a large San Francisco mural painted in mid-June at 1052 Folsom Street, a high-traffic area in San Francisco's trendy SoMa district. CAC commissioned artist John van Hamersveld to incorporate the Bay Area's iconic landscape with the state's iconic fruit, avocados. You may know of John Van Hamersveld from some of his legendary pieces including *The Endless Summer* film poster and album covers for The Rolling Stones, Kiss and The Beatles, among others.

The mural is free of any logo or brand name, however there are digital breadcrumbs that link the painting back to California avocados. For example, the logo is featured in a custom filter when the mural is photographed via Snapchat.

In recognition of how people, especially millennials, choose to communicate in current times, the Commission constructed the mural to tap into the social media habits of that group. From inspiration to creation, the entire process was captured and shared on social media with making-of and behind-the-scenes videos to engage California avocado fans. Check out the behind-the-scenes video: <https://youtu.be/nK4GGgO8QAK>

"The mural concept is new media and a tactic designed to support CAC's show and share strategy, also implemented through digital and social media. We'll evaluate its effectiveness in our post campaign review to determine plans for the future. At a minimum the graphics developed by John Van Hamersveld will be incorporated into our media campaign moving forward," noted DeLyster.

All in all, it was a pretty incredible summer for California avocados. 🥑