



Organic California avocados on display in Southern California.

Organic Avocado Sales on the Rise

Organic food is not a new phenomenon, but its growth is causing many to take notice. Nationwide, 65 percent of retail stores carried organic avocados in 2018, which is an increase of nine points versus 2014. The growth in organics is being driven largely by Millennial households, many of whom are among those pushing for transparency and integrity in the U.S. food supply. Wider distribution and demand boosted sales of all organic foods to \$47.9 billion in 2018, an increase of nearly 6 percent compared to about 2 percent for total food sales, according to the Organic Trade Association (OTA). So how do sales of organic avocados com-

pare, and what is the California Avocado Commission (CAC) doing to support them?

OTA has reported that sales of organic fruits and vegetables reached nearly \$17.5 billion in 2018, an increase of 5.6 percent. The avocado category ranks fifth among all organic fruit categories following berries, apples, bananas and grapes. While avocados ranked #1 on the Environmental Working Groups List of “Clean 15” fruit and vegetables, there is significant demand for organic avocados; retail sales surpassed \$115 million in 2017. Comparing 2017 to 2015, organic avocado retail sales grew at nearly twice the rate of all other organic fruits. Unit sales of all other organic fruit increased 45 percent while

organic avocados grew by 76 percent. Dollar sales of all other organic fruit increased 41 percent during that two-year period and sales of organic avocados nearly doubled with 91 percent growth, according to IRI/Freshlook 2017 vs. 2015.

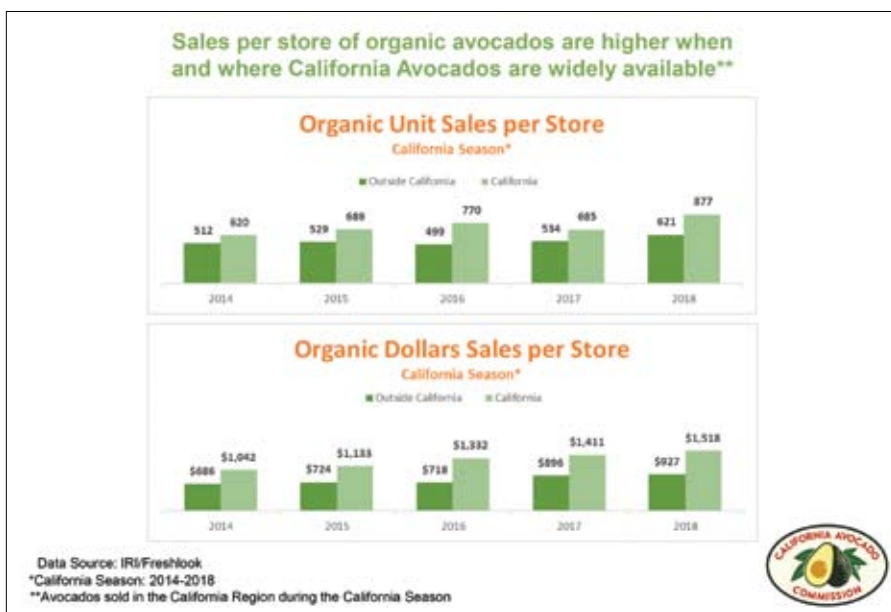
Organic California avocado volume has fluctuated with overall California avocado crop size in the last five years, peaking at 26 million pounds in 2017-18. California avocado organic production reached about 10 percent of the 2019 California Hass avocado crop. Organics' share of the California crop had been in the 8 to 9 percent range for the two years prior, and in the 5 to 7 percent range the three years prior to that. While the year-over-year growth in share of crop has been relatively small, it has nearly doubled in the six-year period since 2013-14. The best resource for organic avocado acreage in California is the 2016 United States Department of Agriculture Organic Survey, which can be found at: https://www.nass.usda.gov/Surveys/Guide_to_NASS_Surveys/Organic_Production/2016_State_Publications/CA.pdf. The survey is being updated for 2019 and the Commission hopes to have results by the end of 2020.

The Commission's overall marketing campaign promotes all California avocados, both conventional and organic, and works closely with individual retailers interested in specific varieties such as GEMs and Lamb Hass and/or organics. CAC retail marketing directors (RMDs) include organics as an item of discussion in their meetings with retailers, including data and information to highlight the state of organics and opportunities with California avocados. CAC selling material includes charts showing that sales per store of organic avocados are higher when and where California avocados are widely available.

Commission representatives attend the Organic Produce Summit, engaging with customers and encouraging California avocado merchandising and support programs. Bristol Farms, Gelson's, New Season's Market, PCC Markets, Sprouts and Whole Foods are key supporters of organic avocados and CAC RMDs have set up organic California avocado promotions with all of them.



CAC worked with New Season's Produce Buyer Jeff Fairchild, right, to develop organic California avocado merchandising programs.





CAC Vice President Marketing Jan DeLyser moderating a discussion panel at the 2019 Organic Produce Summit in Monterey, California.



Robert Seegmiller of Harmon's meeting with Jan DeLyser at the 2019 Organic Produce Summit.

“Demand for organic avocados is strong among specialty and natural foods retailers, and major retailers all have a combination program of conventional and organic avocados,” said Carolyn Becker, California Avocado Commission retail marketing director. “Bagged avocados continue to be a delineator for retailers to evaluate sales of each, and they offer the opportunity for CAC to promote organics specifically.”

Organic produce is also a key part of some foodservice operators’ purchasing strategy. *Organic Arugula Salad with Tem-*

pura California Avocado, shown below, is a concept developed by CAC’s foodservice team to encourage targeted operators to include California avocados on their menus.

Conventional avocados continue to make up the lion’s share of the avocado category, and organics meet the demand for a growing niche in the market. California avocado growers who are interested in learning about organic farming can find information here: CaliforniaAvocadoGrowers.com/growing/become-certified-organic-avocado-grower. 🥑

