

Behind the Scenes:

Introducing the CA Avocado Season to Retailers and Foodservice

Achieving targeted retail and foodservice customers' promotional support of California avocados in season is the top priority of the California Avocado Commission's (CAC) merchandising team. Though the promotional activities take place in season, CAC's team remains in contact with the accounts throughout the year. During the off-season CAC's retail and foodservice teams share avocado category sales and consumption data, consumer trend information and the competitive advantages of merchandising California avocados. As the season approaches CAC's marketing programs are presented, timing for transition to California avocados is discussed and commitments for promotions secured.



Greg Corrigan and Michael Schutt of Raley's in Northern California learn about California avocados from Jan Delyser and Dave Howald of CAC.



CAC RMD Connie Stukenberg and Dan Acevedo of West Pak Avocados at a pre-season Fresh Produce and Floral Council event

One of CAC's retail merchandising directors (RMDs), Connie Stukenberg, likens working with retailers and foodservice to farming: "You need to figure out what ideas to plant where, when to plant them, when to feed and water them, when to be content to wait, when and where it is best to prune, and when to harvest those ideas for the most fruitful yield."

This season the merchandisers are positioning Califor-

nia avocados as the premium choice with customers who prefer California avocados. Retailers who merchandise California avocados and support them with activities such as advertising, displays, digital media, special events and more will have the opportunity to earn prizes through CAC's new 5-Star Performance Program. Additionally there will be three key promotional thematics this year: American Summer Holidays with an emphasis on Fourth of July, California Fresh Snacking, and California Fresh Breakfasts. Independent research indicates that breakfast and snacks represent opportunities for increased consumption of avocados.

Because RMDs have limited time during their sales calls and may meet with a variety of people, including produce or perishables vice presidents, buyers, category managers and merchandising directors, organization of CAC's presentation material is critical. The RMDs begin planning for retail kick-off meetings by reviewing prior year promotion briefs and agreements, and compiling a promotional plan for each customer. One of the key tools used in the corporate retail kick-off sales meetings is CAC's Retail Marketing Book (aka the "ad kit") that showcases the premium nature of California avocados and details the benefits of merchandising California avocados during the season.



Cover of CAC's 2014 Retail Marketing Book

The Retail Marketing Book:

- Highlights research findings illustrating consumer preference for California avocados.
- Outlines the benefits of stocking California avocados in their produce section.
- Contains sell sheets with details of the 5 Star Performance Program and marketing support for the American Summer Holidays.
- Details the variety of in-store merchandising materials available for retailers, such as display bins and recipe booklets.

CAC's in-depth Avocado Business Reviews provide analysis of sales data for the RMDs' use in meetings with customers to review their avocado sales during the California season versus the off-season, as well as to compare prior year sales and their overall sales performance in the market place. This fact-based analysis provides the support for any recommendations the CAC team provides.

As for the foodservice channel, CAC strives throughout the year to build relationships with current and prospective chains by participation in conferences, conventions and hosting VIPs on Califor-

nia avocado grove tours. It can take several years of "pitching" the California avocado story before a foodservice chain opts to conduct a California-branded avocado promotion. To identify potential new chains for California avocado promotions, the CAC foodservice team evaluates which chains serve fresh avocados or will consider doing so, as well as the size of the chain and the volume of avocados used. For chains that have promoted California avocados in prior years, the team analyzes past promotions, including the volume of avocados moved per promotion dollar spent. This analysis helps the foodservice team prioritize target chains and create a strategic plan for each. Pre-season communication with customer culinary and marketing teams also helps influence avocado menu items, promotion themes and scheduling.

"CAC's merchandising and foodservice teams have been actively meeting with target accounts during the off season to wrap up last year's promotions and lay the foundation for the coming season. We work closely with the Marketing Advisory Committee and California handlers on the timing of our outreach and communication of our promotional plans," said Jan Delyser, CAC vice president of marketing. "Both retailers and foodservice operators anxiously anticipate the launch of the 2014 California avocado season." 🥑

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