

Buying into Australian promotion positive for avocado exports

The growth of New Zealand's avocado industry has been slowed by disappointing crops in several recent seasons. Nothing daunted, its leaders are planning for dramatic growth on the back of steady increases in planting over the past decade.

The industry strategic plan envisages 12 million trays by 2015 and total earnings of \$250 million.

This was stressed by Avocado Growers Association and Avocado Industry Council president John Schnackenberg and chief executive Alan Thorn when they spoke to the *'Orchardist'* last month.

"We will reach those 12 million trays. The challenge is to market those trays at value to growers," Alan commented.

When there is a bigger crop, the United States market becomes more inviting. However, here foreign exchange is a key factor. "When the New Zealand dollar is over 60c against the American currency it is not easy to extract value out of the USA," says John Schnackenberg.

John and Alan are positive about the work done to develop the Japan market. "Japan offers a long-term market for our product."

Supply from Mexico is important in Japan, but New Zealand avocados are considered to have the edge in taste.

The avocado industry target of \$250 million by 2015 compares with the average industry value in recent seasons of about \$50 million, covering exports, domestic market sales and processing. The record industry value was \$64 million in the 2007-08 season. Over the decade from 1999-2000 to 2008-09, planted hectares five years and older have soared from 1,248 to 4,073.

Promotion in Australia

A substantial warming improvement in the relationship between the Australian and New Zealand avocado industries is encouraging as the new export season gets under way.

The Australians began with their 'Ave an Avo' campaign and have now moved on to the theme 'Add an Avo'. "This has been very successful in Australia," says John, "It has become a very strong campaign."

It is logical for New Zealand to buy into that programme in order to keep promotions through television, radio and print the same.

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One thing this will allow is continuous promotion of avocados to Australian consumers. New Zealand will adopt the Australian publicity material for the part of the season where its fruit is dominant: from November to February.

“It will mean a consistent impact and consistent look all year. The leverage goes both ways.”


‘Ripeness is all’

Among the industry challenges are the complexity of growing avocados and ensuring that they reach the consumer so that they offer the distinctive and satisfying eating experience for which the fruit is famous.

Avocados are a complex crop. For success, there needs to be effective technology transfer to growers. There must also be knowledge, discipline and skill all the way through the chain from grower to supermarket staff.

Consumer education is equally important so that the fruit is purchased at the right stage of its ripening cycle.

Alan Thorn comments; “Australian research conducted about 18 months ago found that if a consumer has an unhappy experience in eating avocados it may be four to six weeks before a repeat purchase.”

There is an incentive in this for retailers to do their job properly so that they do not lose avocado customers. 

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