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Avocados offer comfort in time of uncertainty

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When people face trying times, it is common for them to seek refuge with the familiar, whether by surrounding themselves with family and close friends or perhaps indulging in a favorite food item.

With the current coronavirus pandemic gripping the nation and social distancing practices firmly in

place for the foreseeable future, solace is not always easily found in the arms of a loved one. But comfort foods are still very much available and stand ready to offer that “warm hug” people are craving.

Enter the avocado, which is making a case for being the world’s favorite comfort food.

“I would argue that the avocado, which is already the world’s favorite superfood, is now one of the world’s favorite comfort foods,” said Xavier Equihua, president and chief executive officer of the Peruvian Avocado Commission, the Washington, DC-based organization established in 2010 to increase the demand and consumption of avocados from Peru.

“The versatility of the avocado makes it more than a fruit, it is indeed a food item,” Equihua said.

“Avocados go with everything and can be used in any meal and in any course, from a breakfast to an appetizer to a savory main dish, and even a dessert,” he said. “There is no other produce item that has the same versatility as the avocado.”

So perhaps a silver lining for what has so far been a difficult 2020 is the fact that Peru is experiencing an “on” year with its avocado crop, meaning the alternate-bearing trees are expected to produce a bumper crop after a down year in 2019.

To that end, Equihua said that although two-thirds of avocados from Peru always go to the European Union, the projection of 200 million pounds of fruit to the United States holds firm, with shipments kicking off in mid-May and lasting through September with promotable volumes. This represents a slight increase over 2019 when 187 millions pounds were shipped to the U.S.

While demand for avocados continues to outpace supply, one might think that retail promotions might not be necessary. But Equihua believes it is more important than ever, especially in a year such as this one.

“With restaurants still closed in some states and some starting to reopen with restrictions, I expect people to continue staying home and preparing their own meals. It is therefore important to continue reminding consumers about the many benefits of the avocado,” he said. “They are versatile, delicious, nutritious and a great value. They are indeed the instant upgrade to any meal.”



To help spread the message about those positive attributes, Equihua has co-authored his second cookbook, *Avocados in Bloom*, which features 55 recipes highlighting the versatility of the famous superfood. The 90-page *Avocados in Bloom* e-cookbook will be available as a free download through supermarkets and via new and traditional media.

Avocados in Bloom looks to match the success of Equihua's first book, *Cooking with Avocados from Peru*, which was released in 2015 and has been translated into multiple languages and downloaded more than 1.2 million times worldwide.

"This is one just one small example of the extensive menu of options that we are offering our supermarket partners this year," said Equihua. "Such menu also includes taggable TV spots and digital media with NBC and FOX, e-coupons and other e-commerce tactics. We always take a bespoke approach with our supermarket partners with regard to marketing. We are also offering the book free of charge as a way of giving something back to consumers, which is especially important during a year like this one."

Equihua added that other retail promotions will be centered on social media and other digital formats, with participation across the country, including adding to their traditional retailer partners several new supermarket chains that are receiving marketing support this year for the first time ever.

And while Equihua obviously is partial to avocados from the South American nation he represents, he is not blind to the fact that the average consumer does not have a preference when it comes to where their avocado was grown.

"Do most people care if it's Peru or California or Mexico?" he asked rhetorically. "Probably not. But the things that the three origins are all doing to promote our respective sources are helping to promote the category as a whole. We are cross-pollinating ideas across the category, which only helps to fortify the image of avocados. This complementary marketing strategy has indeed helped to make the avocado the icon of the fruit world. There is really no other category that is working in concert like this in the world, but I predict that others will follow what we are doing in the coming years as we have created something truly unique in the produce world."

“And during a time when isolation is de rigueur, it’s wonderful to think that the avocado is helping to bring people together,” Equihua concluded.

Pictured: Xavier Equihua, president and chief executive officer of the Peruvian Avocado Commission.

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