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Del Rey offers Apeel on Mexico avocados

By

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October 30, 2020

With its relatively new Vista, CA packing and cooling facility fully operational, Del Rey Avocado Co. Inc. will be able to offer the shelf-life extending Apeel treatment on the production from Mexico for the entire season. The facility opened in the middle of 2019 and Del Rey added the Apeel process option several months ago, which coincided with the end of Mexico's 2019-20 season.

Company Vice President Patrick Lucy said the process has been available on the new crop of Mexican avocados since the season began in mid-summer. He said the Apeel treatment definitely extends shelf life which can work to the benefit of both the retailer and the consumer. According to the Apeel website, the process involves the use of a plant-derived coating that promises to keep produce fresh for a longer period of time. "Produce with Apeel stays fresh two to three times longer, which promotes more sustainable supply chains, better quality food, and less food waste for everyone," according to apeel.com. "For growers, suppliers, and retailers, Apeel is the only postharvest solution that creates an optimal microclimate inside every piece of produce, which leads to extended shelf life and transportability — with reduced reliance on refrigeration and controlled atmosphere."

Lucy said it was difficult to quantify the exact number of days that the product can add to the shelf life of avocados but said retailers use it to better manager the supply chain as they fill their produce department shelves with ripening fruit.

Speaking to *The Produce News* on Oct. 22, the Del Rey executive said the Mexican avocado season was progressing very well with greater weekly volumes than is usually the case at this time of year. Del Rey typically has California fruit as late as anyone as it represents a number of growers from the state's Morro Bay district, which typically ships the last fruit of the season. "We will have Morro Bay fruit for one or two more weeks," he said.

He noted that while Mexico's total volume has been robust through September and October — averaging about 1200 truckloads per week (about 48 million pounds), Del Rey's volume has been in line with past years, largely because of its late California deal. "We have been ramping up our Mexican volume over the past two or three weeks," he said. "By the first week of November, we will be at maximum capacity."

Del Rey is also one of the major suppliers of organic avocados and Lucy said Mexican volume of that category has also been robust. While the f.o.b. price on a carton of organic avocados was returning a premium of about \$10-12 over conventional fruit in late October, Lucy said both products were ripe for promotion. "We've been delivering the message to our retailers that avocados offer great promotional opportunities for at least the next eight weeks," he said. "Promote them every week switching between organic and conventional and bags and whole avocados."

Lucy added that November has not typically been a great avocado month as retailers concentrate on

fall fruit and the items synonymous with the Thanksgiving holiday feast. And avocado supplies from Mexico are often a bit tight in November. That's not the case this year. Promotion appears to be the name of the game. He added that bagged fruit continues to be very popular with consumers, especially during the pandemic. Del Rey has added bagging lines to its New Jersey distribution facility to keep up with demand. "The number of bags we are selling is up 100 percent," he said, adding that all sizes are being sold in bags from large to small and including a mixed-size bag. "We can do whatever the retailer wants to try."

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