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Calavo Growers eyeing growth in Pacific Northwest

By

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At some point this fall, Calavo Growers Inc. is expecting to open a new distribution center in Portland, OR, to better service its customers in the Pacific Northwest, including Canada.

Rob Wedin, executive vice president of fresh sales for the Santa Paula, CA-based company, said Calavo is continually upgrading its facilities to better serve the changing needs of the retail and foodservice industries. For example, it has added a new bagging machine in the United States this year to help meet the growing demand for bagged avocados. “We try to do as much bagging as we can at the packing facilities in Mexico but having additional bagging capacity up here (in the U.S.) gives us flexibility,” he said.

Bagged avocados have been gaining market share for the last several years, receiving a big boost during this time of COVID-19 as consumers are anxiously buying lots of bagged produce for the perceived safety of buying product that has been touched by fewer hands. Wedin said bagged avocados have attracted consumers throughout the product line. He noted that there are bagged organic avocados as well as large, medium and small sized fruit presented in that fashion. He said the very small fruit — 84s and smaller — has become less popular but every other bagged option is seeing increased sales.

He told The Produce News on Oct. 27 that the Portland distribution center was on the verge of being opened. He noted that Portland and Seattle are big markets for Calavo, as is Canada. Currently Canada is most often served by direct shipments from Calavo’s packing facility in Jalisco, Mexico.

Calavo built a state-of-the-art facility in Jalisco several years ago, which it uses for its export business as Jalisco avocados are still not allowed in the U.S. market. The approval process ran into a political speed bump several years ago between the United States and Mexico, with it being stopped in its track. There are strong rumors that Jalisco will soon be opened with avocados grown in that region eligible for certification that will allow them to be shipped to the U.S. market.

Wedin said Calavo has heard that the approval is on the verge for years, yet it has not happened. Though, he said the company is not yet certain it will happen, he did note that it has increased its Jalisco capacity by adding growers, more people in the facility and additional picking crews. “We have thought it was going to happen in the past, only to be disappointed,” he said. “On the other hand, it takes time to ramp up. We have started but we are being smart about it.”

Wedin said the opening of Jalisco would significantly increase Calavo’s potential volume into the U.S. market and improve its overall flow of product from Mexico with increased efficiency and productivity. One of the benefactors would be West Coast Canadian customers who could be serviced from the new Portland facility.

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