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California Avocado Commission kicks off season with integrated Cinco de Mayo promos

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Firecracker Guacamole, a recipe featured in the California Avocado Commission's tie-in promotion with Dulcinea. *(Photo courtesy of the California Avocado Commission)*

With a robust 81 million pounds of avocados forecast to be consumed for Cinco de Mayo festivities this year, it is shaping up to move even more fruit than the Super Bowl, according to a March 6 press

release from the California Avocado Commission. CAC "plans to kick off its spring through early fall season with a strong Cinco de Mayo program that integrates consumer advertising, public relations outreach, retail activity and on-line marketing.

The California season "is ramping up, and we expect there to be a good supply of California avocados with outstanding quality in support of Cinco de Mayo demand," Jan DeLyser, vice president of marketing for the commission, said in the release.

Mother's Day "comes right on the heels of Cinco de Mayo, so we're encouraging retailers to merchandise both ripe and breaking avocados to capitalize on demand for multiple occasions," Ms. DeLyser continued.

Mary Sue Milliken and Susan Feniger, California celebrity chefs and restaurateurs known as the Food Network's "Too Hot Tamales," will be CAC's spokespersons for the Cinco de Mayo activities, the release stated. They will "participate in media interviews and be featured in a broadcast news release to encourage avocado consumption for the event. The chefs will advise that California avocados are in season and perfect for entertaining from Cinco de Mayo through early fall."

Owners of "the critically acclaimed Border Grill restaurants in Los Angeles and Santa Monica, CA, and Las Vegas, NV, as well as the Border Grill Truck," Ms. Milliken and Ms. Feniger "created two new California avocado-centric recipes for Cinco de Mayo," which will be featured on the commission's web site, promoted to traditional media nationwide, and "marketed to influential food and lifestyle bloggers," the release stated.

But Cinco de Mayo is not the only holiday this summer for which avocado consumption is expected to top the estimated 70 million pounds consumed on Super Bowl weekend. Ms. DeLyser told The Produce News March 7 that consumption for July 4 festivities this year is expected to rival the 81 million pounds of avocados projected for Cinco de Mayo.

"We are really stepping up our communications program around traditional American summer holidays, and the Fourth of July is going to be a key focal point of our efforts," she said. Memorial Day, and possibly Labor Day depending on the duration of the California shipping season, will also receive attention.

A new tie-in program will pair California avocados with Dulcinea watermelons in three recipes, one of which uses half of a watermelon, hollowed out, as a bowl for the guacamole. Tying avocados with a watermelon, a popular item for the Fourth of July and throughout the summer, reinforces the idea that avocados and summer go together, Ms. Delyser said.

"We've got a goal of positioning the fourth of July" as an occasion for avocados and summer as a season for avocados, she said. "We just want consumers to think of avocados during our season" at any event that brings people together, whether it is a holiday or a barbecue or picnic.

The Dulcinea tie-in is one of several "new things on tap this year" in the commission's marketing programs this year, which run from mid-April to mid-September, said Ms. Delyser. "We are going to build on the successes" of previous programs, she said. "The integrated marketing campaign that has been very effective will still be a key part of what we do, but we will be adding some components to it."

The commission will "continue to run print advertising" in various epicurean magazines, she said. This year, those ads "will step up the California messaging, taking unique California grower stories and calling out what is uniquely California."

There will be outdoor advertising in the core markets in California as well as in Portland, Seattle, Phoenix, Denver and Salt Lake City, "the same as we had last year," she said. Also, "we will have some key account activities" in other parts of the country such as Texas, the Midwest and the Northeast with "retailers and foodservice operators who want to promote California avocados in season." However, most of the consumer media will be in the western markets."

A radio advertising program with 30- and 60-second spots with retailer tags will continue, and "we will be doing in-store radio broadcasts" as well as shelf talk banners, Ms. DeLyser said. "This year, we are going to work with the shelf talk banners in the bread aisle, one of the most heavily trafficked aisles in the grocery department. There are a lot of opportunities to tie in avocados with bread items."

A specific bread tie-in will be a co-marketing promotion with King's Hawaiian Bread in which King's will put Avocado Commission recipe cards into 1 million of their packages, she said.

In California, "this year we've got an effort going on to proclaim June as California Avocado Month," Ms. DeLyser said. "We are working with different city and county governments to make that happen."

The positive nutritional message that avocados have to offer has been one of the key factors, along with year-round availability and ripe programs, that "has allowed the avocado category to grow at the pace that it has," Ms. DeLyser said. CAC has been involved in nutrition communications since the mid-1980s, "and we have really seen great things come out of our association with third-party experts in the nutrition arena." Those programs will continue.

"We find that having nutrition experts out there singing the praises for consumption of avocados and communicating accurate information about the nutrition value of avocados really has assisted in growing the category," she said.

The commission has numerous other marketing activities on the docket as well, ranging from social media and the Internet to a retail newsletter and trade advertising.

In the foodservice arena, CAC continues to work with foodservice operators. "We had great success last year on a tight market and look for even more promotions" with this year's larger crop. Many foodservice operators "are stepping up their connectivity with fresh California avocados and prominently promoting them on their menus throughout the summer months," she said.

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