



Health Claim for Avocados Approved: HAB, CAC to Emphasize Benefits

By Tim Linden

In December, fresh Hass avocados were granted the right by the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to include a “heart-healthy” claim in advertising and promotional materials, and on the fruit itself.

This designation, granted as the result of a petition by the American Heart Association (AHA), is a long time in coming, and officially confirms what the avocado industry discovered through much research: avocados are good for you and their fat content is “good fat.”

Dr. Nikki Ford, director of nutrition for the Hass Avocado Board (HAB), explained that what the FDA formally did was issue an interim final rule, effective immediately, allowing fresh Hass avocados, as well as all other raw fruits and vegetables, the right to use the “Dietary Saturated Fat and Cholesterol and Risk of Coronary Heart Disease” health claim. She said this allows fruits and vegetables that did not previously comply with the “low fat” definition and/or the minimum nutrient content requirement to make the claim. This new regulation is in line with the FDA’s recent guidance to redefine

the “healthy” nutrient content claim, which took into consideration the breakdown between good (unsaturated) and bad (saturated) fats.

Prior to this new guideline, the FDA determined that any product with three grams of fat or more did not qualify to make the “healthy-heart” claim.

Emiliano Escobedo, executive director of HAB, praised Ford for her efforts in helping the American Heart Association make a strong case for avocados and other raw fruits and vegetables. “Without Nikki’s work this wouldn’t have been accomplished,” he said.

He said in its promotional and advertising materials, HAB will capitalize on this new ruling by using even “stronger language” with regard to the health benefits of avocado than they have previously. Escobedo believes the claim will resonate well with consumers as he called the use of the AHA’s “Hearth Check Program” a powerful message for all consumers, and a key driver of increased consumption of healthy foods. He noted that while a significant percentage of heavy and super

heavy users of Hass avocados point to the product's health benefits as a reason for increased consumption, there are still many users that don't make that connection. He infers that a greater emphasis on the heart-healthy aspect of avocados will increase consumption.

The HAB executive said the board's future promotional efforts touting this connection also will focus considerable attention on health professionals. This group exerts significant influence on consumption habits of the general public, and while most certainly know that avocados are a healthy food, this new claim greatly reinforces that concept. Ford said many dietitians and nutritionists around the country have to follow the FDA guidelines strictly when creating menus for specific target groups. Even though they knew that avocados contained the "good fat," avocados could not always be included in those diets. Now they can.

Ford revealed that HAB has developed avocado recipes that capitalize on the claim and qualify for the American Heart Association Health Check Program, which basically gives those recipes a ringing endorsement. Escobedo added: "All fresh Hass avocados have long been recognized for their range of health and wellness benefits, and now we can more directly promote their positive role in a heart-healthy diet."

HAB's Nutrition Research Program, established in 2010,

is committed to increasing awareness and improving understanding of the unique benefits of avocados to human health and nutrition. This new guidance on heart health is in line with the latest body of research examining the relationship between avocado consumption and risk factors for cardiovascular disease, which HAB will continue to explore in the research it funds.

Escobedo said not only will HAB promote this new guideline but it also is actively encouraging the other avocado promotion organizations, as well as packers and shippers to exploit the opportunity.

Jan DeLyser, the California Avocado Commission's vice president of marketing, noted that CAC "will be participating in the American Heart Association Hass Avocado Heart Check program. At this time CAC has completed the application to license the Heart Check certification for California Hass avocados sold in the USA, and we expect the certification to be in place before peak season."

She added that preliminary plans include using the mark in specific trade and consumer programs, with potential inclusion in advertising and public relations. She added that CAC will help HAB spread this great nutrition news via social media, including its consumer-forward CaliforniaAvocado.com website. 🥑

