

Fourth of July Promotion Resonates with Consumers & Retailers

By Tim Linden

Numbers don't lie. In 2011, avocado sales were a healthy 54.5 million pounds over the Fourth of July holiday promotion period. In 2013, there was an 80 percent jump in sales with 98 million pounds during that same time frame.

"Three years ago during one of our strategic planning sessions," recalls Jan Delyser, vice president of marketing for the California Avocado Commission, "we noted an opportunity to create a key avocado consumption activity during the summer months that was similar to what the commission had done previously for the Super Bowl and Cinco de Mayo."

Delyser said it didn't take long for CAC's marketing team to focus on the many uniquely American holidays that define summer in the United States. The Memorial Day weekend has long been considered the kick off to summer with the Labor Day weekend sitting at the opposite end of the season. And right dab in the middle is the Fourth of July, resplendent with its flags, banners and ubiquitous picnics.

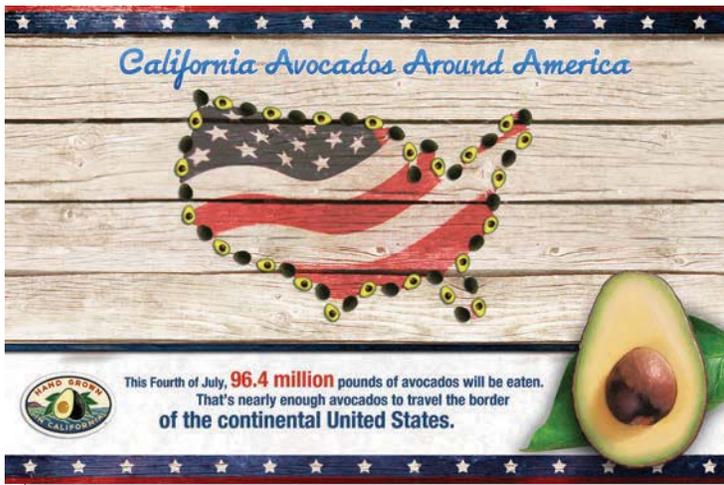
California avocados often play a role in festive gatherings, which was evident by the solid 2011 sales that preceded the Fourth of July marketing push, but there was a strong inkling that the industry could do better.

Last year, CAC launched its picnic-themed Fourth of July promotion and repeated it this year. "The results have exceeded our expectations," Delyser said.

Last year, more than 85 million pounds of California avocados were consumed during the holiday period, representing a 56 percent increase from the previous year. This year's 15 percent gain on that already-robust figure has eas-



ily propelled the Fourth of July into one of the top avocado consumption events during the year.



DeLyser said this only bodes well for the future as the Fourth of July is the peak harvesting and shipping period for California avocados and there is no reason to expect that to be any different as the future unfolds, regardless of the individual size of the crop from year to year. For example, early estimates project lighter volume for the 2014 California crop. DeLyser said that less volume could impact the length of the season, but during the May to September time period there would be ample supplies to continue to strengthen the connection between California avocados and Fourth of July consumption. "That will be the peak period for our volume and we want to continue the momentum that has been created over the past two years," DeLyser said.

The promotion itself utilized a multi-pronged approach to get the message to both the consumer and the trade. Television advertising flights in California's major markets and general market radio advertising in other core markets started in late June and ran through the holiday week. For continuity the same TV and radio spots introduced in 2012 were utilized. The creative focus used a vintage 1950s/'60s thematic to suggest that California avocados have long been a Fourth of July tradition.

In addition, new print and online advertising were developed to support the creative theme while communicating premium positioning for California avocados. The print advertising ran nationally in epicurean publications. Online display banners, recipe site sponsorships and in-grocery radio advertising were used to encourage consumers to buy California avocados for the holiday and throughout the season.

CAC also reached out to food bloggers discussing the holiday promotion. This resulted in extensive on-line coverage. CAC's social media effort included advertising on Facebook and an email promotion featuring new recipes and a recipe contest.

The Too Hot Tamales, chef partners Mary Sue Milliken and Susan Feniger, who are official spokespeople for CAC, were featured on a segment of "Good Day L.A." The two restaurateurs also hosted a media lunch at their Border Grill restaurant, featuring avocado-centric dishes perfect for summer cooking and entertaining.



On the retail promotion front, CAC provided retailers with "Have a Blast with California Avocados", a fireworks-themed booklet packed with California avocado recipes and nutrition information for their displays and consumer events. There was very good retail promotional support during the period as CAC shipped more than 1,750 California avocado display bins for the holiday, and many retailers held display contest for their produce managers. The contests were supported with retailer ads featuring the Hand Grown in California logo.

Anecdotally, retailers stepped up to the plate and hit the ball out of the park. Many retailers submitted display images that showed very creative, patriotic displays with prominent placement of California avocados. Bristol Farms Tweets mentioned California avocados and the holiday; Hy-Vee distributed recipe booklets and avocado cutters in-store; Wegmans distributed booklets leading up to the holiday...the list of participants goes on and on. 🥑