



Educational California avocado grove tour attended by a team from Albertsons provides hands on experience with the products they sell and allows attendees to experience the passion the growers feel about what they grow.

Getting in the Grove

The Value of CAC Grove Tours

Grove tours have been a part of the California Avocado Commission outreach throughout the organization's history. For the past few years, CAC has hosted grove tours for key consumer influencers and potential trade partners. The tours offer a firsthand look into how the fruit is grown and packed, as well as providing a better understanding of the distinctive qualities and consistent reliability of California avocados. As a result, participants from media, bloggers, publicists, retailers and foodservice operators more passionately encourage demand for California avocados through articles, posts, promotions and menu additions.

Grove Tour Itineraries

Tours generally start with a short bus trip to a California avocado grove where participants are greeted by the avocado grower who leads the group through the grove. The attendees are educated on the workings of an avocado ranch, the care and nurturing that goes into producing the fruit, the beneficial climate that produces the premium quality of California avocados and are (depending on the timing of the tour) given the opportunity to try their hand at picking some avocados. As an example, last year CAC hosted produce managers from Albertsons-SuperValu, H-E-B, Sam's Club and Whole Foods, providing them with first-hand California avocado experiences they can share with their shoppers.

Usually the next stop on the tour is a packinghouse where participants are greeted and suited up in safety gear. Tour groups then observe the fruit coming from the grove, through

the packing process, receiving information on the special care used to pack and pre-condition avocados while maintaining food safety standards in preparation for shipment to grocery stores and foodservice operations.

Most tours also provide an opportunity to showcase California avocados in a meal event and often with one of CAC's artisan chefs who prepare an avocado-centric meal and share their love of California avocados. When the location permits, CAC also arranges for cooking demos and contests with the tour groups. To demonstrate fresh California avocado versatility, CAC selects menus for the tour guests that showcase both simple ideas and elaborate menu concepts featuring the fruit. This activity has resulted in media coverage and also influenced new ideas used by retailer supermarket dietitians (SRDs) and foodservice operators.



Joanie Taylor from Schnucks Markets tries her hand at picking California avocados

The Media on Tour

One of the key audiences for grove tours is influencers from the media. Traditional and social media are both important on a tour. Bloggers provide immediate coverage as they post about the tour on their Facebook®, Instagram® and Twitter® channels throughout the tour. In addition, traditional media (e.g. newspapers and magazines) continue to serve as trusted resources for consumers and offer comprehensive readership on published stories.

A grove media tour last year included 17 attendees who tirelessly reported their experience leading up to and during the tour on social media platforms. Following the tour, beautiful, informative blog posts were written by all the attendees. Coverage included 92 brand-related tweets on Twitter reaching nearly 400,000 users; six Facebook posts, which resulted in 121,571 impressions; and 17 blog posts, which totaled 195,646 monthly visits to the posts online.

CAC's concerted effort to engage media by taking them on the farm to fork journey of a grove tour has paid off again and again with comprehensive coverage resulting in increased awareness of California avocados and the development of dozens of strong relationships with key media

and bloggers whose coverage of California avocados encourages consumers to seek out this premium fruit.

Foodservice on Tour

The number and quality of CAC foodservice tour attendees continues to grow and impress, with regional and national chains sending representatives to observe grove management and learn why California avocados are a good choice for their operations. Between 2011 and 2012 CAC hosted nearly two dozen different groups of restaurant representatives and also organized college and university foodservice and private restaurant chain tours.

California avocado menu placement encourages new ways to use avocados and additional California avocado sales. Among the grove tour successes from 2011-12 were programs at five foodservice chains whose representatives toured the California avocado groves, tested fresh avocado menu items and then put them on their menus:

Panera Bread Company, with 1,493 locations nationwide, showcased fresh avocados in two popular applications: Roasted Turkey and Avocado BLT Sandwich and Chopped Chicken Cobb Salad with Avocado.



Paul Pszybylski from California Pizza Kitchen on the packing house portion of a CAC tour.

In December 2012, Chili's, with more than 1,300 locations across the country, replaced processed guacamole product with fresh, house-made guacamole in all their stores after attending a CAC-facilitated grove tour.

El Pollo Loco, which has 415 locations, began its conversion to fresh avocado with a limited time offer (LTO) featuring the Poblano Burrito and the option to "add California Avocado." The fresh avocado option proved so popular that the chain followed with additional options on the permanent menu and switched out processed guacamole with

freshly made.

Shari's, with 104 northwest locations, started with three new fresh avocado menu items (avocado omelet, salad and burger LTO), then expanded to six as fresh avocados boosted sales. Every May, Shari's promotion calendar spotlights their fresh California avocado dishes.

Daphne's California Greek, introduced the California Greek Salad (with fresh California avocado) and with the salad's success, Daphne's later added fresh guacamole with Greek seasonings in a meze sampler and a wrap.

Retailers and Supermarket Registered Dietitians on Tour

CAC encourages retailers and SRDs to participate in California avocado grove tours to help them learn what makes California avocados the premium choice. Last year the Produce for Better Health foundation hosted a grove tour with nearly two dozen SRDs in attendance, and participants from two retailers in California avocado development markets, including two culinary dietitians from H-E-B (Texas) and the director of consumer affairs from Schnucks Markets (Missouri).

After the tour, SRDs shared the information they learned with other staff at retail, and included California avocados in store programs. Among the highlights were California avocados spotlighted in an in-store "Kids in the Kitchen" cooking class, and an SRD from H-E-B featured California



(L-R) Ana Domingo, Luz Armenta and Kristin Olszen (all from San Diego State University) on the National Association of College and University Food Service Pacific Region Conference Tour

avocados on two TV segments that aired on KENS-TV Great Day San Antonio, San Antonio's number one local entertainment and lifestyle program. 🥑

To view additional photos of past grove tours, check out CAC's Flickr account at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/californiaavocados/>

