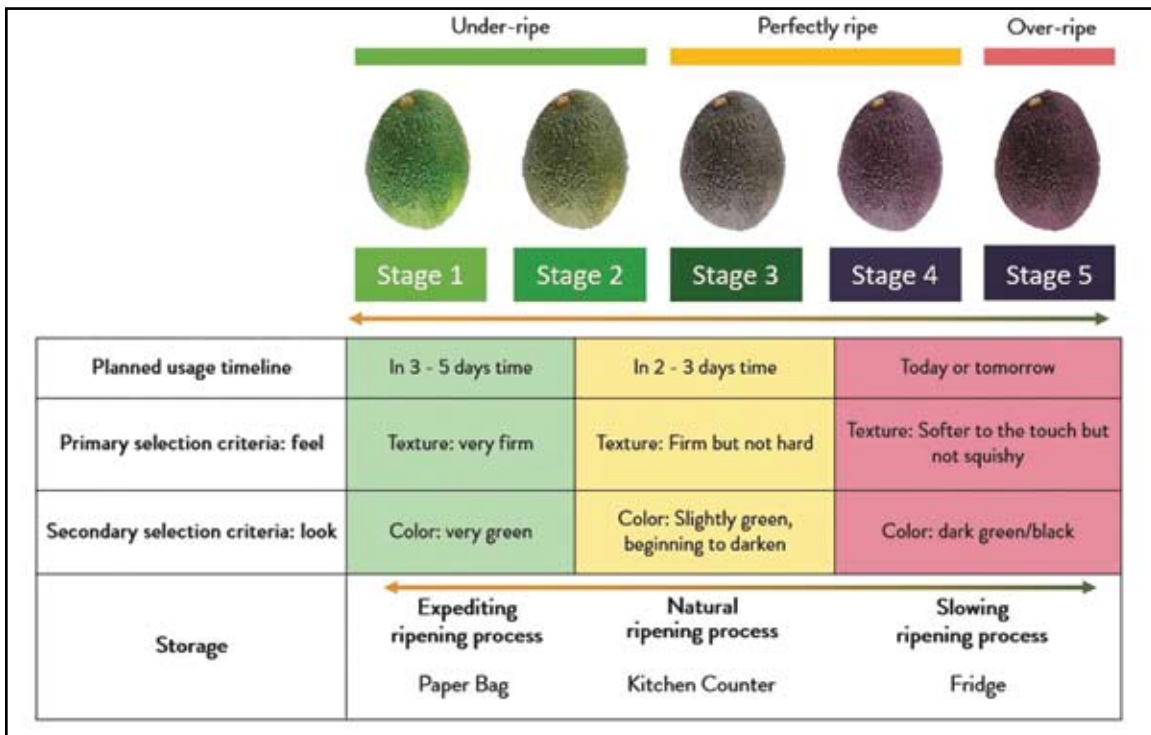


# Avocado Ripeness Study Helps Handlers and Retailers Understand Consumer Purchase Decisions and Increase Sales



**A**s a leader in the industry, the California Avocado Commission is frequently asked for information to help handlers and retailers build demand for California avocados. A key component of increasing sales of the premium fruit is understanding the behaviors behind a shopper’s decision-making process — how often they shop, what motivates their purchases of avocados and why they select certain avocados over others. To that end, the Commission conducted an Avocado Ripeness Study during the 2021 California avocado season at Tier 1 retail account locations to provide insight into shoppers’ avocado ripeness level preferences and the role those preferences play in determining shoppers’ decisions to purchase avocados.

In 2002, a quantitative consumer study conducted by CAC discovered 77% of avocado consumers planned to eat their

avocados on the same or following day of purchase. However, the Commission’s 2021 Avocado Ripeness Study, qualitative research conducted in July 2021, suggests trends are changing. Findings from the survey indicate today’s consumers are looking to purchase avocados they can enjoy the day of purchase as well as later in the week, and that their ability to determine the ripeness of the fruit — and identify a good value — are deciding factors in their purchases.

Participants indicated they shop in-store on a weekly basis and although they don’t plan every meal for the week ahead, they do consider what they might make throughout the week when creating their shopping lists. This behavior is reflected in the purchase decisions they make concerning avocados. Many of the consumers surveyed reported they were looking for avocados for same day use as well as throughout the week. Further, they noted they rarely purchase avocados for



*Retailers often merchandise the ripest avocados stacked on top of less ripe avocados to help shoppers easily find the most-ripe avocados and to protect them from potential damage. The Commission provides retailers with bins to encourage incremental displays during the California avocado season, and these can help customers showcase different ripeness levels.*

same day use only. Most shoppers reported they purchase two to five avocados at a time and will purchase more if they are planning on using more avocados in a dish than usual or if there is a good sale. Ultimately, consumers select avocados based on how and when they plan on using them.

Confident in their ability to gauge avocado ripeness, shoppers prefer bulk avocados for same day use because they can easily assess an individual piece of fruit's ripeness based on its appearance, color and firmness. In fact, every participant mentioned they squeeze avocados and use the level of firmness to determine ripeness. Although shoppers generally viewed bulk avocados as the more expensive option, if they were looking for fruit they could consume the day of purchase they preferred bulk fruit whose ripeness they could easily determine.

As for incremental avocado purchases consumers make based on what they need for the next three to five days, shoppers indicated a preference for bagged avocados because of the perceived value they offer. Half of the participants reported they would occasionally purchase bagged avocados for the cost-effectiveness and convenience. When purchasing bagged avocados, participants indicated that, if available, they would prefer a variety of ripeness levels of avocados in the bag so they could use the avocados over time.

The study also helped the Commission determine if select retail accounts are meeting shopper preferences. While conducting this study, the Commission noted that select re-

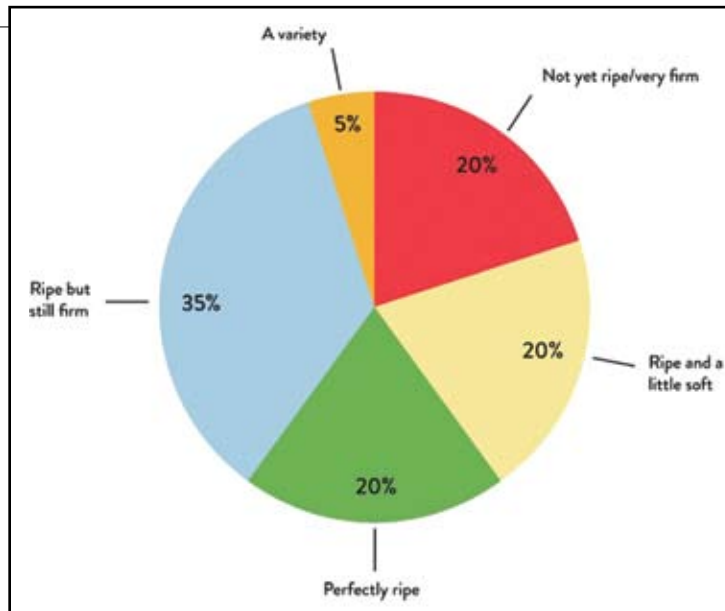


*Some retailers merchandise ripe and less ripe avocados separately when available, which may encourage incremental purchases.*

tailers are utilizing shoppers' preferences for ripeness when displaying avocados. Multiple retailers have avocado displays in their produce department that feature avocados that are "ripe now" in one section and avocados that will be "ripe in a few days" in an adjacent section. Many other retailers follow the merchandise practice of stacking the ripest avocados on top of firmer ones, helping shoppers select the ripest fruit while also protecting the softer fruit from damage.

Because consumers select avocado ripeness levels based on usage, serving occasions and the timeframe in which they will use them, the majority of respondents indicated they preferred avocados to be slightly underripe rather than overripe to ensure they have the flexibility to use the fruit over several days. This is a significant change from consumer preference in 2002. Consumers also have a strong awareness of how to adjust the ripening of avocados at home with all participants sharing similar methods for storing avocados. These methods included storing avocados in the refrigerator to slow the ripening process or expediting it by placing the fruit in a paper bag. Common reasons shoppers purchased fewer avocados than usual was if the fruit was too ripe, not ripe enough or too expensive.

Insights from this qualitative ripeness study can have an impact on sales. The Commission is sharing key findings from the study with handlers and retailers to help them better understand the important role ripeness plays in a shopper's decisions and insights concerning consumer demand for the fruit.



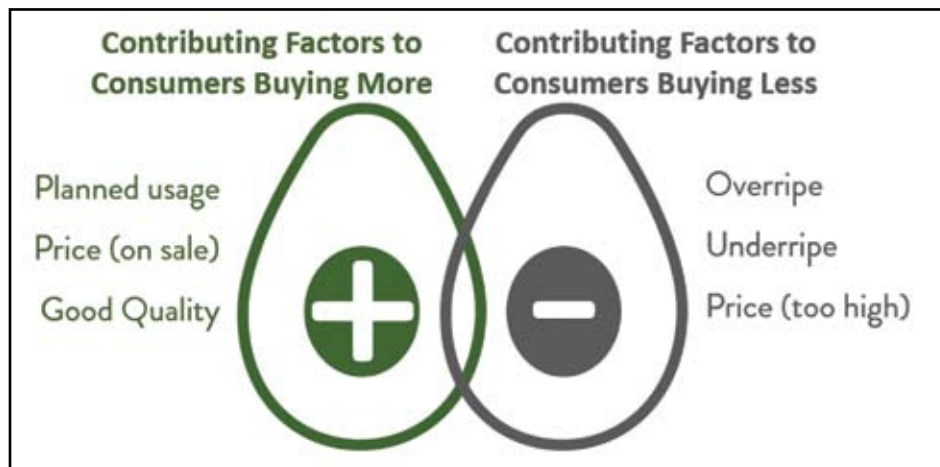
In the 2021 study shoppers indicated a range of preferences for avocado ripeness levels.

Based on the study’s findings, the Commission’s research and analytics teams made the following observations:

- Shoppers are looking for multiple levels of ripeness when selecting avocados. Retailers and marketers can benefit from this by providing a variety of ripeness levels of bulk California avocados and consider offering bagged avocados with multiple levels of ripeness per package.
- Shoppers indicated they consider country of origin and show preference for California avocados. One ripeness study participant noted, “Yes, my store usually has a good mix of both ripe and unripe, especially as they are grown and distributed in California.”
- Providing recipes and usage ideas for California avocados can help shoppers with meal planning. This tactic can

incentivize shoppers to take advantage of perfectly ripe and soon-to-be ripe avocados.

Armed with the knowledge that consumers take an active role in selecting their avocados based on ripeness — with price and value driving incremental sales — handlers can develop and enhance their ripeness programs around consumer preferences. Similarly, retailers can utilize this data to develop in-store displays that address consumers’ consideration of how, when and for what occasions they are serving avocados. Ultimately, this study strengthens the Commission’s position as a trusted partner who provides industry members with valuable information to increase demand for and awareness of California avocados. 🥑



These factors contribute to why consumers purchased more or less avocados when shopping.