



By Maura Maxwell

Wednesday 30th October 2019, 11:37 GMT

America's avocado love affair

HAB's Emiliano Escobedo explains how consumer marketing has helped make avocados America's favourite fruit.



The Hass Avocado Board (HAB) was set up in 2002 to promote the consumption of Hass Avocados in the US. Funded by domestic producers and importers, it organises promotional, research and information programmes under the supervision of the USDA to support the growth of the industry. Fruitnet catches up with its executive director Emiliano Escobedo.

Avocado demand in the US is higher than it has ever been and a big part of this is down to the marketing campaigns that the Hass Avocado Board has carried out. Can you give us an idea of how much the market has grown since the Hass Avocado Board was set up in 2002?

Emiliano Escobedo: The Hass Avocado Board's job is to make avocados America's most popular fruit – and it's working. We have invested millions of dollars in nutrition-focused marketing

Other key holidays where we are seeing year-on-year dollar growth include Easter, Memorial Day, Father's Day, Independence

campaigns that have helped make Hass avocados a part of pop culture.

Per capita consumption has increased from 1.6lbs in the 1990s to 7.1lbs in 2018, making them the envy of the produce industry. Supply in the US has risen from 700m lbs (318,000 tonnes) in 2002 to 2.56bn lbs (1.16m tonnes) in 2018, equivalent to 266 per cent growth since 2002.

How have your campaigns changed over the years?

EE: The media landscape has changed over the years and traditional media has expanded to now include digital. We have to be where our consumers are and they are obtaining information digitally, mostly through mobile.

HAB's marketing efforts consist of advertising, public relations, and social media. To engage with our health professionals and consumers on a daily

The environmental impact of avocado production has come under media scrutiny in parts of Europe. Do you see this

basis, we use popular platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and LinkedIn. In addition, our advertising has been focused a lot on online display ads. This allows us to target our audience by interest (health, food, wellness), region, and other criteria and drive traffic to our websites LoveOneToday.com and SaboreaUnoHoy.com and provide them with the information they need such as research information, free educational materials and recipes.

Super Bowl is one of the biggest days for avocado consumption in the US. At what other times of the year does demand traditionally peak?

EE: Super Bowl is not always the biggest day for avocado consumption in the US – it actually competes with Cinco de Mayo for that honour. In 2018 retail sales for Super Bowl were 64.7m units or US\$58.4m while Cinco de Mayo retail sales were 65.9m units or US\$60.2m.

of this tremendous industry and to play a positive role in its continuing expansion and growth. I enjoy working

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Day, Labour Day, Halloween and Christmas.

The HAB has invested a huge amount in research into the nutritional content of avocados, including a recent clinical study with 1,000 subjects. Can you tell me a bit more about this latest study?

EE: The Habitual diet and Avocado Trial (HAT) is a research project that aims to answer the question of whether eating an avocado every day for six months impacts belly fat and metabolism. Five universities are participating in the trial, which is currently enrolling at least 1,000 participants from across the US. This is the first large-scale interventional study investigating the effects of a single whole food on health.

The HAB has a science research pipeline of ongoing clinical studies investigating the relationship between fresh avocado consumption and weight management and risk factors for cardiovascular disease and diabetes. And, based on their nutrition and phytochemical components, early research suggests that avocados may benefit many emerging areas including skin, eye, joint and cellular health.

How important has the foodservice sector been in driving demand?

EE: Foodservice is a driving force of avocado sales in the US. This is due to several factors including year-round availability, consistent quality, increased consumer demand and the versatility of avocado that allows restaurants to serve them on several menu items throughout various meals and cooking styles beyond traditional Mexican/guacamole/salad mix. One example of this is the increased popularity of adding avocado to sandwiches, burgers and wraps as well as avocado toast.

becoming a concern in the US?

EE: Avocado demand has increased all over the world. Avocado consumption is associated with nutritional and health benefits, in part as a result of the nutritional research and marketing that HAB has engaged in over the years, which is a good thing for all of us. I don't want to speculate about where consumers' environmental awareness generally or specifically about avocados will be. That said, I do believe that not having a sustainability story to tell about your food product puts you at a disadvantage against those that do even if your product is healthy and great in many ways.

Mexico dominates the US avocado market, but the industry is getting increasingly crowded, with Peru, Colombia and many other suppliers looking to grab a slice of the lucrative US market. How do you see this playing out in the next few years?

EE: The US market is supplied by four main sources: Mexico (78.4 per cent), California (12.1 per cent), Peru (7 per cent) and Chile (2.2 per cent). The remaining 0.3 per cent is supplied by the Dominican Republic and Colombia. I don't think the market is getting increasingly crowded, Peru has not increased its volume to the US in the last three years and Colombia is still facing serious phytosanitary challenges preventing considerable volume from reaching the market. In the next few years, I expect the shares of market to remain similar, as the overall market continues to grow.

Finally, can you share some of your personal highlights of the HAB's marketing campaigns over the years?

EE: I am humbled to be a part

collaboratively with all of the producers and importers, who keep the landscape dynamic and vibrant.

HAB has worked with several health organisations such as the American Heart Association and the American Diabetes Association. The latter earned HAB several awards, namely the PR Week award for multicultural marketing campaign of the year and PRSA (Public Relations Society of America).

We consistently work with the media, trade, consumer and health professionals in order to get our research and nutrition message out which have received positive coverage in the Huffington Post, NBC, Bloomberg, CBS, Reader's Digest, NPR, USA Today and many others. In addition, HAB has worked with food and health influencers, registered dietitians, cardiologists and culinary-minded physician, to help communicate the avocado health benefits to consumers. Our marketing efforts have generated a lot of awareness of the Love One Today programme, which is an ongoing, science-based programme designed to build awareness of the health benefits of eating fresh avocados.

Through this programme, health professionals have recommended an increased avocado consumption across a variety of health conditions, such as overall healthy living, heart health, weight management, and diabetes. Our nutrition-driven campaigns are backed by leading institutions and researchers which have helped grow consumption of avocados in the US.