

TRAINING

Avocado training pays dividends

A TV appearance has crowned an expanded Asian buyer training programme for Australia's Avocado Export Company this year

TOM BICKNELL
 thomas@fruitnet.com

The Avocado Export Company (AEC), one of Australia's largest avocado exporters, ramped up its buyer training programme in Asia this year ahead of the country's Hass season.

The AEC, which trades as Avoz Exports and sells under the Auspak brand, has boosted its buyer and retail training programmes in the region to counteract the high value of the Australian dollar, according to the company's outgoing general manager Louis Grey.

"We [ran] a programme in Singapore and Malaysia which had an excellent response, and the main emphasis was for supermarkets to give customers an option of ready-to-eat and also hard fruit," Mr Grey tells Asiafruit Magazine.

The programme in Malaysia was complemented in supermarkets there by promotional materials organised by the AEC's Malaysian importer Euro Atlantic, and was capped by an appearance on national television.

Euro Atlantic's marketing manager Adrian Ung appeared on a 15-minute breakfast TV slot on Malaysian channel NTV7 on 25 April, explains Mr Grey. "Adrian had a 15 minute session talking about Australian avocados," he details. "That's a first for Australian avocados in any Asian country. That was a big scoop."

The Malaysian programme also featured the 'A Taste of Australian Avocados' seminar run by Euro Atlantic and the AEC for retailers, wholesalers and importers, and addressed by Jodie Campbell, business manager of horticulture and forestry science at Queensland's Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI). The programme received extended coverage in the Malaysian media, and attracted over 100 figures from the country's fresh produce business.

A similar training programme was organised in Singapore by the AEC and importer Freshmart, and was attended by 64 participants from NTUC FairPrice Supermarkets, 32 delegates from Giant Supermarkets, and 17 delegates from ShopNSave.



Educational material showing stages of avocado ripeness was distributed to retailers



The AEC/Euro Atlantic seminar in Malaysia

Following the training in Singapore and Malaysia, the AEC also ran a programme in Thailand and Hong Kong during May and Dubai in June.

This year the AEC's programmes have focused on retail training in how to handle Australian avocados, and how best to display and market them to consumers. The company's key message of providing both ready-to-eat conditioned fruit as well as firm fruit has proven a winner with retailers in previous years' training programmes, according to Jennie Franceschi, AEC's incoming general manager and director of the AEC's sole West Australian avocado supplier Advance Packing & Marketing Services, which trades as West N Fresh.

"We were in a Jusco supermarket in Kuala Lumpur, and the store manager told us that since they did the training and weren't throwing out the ripe fruit, their sales had increased dramatically," says Ms Franceschi.

She says the AEC is also expanding the range of avocado size specifications it exports over the Australian winter season. Several buyers in South East

Weather has patchy impact on season

The current Australian avocado season from the country's eastern states has been troubled by the stormy weather earlier in the year, and by rains disrupting picking as Asiafruit Magazine goes to press.

But the impact of the weather on production has been patchy, and only some suppliers have been affected. Orchards south of Bundaberg in Queensland seem to have been lightly touched compared to those further north, and overall volumes were looking fair going into the main eastern Hass season.

Growers in the southern tri-state area, around the Sunraysia and Riverland regions in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia, are also expecting a record crop, with the wet summer that has troubled growers in Queensland setting up ideal growing conditions further south.

Major volumes of the Hass variety are expected to hit the market in the last half of May and into July.

Asia have begun buying small fruit around count 80 and retailing them in net bags of five pieces, as well as large fruit around count 16, which are sold individually packaged with nutrition information on the wrapping, Ms Franceschi says.

"We're trying to branch out a bit on sizes, and find homes for that really little stuff in particular," she explains.