



Working with the Team in Farm-to-Fridge

BY SHARA BOHACH (CLEVELAND)

Want to know the fastest growing menu item last year? You guessed it—avocado toast! The avocado is "the overnight success story that took 40 years," according to Jan DeLyster of The California Avocado Commission.



Robert Schueller of Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Inc. moderated the session and started us off with a taste of guacamole with pomegranate arils. He then introduced us to the team responsible for getting this celebrated crop from farm-to-fridge and maximizing its sales and profit.

Working the farm: Mimi Holtz and her husband founded Rocky H Ranch, an avocado farm in Southern California. While their trees became plentiful, she said that in 1992 people didn't even know what avocados were, let alone what to do with them. She worried, "What are we going to do with all these avocados?"

Like all farm stories, there is always the delicate balance between the right weather conditions and enough water. Mimi presented to us the fascinating cycle of constant care of the

trees. She took us through the flowering, to the ripe fruit, to picking, to planting new varieties in order to be able to have year-round production. She shared all of the perils that can happen to the fruit, including not getting pollinated, lack of water, freezing, sunburn, and falling too soon. So many factors can lead to the unfortunate necessity of cutting down trees in order to preserve the year's crop. As for most farmers, it is definitely a labor of love and passion. To learn more, visit Mimi's blog mimiavocado.com.

The California Avocado: So now we have a beautiful crop ready, but before going to market, there is marketing. A certain portion of the profit of more than 2000 California avocado growers goes to The California Avocado Commission to pay for beneficial marketing and engagement in industry activities.

The commission works to promote the avocado itself—a branding effort to increase its demand. They work to differentiate California avocados with nutritional research, advertising and PR communication, public education, and branding. Over the years, in-store displays, bloggers, artisan chefs, and social media spread the word about the avocado's nutritional benefits, taste, and versatility in recipes. They



Robert Schueller of Melissa's Produce, Jan DeLyster of The California Avocado Commission, Mimi Holtz of Rocky H Ranch. Photo: Shara Bohach.

reminded us to keep things fresh and exciting by adding avocado to our salads and sandwiches, and to experiment with exciting add-ins to traditional guacamole. They even campaigned and got an emoji for our phones. They made the avocado fun, trendy, and a superfood. The results have been an amazing awareness and tremendous growth.

Sometimes the relationship can be delicate and even rocky, but the farmers and the commission continue working together towards their common goal of nurturing and creating demand for the California Avocado and all of its uniqueness. We would have to say it seems to be working. Go avocado! 🥑