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AVOCADO APPEAL IN GERMANY

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Abstract

The German market was set up for cv. Fuerte avocado fruit mostly by Agrexco in 1980-1987, but the consumption is relatively low. In the present study, retail prices were assessed in Europe and the US, and questionnaires distributed in Germany to identify consumer preferences. The results, which may lead to new marketing strategies for avocados in Germany, showed that

- 1) All people interviewed recognise avocado fruit cv. Fuerte in the shop.
- 2) Of the people interviewed, 33 % bought avocado fruit one to three times a month, 38 % bought one to three times a year and 29 % never bought an avocado fruit at all.
- 3) Avocado fruit were easily obtained at all times.
- 4) All consumers questioned bought one fruit at a time.
- 5) All consumers questioned eat their avocados at home, not in a restaurant.
- 6) Avocado dislike in Germany is based on taste which was described as "not ripe/ready to eat, tasteless, fatty, not fruity, fibrous, dry and hard".
- 7) The absence of recipes was criticised.
- 8) Older people bought considerably fewer avocado fruit.
- 9) Prices were not a selling point.
- 10) Promotion would improve avocado sales in Germany.

1. Introduction

The avocado industry in Europe with 105,000 t of fruit imported in 1992 is worth 140 million ECU (Sartorius and Grote, 1994). With an avocado consumption of merely 0. 1-0. 15 kg/person/year (table 1), consumer health awareness, large fruit consumption per capita and its strong economy, Germany may provide one of the largest market potentials (Blanke, 1991). Consumption may be increased 10-fold to levels of other European countries such as Spain or France with 1.2 kg/person/year.

This initial study was aimed to explore consumer preferences, an idea which originated during a television interview at the last World Avocado Congress in Orange County, California, USA. It concentrates on labels, varieties, ripening delay, fruit quality and prices at retail outlets as well as eating habits in both restaurants and at home. Successful completion of the first phase and collaboration with the fruit industry will lead to the development of marketing strategies, tasting panels and nutritional studies to improve consumer awareness and the appeal of avocado in Germany.

2. Materials and methods

2.1 Questionnaire and circulation

Ca. 100 people were carefully selected who are responsible for shopping in private households in the Northeast (Hannover), West (Küln/Bonn) and South of Germany (München). People working at fruit research establishments were excluded. The interviewees were separated into three age groups, since avocado is a relatively new fruit which was introduced mostly by Agrexco in Europe in 1980-1987 and the younger generations were expected to be more enthusiastic to it. To cater for the largely avocado-ignorant, the questionnaire contained multiple choices for only 5 simple questions and ample space for personal comments.

2.2 Prices

Avocado retail prices were examined in August and September 1995 in Bordeaux for France, in Bristol for the UK, in Bonn for Germany and Riverside/Los Angeles for the US. Prices were for the best quality and large (over 280 g) fruit of usually cv. 'Hass', except for cv. 'Fuerte' in Germany. Prices were converted using local exchange rates to avoid artificial prices due to short-term exchange fluctuations, i.e. weak £ or \$.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Price ranges in Europe

Avocado prices in Germany and Britain were commensurate in September 1995, but higher than e.g. in the US (table 1). The by far largest avocado consumption in France was associated with slightly cheaper prices (table 1) which, in turn, may be a result of the larger, more economic, shipments.

3.2 Selection of interview partners

The interview partners were selected on the grounds of being responsible for the shopping. The social profile comprised a female: male ratio of 5-6: 1, a ca. 1: 1: 1 ratio for the three selected age groups and a ca. 1: 1 ratio for single or multiple households (table 2) which seemed a realistic choice for German society.

3.3 Ten rules of consumer preferences in Germany

- 1) All people interviewed recognise an avocado fruit (cv. Fuerte) in the shop.
- 2) Consumers interviewed claimed to eat their avocado fruit exclusively at home (Table 3), i.e. not in a restaurant. This answer may indicate that
 - a) the interviewees did not recognise sliced or processed avocado fruit in a meal or
 - b) restaurant menus in Germany are avocado fruit deficient.
- 3) Avocado fruit were easily obtained at all times.
- 4) Of the people interviewed, 33 % bought avocado fruit one to three times a month, 38% bought one to three times a year and 29 % never bought an avocado fruit at all
- 5) Consumers questioned bought one fruit at a time.
- 6) The German consumer dislikes avocado fruit, because the available fruit were classified as "not ripe/ready to eat, tasteless, mealy, not fruity, fibrous, dry and hard"
- 7) The absence of recipes was mentioned as one reason for not buying avocado fruit.
- 8) Only 7 % of interviewed people above the age of 40 bought avocado fruit.
- 9) The retail price was not a selling point.

10) Promotion and recipes could improve the sales of avocado fruit in Germany.

3.4 Problems with recipes and corporate logo

Since the absence of avocado recipes was criticised in the first answers, space for individual recipes was then included in the questionnaire. The recipes given in the questionnaire were half a fruit with (1) lemon/shrimps, (2) in a salad or (3) guacamole. Recipes developed by the German consumer were (1) noodles with avocado, vegetables with avocado cream, (2) creamy avocado soup, (3) chopped avocado with tomato ketchup, chile and salt, and (4) quark and honey with avocado and lemon. Some customers only bought avocado fruit, if they exhibited a label. They recognised the Carmel logo, but without association with a particular country.

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Table 1 - Avocado consumption and prices* in September 1995

Country	Consum.[kg/year]	DM	£	FF	\$
France	1.2	DM 1.28-1.60	£ 0.57-0.71	FF 4-5	\$ 0.9-1.2
Great Britain	0.2-0.3	DM 1.76-1.83	£ 0.76-0.79	FF 5-6	\$ 1.2-1.3
Germany	0.1-0.2	DM 1.69-1.99	£ 0.73-0.85	FF 5-6	\$ 1.2-1.5
USA					\$ 0.8-1.0

* retail prices for a large fruit (>280 g), best quality in a local high street shop

Table 2 - Profile of interviewees in September 1995

Female: male percentage	:	85 : 15	%
Age group < 30, 30-40, > 40	:	31: 38: 31	%
Responsible for single : multiple household:		54 : 46	%

Table 3a - Consumption of avocado fruit in Germany by age group

Age under 30 (18 to 29)	:	6-12 times per year
Age between 30 and 40 inclusive	:	2-36 times per year
Age above 40 (41+)	:	1-2 times per year or never

Table 3b - Purchase frequency in the past and present
1986 (Shoham) **1995** (Blanke)

3 times a month		8 %
2 times a month	3 %	12 %
1 times a month		13 %
3 times a year		8 %
2 times a year	19 %	15 %
1 times a year	9 %	15 %
n e v e r	69 %	29 %
total current buyers:	22 %	71 %

Table 3c - Comments on avocado fruit quality in the past and present
1986 (Shoham) **1995** (Blanke)

1 not ripe/ready to eat	71 %	21 %
2 no taste	33 %	29 %
3 not fruity	63 %	14 %
4 too fatty	47 %	7 %
5 mealy	-	7 %
6 too fibrous	-	14 %
7 too firm/hard	-	14 %
8 too dry	-	7 %
9 too expensive	62 %	7 %
10 difficult to obtain	36 %	0 %