



(Photo by Kelly Sikkema on Unsplash)

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Guac's going on? The rise and pitfalls of the avocado

For Colin Wells, his usual Sunday morning brunch of smashed avocado on toast with a perfectly poached egg on top always comes with a knowing smile. As the global head of perishables at Panalpina, he is responsible for

ensuring that the freshest avocados are shipped from origin countries to the rest of the world, and that they reach the consumer in pristine condition.

“Honestly, our job is the easy bit,” says Colin. “All we have to do is ship the fruits at a constant temperature, depending on which variety we are shipping. It can get complex getting the logistics right of course, but it’s the farmers who have the really tough task.”

He’s right. As you wrestle with the stone and skin at home they seem a hardy fruit, but during the growing cycle they are more delicate than you might think. They are a thirsty crop, requiring plenty of water, and they don’t like the cold. A sudden freeze and a farmer can be looking at financial ruin. It’s little wonder, then, that they are grown in the warmer climes of producing countries such as Mexico, Chile, Peru, the US, and Australia.

However, too much sun can get them sunburnt and rain is one of many reasons why black spots occur, rendering the avocados unsuitable for sale as a whole fruit (farmers will turn these ones into deli-ready guacamole). Add to the mix the fact that a flash flood can not only ruin a harvest but also potentially kill the trees, and you have a fruit that is absolutely dependent on the right climate.

The fact that avocado trees might only start to produce saleable fruit after a decade or so also means farmers taking long-term gambles, though gambles which look like good bets right now. Demand for the fruit continues to grow, in the US, consumption of avocados rose from less than 1kg per person to over 3kg per person between 2000 and 2015 – that equates to over 4 billion avocados per year in the US alone.

Similarly, China has seen an explosion in popularity of the fruit, with imports from Latin American countries such as Mexico and Chile [growing by about 250 per cent a year](#), leaping from just 154 tons in 2012 to more than 25,000 tons in 2016.

But a global explosion of popularity, coupled with the fruit needing stable growing conditions, has seen spikes in price of the humble avocado. In 2016 for example, a case of 48 avocados in the US jumped from US\$45 to US\$100, a hike that was passed on to consumers.

“But we didn’t really see demand drop,” says Colin. Indeed, demand was such during that 2016 price hike that the American media labeled it ‘the great guac crisis’.

With evidence that avocados were being eaten by megafauna over 10,000 years ago, will we still have avocados in another 10,000 years? “I hope so,” concludes Colin, “or at least as long as I’m eating Sunday brunch.”

Interested to see how avocados are grown? This is a great little video from True Food:



[Watch video on YouTube here](#)

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