



**Swift. Appropriate.
Trust. Safety.
Compassion.
Support.**



Members Helping Members™

Commodity and Regional Marketing: Promoting Produce from Crisis to Recovery

We asked our promotion experts – commodity boards, regional grower associations, and state departments of agriculture – how they adapted their promotion work during the COVID-19 crisis and how they see their work changing as we move into recovery. Here’s what they had to say.

Marketing/Communication: Swift Shifts, Digital, Appropriateness

- During crises, you need swift but appropriate actions. You have hours, not days, to make decisions and implement new strategies. Be creative: Unprecedented problems require unprecedented solutions. Adjust marketing programs on the fly (e.g., quickly moving product normally packaged and designated for the foodservice channel to be redirected into the retail channel).
- Potatoes South Africa’s digital assets provided intelligence that would otherwise have been missed. We have learnt to engage more, listen more and most of all show compassion. We have been strong on the organisation’s Instagram, Twitter and Facebook pages, all of which have grown considerably. Our Facebook page alone grew by 123%, our communication messages reached 196,000 representing an 80% increase

Commodity and Regional Marketing Contributors



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- all with strong engagement (200% growth). We also launched a radio advertising campaign on food security, fresh-nutritious and easily accessible potatoes, comply with COVID-19 regulations and Safe South Africa.
- Double and triple down on digital communications via social media, organization website and electronic newsletters. If your e-newsletter is normally monthly, begin issuing it weekly with specific solutions to consumer concerns (e.g., storage, handling, prep, recipes). Maintain an active Q&A on your website where customers and consumers can get accurate and direct answers to their questions.
- When we got “safer at home” requirements, the management and marketing team immediately tweaked our marketing plans. We moved outdoor advertising timing to later in the summer since people would not be out driving. And we increased media spending in streaming video to be certain we are placing our ads and marketing messages where our target audience is spending time.
- Adjust your normal communications in light of a world where many have lost jobs and gained time in home. Be sure your messaging is not tone deaf. We realigned resources and evaluated our strategies and activities given current circumstances. Specifically:
 - Versatility: An April-June national flight of our YouTube preroll commercial that focuses on watermelon’s healthy/happy attributes, and showcases versatility.
 - Kids/family in the kitchen: A paid media feature on watermelon recipes for kids: all recipes from a single watermelon, engaging kids and getting everyone involved in the kitchen for fun.
 - Health: We amplified our posts on health. While our oversight would not allow any immunity-related posts, we received great engagement with simple Vitamin C and hydration, two of the simplest health benefits that resonate with consumers.
 - Fitness: Watermelons as workout equipment. For example, my favorite was the watermelon at-home workout with The Fit Fork on our Instagram Live, which used watermelons like kettlebell weights.
- Keep the entire distribution chain informed. Each link usually is only focused on its own issues. Help them see how better-coordinated solutions will help everyone meet end-consumer expectations. Daily personal communication is critical, along with weekly more formal written summaries.
- The CEO should be available to the media and steer the issues in ways that help your industry. Consumers are more likely to trust the brand the CEO represents if they can trust what the CEO is saying. This is no time for the CEO to take a ‘no comment’ approach to media inquiries.

Consumer Considerations:

More Cooking, At-Home Time, Trust/Safety

- Consumers are looking for brands they can trust to be high quality and safe for their families. They are shopping less but buying more each visit, so quality becomes even more important. They can’t waste money when family resources are tight. This brand imagery can be lost overnight if your actions are not carefully thought through.
- Consumers are cooking at home more. We have amplified our efforts to direct consumers to our 400+ shoppable recipes through organic and paid social media, focusing content on recipes that are easy to make at home, promoting pears for online shoppers, and helping consumers who are looking for longer-lasting produce items.
- We see a focus on comfort produce – not high-end items – and we’ll promote the basics because homemakers may be making stews, casseroles, soups, which may also help the food budget stretch further.
- One of our first pivots on our social channels was to provide supportive information for consumers who were cooking at home, including how to select, care, store and prepare fresh California avocados.

- We believe the trend of spending more time at home with the family and more importantly, cooking at home is here to stay – so we will focus on educating consumers on how to cook with local ingredients. We are also focusing our consumer campaigns on the safety and importance of consuming Certified SC products and using recipes and activities that incorporate local fruits, vegetables, seafood, dairy and protein.
- Consumers shop at the store less frequently and that has cut into impulse buys, especially fruit. We have worked with retailers and commodity groups/associations to promote their programs – buying from small farms and creating boxes for delivery to non-profits. Retailers are, for the most part, not relying on government to help them source products.
- People are very aware right now of where their food comes from. We are seeing changes in patterns – wholesalers and farmers are selling direct to the public, so people are buying CSAs and engaging directly with farmers, really rewiring their whole food acquisition pattern. People want to support their communities.

Grower Considerations:

Ops Changes, Uncertainties, Support

- Apple shippers adapted to retail needs by packing larger quantities of bagged fruit to meet the greater demand for 'grab and checkout' shopping.
- Certified SC Grown, in partnership with the nonprofit, SC Advocates for Agriculture, is launching the Farmers to Food Banks Program. This will provide funds for distributors to buy products from South Carolina farmers and donate that food to food banks and pantries.
- Growers made immediate packing/operations modifications to comply with social distancing and safeguard the health of employees and businesses.
- One unexpected effect is that the livestock industry that relied on food waste from the restaurants and grocers have had to purchase grain/feed that is expensive and not in big supply in Hawaii and we have linked the farmers with off-grade products and subsidized grain purchases to adapt.
- Commission efforts to drive demand and sales are essential. The California avocado industry continues to harvest ahead of projection and we must keep demand high for avocados.
- Part of our role is identifying market trends and educating the growers on potential opportunities. So during this time change, we are exploring new ways to promote Certified SC products at retail, including using grocery ecommerce sites to market local products and strengthening our in-store merchandising program.
- The growing importance of fresh fruits and vegetables means that we will provide what the farmers need – seeds! We'll continue to emphasize education, resources and networking in the process.

Technology Considerations:

Adapting from Face-To-Face to Digital Connections

- We have had to promote the activities of the associations – our Farm to Car program is an example. We are using our 'rolodex' to link farmers, ranchers and producers with public agencies such as prisons, hospitals and schools (grab-and-go boxes). We expect this collaboration will develop new relationships that may remain going forward.
- After canceling our annual Consumer Connection Conference, PBH shifted all our attention to digital and social marketing to connect the industry with consumers. Between PBH and its network of influencers, we reach millions of consumers every day. Though that strategy has not changed, the themes, content amount/frequency that we are pushing through our digital/

social ecosystem continues to be dynamic. And, we will explore virtual opportunities to connect PBH members and the produce industry with our network of influencers.

Compassion and Relationships

- Remain appreciative and proud of those serving on the frontlines in healthcare, agriculture, retail and foodservice.
- Thank everyone in the supply chain, farmers, shippers, produce buyers and merchandisers, checkout folks, etc. Everyone is working overtime in stressful conditions. Make sure they understand you are there to provide solutions and support all along the way.
- We are fortunate, people need to eat and love to eat. Let's help them find the Joy of Fresh in produce and floral.
- Having strong relations with all partners along the distribution chain is essential to assure everyone you aren't going to make matters worse with your solutions. The more you can rapidly solve their problems, the more you build trust to continue to be a key factor in helping address future issues. Produce buyers will long remember whether or not you were essential in helping solve their challenges.

Moving into Recovery

Marketers cited two key themes for the future: Build on what we've learned rather than trying to go back to the way things were. And be flexible as you remain true to marketing basics.

- The best thing our industry can do is not imagine going back to the way things were but to learn from this experience and build upon it.
- Consumers are getting tired of and frustrated by terms anchoring them to a crisis mentality. Avoid sensitive terms like 'the new normal.' Avoid clichés: We may all be experiencing the same situation, but we are not 'all in the same boat' as the crisis has hit some people much harder than others. Be caring, keep caring and don't try to make your 'caring' a marketing play.
- Greater reliance on e-commerce (from marketing, to virtual matchmaking between supply and demand, to distribution) and having the right tools to access webinars and Zoom meetings – necessary for teleworking and more.
- We leaned into the digital space for branding and that will continue to grow. Just as we compete for shelf space (or in today's climate—the curb or back of an Instacart driver's car) marketers will create a new way for messaging online. Consumers have become accustomed to selecting fresh produce online and having it delivered, arranging for curbside pickup, or visiting their favorite grocer with safety first on their mind.
- Produce marketers need to continue to be flexible, nimble and creative with their marketing plans.
- Potatoes are affordable and fresh year-round, and the pressure on consumers' disposable income will benefit potatoes. It is critical that we communicate with consumers constantly. Foodservice closures have severely disrupted the value chain for processed potatoes, requiring expensive storage and potential impact on future contracts. This supply impact will be short-to medium-term, but the financial implications are significant. Informal trade was at first restricted, but they were allowed to trade later on under strict conditions.
- As we approach the summer season, we will continue many programs, like our watermelon recipe challenge, health benefit messaging, safe food handling and sharing joy/happiness.
- Our members will be looking for support in moving product through retail – and hopefully through foodservice one day soon. We are identifying ways to connect our members through retail promotions, as well as additional amplified digital content solutions to encourage and inspire consumers to buy more produce.