

RETAIL SALES (GREEN AND RIPENED FRUIT)

06 A GUIDE TO
BEST PRACTICES



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Fruit may arrive at retail sales points directly from packing houses, or via distribution centers, which may or may not be operated by the retail sales point. The fruit may be pre-ripened or in a hard state. All of these factors need to be taken into account in the management of the fruit at the retail point.

The retail sales point is where considerable damage to fruit and therefore quality loss can be caused if not managed correctly.

ORDERING AND INVENTORY CONTROL

Management needs to accept that avocado fruit is a perishable product that will soften rapidly once it starts to ripen, and will have an approximately 4 to 7 day shelf life at ambient store temperature. Ripening of hard fruit will be accelerated when placed in display bins of ripening fruits due to ethylene presence. Stock control of fruit in display bins and in the store overall, therefore needs to be tightly managed to ensure that fruit is sold before becoming over-ripe.

STORAGE OF FRUIT AFTER ARRIVAL

Inventory control should ensure that a minimum amount of fruit will need to be stored before display and sale.

On arrival, fruit needs to be checked for quality compliance. Fruit origin should be known, in compliance with traceability requirements. Therefore, should there be any defects, the original packer can be informed if there is any non-compliance. This, together with observations from the store display and any customer feedback, will complete the quality management tracking system.

On arrival, fruit should be stored at low temperature. The temperature should be as close as possible to arrival temperature, or as stated on the delivery manifest. Where fruit from multiple origins is received, it is probable that the storage temperature requirements are different. This is especially important where very mature late season (high dry matter fruit) is received at the same time as less mature early season (low dry matter fruit) from a different origin. Multiple temperature storage rooms should therefore be used where required.

Do not store fruit in close proximity to high ethylene producing products such as apples, and bananas.

Take care to select the correct fruit for moving out of cold rooms to retail display, taking into account fruit age and whether fruit has been primed to ripen with ethylene.

Storage cold rooms should be vented with fresh air on a regular basis to prevent excessive build-up of CO₂ and ethylene. High levels of either of these gasses will adversely affect the ripening and quality of avocados and other fruit products stored in the facilities.

FRUIT DISPLAY

The fruit display is another area of considerable concern in quality management.

Soft or softening fruit will bruise easily, become damaged and post-harvest disorders such as pathogenic rots (anthracnose and stem end rots) will be accelerated by the damage. Over-ripe fruit in the display will also be of concern for the same reason. Consumer aversion to purchase certain fruit such as those showing some blemish or lenticel and minor cold damage can affect both price and sales rate, which in turn may affect returns on other sound fruit. There are three primary reasons for problems related to fruit quality occurring at the point of sale:

- Fruit stacked too high, with lower fruit becoming damaged, especially once soft
- Large stacks of fruit with a mix of ripe and unripe fruit. The ripe fruit can become over-ripe within the stack if not carefully sorted by store staff
- Consumers testing fruit for ripeness resulting in extensive bruising



The solution to these problems has been found to be simple.

- When placing fruit into the display, either leave in the boxes it was shipped in, or place fruit carefully into the display. Do not tip fruit from the box into the display, as this will damage fruit
- Ensure that the display does not have more than 2 layers of fruit
- Do not place too much fruit into a display. Consider the display size in relation to the amount of fruit that can reasonably be sold before it becomes too ripe (a few days)
- Store staff sort the fruit daily to ensure the ripest (normally darkest colored) fruit is moved to a position the consumer will see first, and can easily reach. This means placing these fruit on top and towards the front of the display
- Manage the display by removing any over ripe or clearly damaged or decaying fruit
- Separation of riper fruit into a ripe and ready section can be useful
- Ripe and ready fruit, especially if pre-packed in consumer packs, can be displayed in chilled sections to prolong shelf life
- Consumer information and education displays to enable and encourage consumers to select fruit without checking for ripeness and thus bruising it



At check-out, train staff to try and ensure fruit is not packed under other heavy or bulky items which will result in damage which the consumer will later experience.

STAFF AND CUSTOMER EDUCATION

The final point of distribution, that being the retail store, and in-home handling after sale are the least controlled portions of the entire distribution chain, but nevertheless can have very significant effects on fruit quality and therefore consumer experience, which ultimately affects both future sales and price.

The solution to many of the problems experienced, apart from those outlined above, is training and information. In store personnel need to be adequately trained to handle fruit from the time of arrival at store and through the entire storage, display and sales processes, with the aim of supplying fruit of good eating quality to the consumer. Staff need to understand the ripening process of the fruit, and thereafter how to handle it correctly.

Clear, fast and easy to read or see, instructions to consumers need to be instituted to ensure that not only do they not damage fruit in the displays, but that they have greater appreciation for slightly externally damaged fruit and know how to treat fruit once purchasing it.



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- Ensure careful inventory control
- Check quality on arrival and report defects to original packer
- Store at appropriate low temperature in cold rooms which are vented on a regular basis. Store away from fruits known to produce ethylene
- Select fruit for display carefully taking into account fruit age and previous treatment
- Place fruit into displays carefully to avoid bruising, and use no more than 2 layers of fruit or original packaging
- Manage displays to ensure easy selection of ripe fruit by customers and removal of over-ripe or decaying fruit
- Assist consumers to be aware of how to select and handle fruit without damaging it through customer education
- Train store staff in correct handling and management of avocado fruit