Avocado farming

**Misconceptions**
- Growing avocados is a complicated and time-consuming business due to the high sensitivity of the avocado plant and roots.
- Only large-scale farmers can provide resources to counterbalance poor harvests and develop new technologies, which are necessary to cultivate a commercially-viable volume of avocados.

**Reality**
- Avocado growing and exporting has become a significant business factor for countries such as Peru, South Africa and Mexico, generating employment and economic security. It not only stimulates the labour market but also fosters technical knowledge among farmers and their employees.
- In the main avocado-growing regions of South Africa, large producers and exporters not only pay their workers fairly, but they also help raise living standards by providing schooling and other educational resources, housing, wellness and transport services and other community-related benefits.
- Peru, as one of the founding members of the WAO, works together with the World Bank on a programme dedicated to educating communities on how to harvest avocados more sustainably. It is a long-term project with the stated objective of enhancing educative processes to foster sustainable cultivation of the avocado while offering financial support.

**Water Usage**

**Most common assumption**
- Avocados need large volumes of water to be cultivated, between 70 and 300 litres per fruit. This can become a challenge during dry periods.

**Reality**
- Avocados adapt to different climatic zones across the world and are widely grown in high rainfall areas where no irrigation is used, for example in Colombia and Mexico. Most commercial avocado orchards in South Africa are irrigated, but water-efficient irrigation systems are used. Even in desert zones avocados are increasingly irrigated with ‘smart’ water application systems. Israel uses desalinated water and Peru irrigates their avocados with water captured from the snow-capped Andes.
- Per hectare, avocados use less water than citrus fruits and bananas. Avocados have a lower yield per hectare than these crops so per kilogram it may seem higher.
To be approved for sale in European supermarkets, the avocado needs to have been sprayed with pesticide, which then sticks to the fruit and affects the flesh when the avocado is cut.

The avocado is one of the cleanest fruits on the market with regards to pesticide use. According to The Environmental Working Group’s latest analysis of more than 35,000 samples of produce, the avocado ranked second lowest in pesticide residues. This is due to the fact that firstly, very low levels of pesticides are used in cultivating the avocado and, secondly, farmers have become more scientific in their approach to limiting the use of pesticides, focusing on the introduction of natural remedies to control pests.

The real water killers are not avocados, but meat consumption and food waste as outlined by the renowned water research report of the University of Twente and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

To clarify: on average, a European consumes four avocados per year. The virtual water footprint of these four avocados equates to the consumption of approximately 1,000 litres. Distributed over a year, each individual consumes an additional 3 litres per day. This may seem like a lot until you realise that, for a single cup of coffee, 140 litres of virtual water have been spent. Fancy a chocolate bar with your coffee? If so, you consume the equivalent of another 1,700 litres of virtual water. Why not then stick to the avocado and its impressive array of vitamins, minerals and healthy fats?

Avocados have a complex supply chain that is only ecologically responsible if the fruit is sourced from a neighbouring or nearby country. Sourcing from origins on other continents offsets the ecological and health image of the fruit.

Most of the WAO farmers pack in accordance with the instructions of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN – that is the Code of Practice for the Packaging and Transport of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables. This Code of Practice ensures that produce quality is maintained during transportation and marketing.

The WAO makes sure that printing or labelling of fruit is achieved with non-toxic ink or glue.

Innovations are being trialled by UK and European retailers where labels and use-by dates are lasered directly onto the skin of the avocados, to save energy by replacing traditional food stickers.

To a great extent, the WAO is working with GlobalGAP (Good Agricultural Practice) certified farmers. They strictly follow farming guidelines set by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. GlobalGAP certification aims at preventing foodborne diseases and at enhancing the safety of food with strict third-party controls.

Water Consumption during Production Process:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fruit</th>
<th>Virtual Water Footprint (l/kg)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beef</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomato</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avocado</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Pesticides being used on avocados

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