

Smashing it

More than 20,000 avocado lovers in New Zealand buy their fruit via an online delivery service which is gaining a significant following in the Southern Lakes.



The Avo Tree supplies Hass avocados from its base in the Bay of Plenty and the seed of what has become a highly successful company began in founder Thorley Robbins' family garage.

Since his mid-teens Thorley had sold fruit on the side of the road for extra income and after finishing university, he returned home to Katikati with the idea of setting up a website to sell avocados grown on his family's lifestyle block.

"I was frustrated that avocados bought from supermarkets didn't have the same flavour as the ones coming off our trees and this inspired the business."

Within two weeks Thorley had sold the entire crop which left him urgently looking for other local suppliers.

"We live in one of the country's best regions for horticulture so I started knocking on doors explaining to people about our business model and asking if they'd like to be involved."

Thorley now works with more than 50 local growers from small backyard orchards to a few larger farms. He says building relationships with a variety of suppliers means he can buy selectively at the best time.



"Avocados can stay green on the trees for up to eight months and only ripen once they're picked so we always leave smaller fruit to develop and tell growers when we'll be back."

"Virtually all avos, whether they're destined for the supermarket or road-side stalls, come off the tree in perfect condition. The problem is you never know how good the fruit will be to eat until you slice it open. This is all down to how it's managed after picking," he says.

"A lot of supermarket avocados go in and out of cool storage which can cause the fruit to start breaking down. Our fruit is never chilled and goes direct to large, airy depots before being collected and carefully delivered by CourierPost."

Over the last four years The Avo Tree's loyal customer base has grown to more than 20,000 with many ordering regularly via subscription. The company has delivered more than 140,000 boxes around New Zealand from Stewart Island to Great Barrier Island.

Thorley says the service is proving particularly popular in the lower South Island where consumers don't typically have access to fresh and affordable side-of-the-road avocados.

"We give customers' confidence that our fruit will be of a consistently high quality - creamy with a rich and buttery flavour packed with 'good fat'. And because we only pick to order there's virtually no waste."

Orders can be made via The Avo Tree's website where there are also ripening tips, a gift store selling skincare products and a recipe section with a range of innovative ways to prepare and eat avocados.

"Our mantra is from paddock to plate, fresher is impossible," says Thorley. "We stand by this and the feedback we receive from customers throughout New Zealand reinforces we are meeting expectations."



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