



DISTRIBUTION CENTERS

04 A GUIDE TO
BEST PRACTICES

DISTRIBUTION CENTERS

Distribution centers need to take responsibility for holding the fruit until it is transported to retail outlets (in the case of retail store distribution centers) or for onward distribution to pre-packers, ripeners, food service processors, retail stores or retail store distribution centers. However, this variety of downstream customers does not materially affect the principles of avocado fruit storage for quality maintenance.

On arrival, fruit should be off-loaded as fast as possible, and with the minimum chance of cold chain breakage. Pallets should be moved into the center and into cold rooms as fast as possible.

Temperature logs of the trucks should be checked and any discrepancies with required temperature protocols noted.

In the case of arrival at the first distribution center after the packing house or arrival of imported fruit, if downloadable only (non-tracking) temperature devices are present in one or more pallets of the arriving consignment, remove them and download the information. If trackable devices are present, they can be removed at this point, or left to continue tracking. See instructions on documentation from the packing house.

Where the distribution center is not the first point of arrival a temperature logging device may or may not be present. If present, remove and download or if tracking, leave to continue tracking.

Whether a temperature tracking temperature device is present or not, fruit pulp temperature measurements need to be taken on a random selection of pallets immediately after off-loading. At least two pallets of every 20 should be checked. Preferably, a pallet at the truck door end as well as one at the front should be chosen. If either is out of protocol by more than 1°F, then every pallet unloaded should be checked.

Information concerning every consignment as described in the bill of lading (not only those deemed out of protocol) should be submitted back to the packing house or fruit origin (if imported fruit).

Storage of fruit should be at a temperature as close as possible to the stated shipment temperature.

The variation from shipping temperature should not exceed 2°F higher than shipping temperature or 4°F lower in a static cooling holding store. Unless specifically requested by the original shipper, distribution centers should not be considered ripening centers or places where fruit may start ripening. Therefore, temperatures should be as stated for shipping, and not increased. In fact, if fruit are stored at temperatures which allow ripening to start, but below ambient ripening temperature, there is a high potential for the development of physiological and pathological disorders.

It is essential that temperature breaks are kept to a minimum, and therefore unloaded fruit should be placed in the appropriate cold rooms as soon as possible.

If fruit quality evaluations are done at the distribution center, results should be sent to the original packing house or shipper, where all quality co-ordination is done. Results should be communicated electronically, as soon as possible.

QUALITY EVALUATION UPON ARRIVAL TO DISTRIBUTION CENTER



Avocado fruit should preferably not be stored with any other commodity. If this is unavoidable, ensure that the fruit is not stored with or placed in proximity to any products known to produce ethylene. Of note are apples, peaches, nectarines, bananas, melons and kiwifruit.

Regularly check the cold rooms for gas build up, particularly ethylene. Ethylene should be non-detectable. Regular venting of fresh air should also be undertaken to prevent a buildup of gasses, especially ethylene. Venting with fresh air should be done for 15 to 20 minutes with fans running. This may be needed at intervals between 2 and 6 days. Approximately 3 to 4 air volume changes may be needed to ensure gas build-up is eliminated.

To prevent rapid build-up of gasses as described, no internal combustion engine equipment should be operated in or near cold rooms. Trucks delivering fruit or at the loading docks to be unloaded should not be running when the loading dock doors are opened, and sufficient time after truck engines are stopped should be allowed for gas emissions to disperse.

To maintain good sanitation, all cold rooms should be cleaned on a regular basis with a sanitizing agent.

To ensure appropriate handling of avocado fruit, all operational staff at distribution centers should be adequately trained through the attendance of industry approved training, to fully understand the product and the handling requirements to ensure the best possible retention of fruit quality.

DISTRIBUTION CENTERS

- Off load fruit from trucks as fast as possible
- Check truck temperature logs against written shipping instructions and note conformity or lack thereof
- Check pulp temperature of fruit from at least 2 pallets per 20 pallets
- Remove temperature data loggers if required and download. Leave tracking recorders in place unless requested to remove
- Place fruit in cold storage rooms without delay. Use rooms with temperatures as close to shipping temperature as possible
- Do not store with other commodities if possible, and not ethylene producing products
- Ensure the cold rooms are regularly checked for gas build up (ethylene should be non-detected), and vent rooms with fresh air regularly
- Electronically remit fruit temperature and quality information of every consignment to original packing house or shipper without delay
- Ensure that all operational staff receive appropriate industry approved training