

Powder to the people

Meet the enterprising Far North avocado growers who have given everyone's favourite toast topping an extreme makeover.

STORY JOSIE STEENHART

ONE OF THE country's largest avocado growers, Ovāvo, recently began to consider a future for the fruit beyond its fresh form. "A few years ago we started thinking about how to upcycle our "process" grade fruit – about five to 10 percent of our crop that can't be sold for aesthetic reasons, which is an industry-wide problem," says Andrew Vivian, general manager and "avocado innovator". "We teamed up with the smart minds at Callaghan Innovation, with co-funding help from the Bioresource Processing Alliance. Ovāvo freeze-dried avocado powder is the first step in our journey to harness the goodness of avocado as an ingredient people will want."

Avocado butter, avo-infused snack bars and desserts are some of the potentially delicious and nutritious ideas being talked about. "We've been working with the Food Technology team at Massey University to develop a number of products for Ovāvo, including muesli bars, tortilla wraps, hummus, dips, chocolate truffles, breakfast drinks and ice cream," says Vivian.

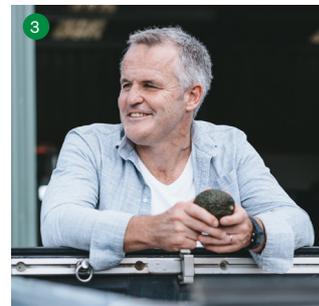
And it's not just about flavour and nutrition. "In addition to the numerous health benefits of avocado, we're also finding a number of functional benefits, including a creamy texture mouthfeel, animal fat replacement, improved satiety and even improvement in the melting point of ice cream."

Making the avocado powder is a technical process that's taken work to perfect. "We extract maximum nutritional value from our fruit by dehydrating avocado flesh into a concentrated powder that's naturally stable in secondary processing," says Vivian. "Vacuum technology and sub-zero temperatures are combined in a process that turns ice crystals within the frozen avocado into vapour, which is then extracted. The powder retains its natural properties [structure, colour, flavour, nutrients] and can be stored at room temperature, unopened, for 12-plus months."

With global demand for the green fruit unabated, new applications for avos – from food and cosmetics to nutraceuticals – are burgeoning. But Vivian believes Ovāvo has some secret weapons that set it apart. The



1. Ovāvo "avocado whisperer" Claudia Madrid. 2. The fruit can be made into a dairy-free frozen treat. 3. Ovāvo general manager Andrew Vivian. 4. Freeze-dried Hass avocado powder.



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orchard's Waiharara location in the Far North is one. "Our soils are rich in nutrients and the pristine water and microclimate lends itself to growing the highest quality Hass avocados. We are custodians of a special piece of land to respect and manage sustainably for those to follow."

Another advantage is the company's "avocado whisperer", Claudia Madrid. "Our Chilean chief orchardist has been growing avocados all her life," says Vivian, who adds that they're surprisingly tricky to grow, producing only three fruit from every 1000 flowers.

The fruit Ovāvo uses for the powder



would otherwise go to waste – deemed "too small or not pretty enough for retail sale". Of the produce that does make it to market, an estimated 30-40 percent ends up being thrown out due to spoilage. "Two tablespoons of the powder has the nutritional goodness of a whole avocado. And importantly, the water we use to grow our avocados isn't at the expense of anyone – abundant from the sky and supplemented by pristine, self-replenishing water aquifers." ovavo.nz 🌱