

Star-studded marketing push for fruits and vegetables targets Fresno



In this image from video provided by the Partnership for a Healthier America, Carolina Panthers quarterback Cam Newtown is featured in the organization's "FNV" ad campaign. The celebrity-studded campaign being launched Thursday, Feb. 26, 2015 aims to market fruits and vegetables like they were any other popular packaged snacks. "FNV" is intended to be a catchier way to refer to "fruits and vegetables." UNCREDITED — Associated Press

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A new campaign enlisting celebrities to shill for fruits and vegetables has two U.S. markets — Fresno and Hampton Roads, Virginia — targeted for a spring push.



The campaign was announced by the Partnership for a Healthier America, which works with private companies and was created in conjunction with first lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move! initiative to get families to eat better and exercise. The push is being called "FNV," which is intended to be a catchier way to refer to "fruits and vegetables."



To start, the campaign will primarily be on social media networks like Twitter, where short videos featuring actress Jessica Alba and NFL quarterbacks Colin Kaepernick and Cam Newton will be posted. Additional videos will be released in coming days starring Golden State Warriors star Stephen Curry and others.

A teaser video for the broader campaign was [posted online Thursday](#). Around spring, a marketing push including TV and print ads is slated to hit the Fresno and Hampton Roads regions that are popular test markets because of their diverse communities.

Over time, the CEO of the Partnership for a Healthier America, Lawrence Soler, said the idea is to expand the

campaign more broadly, although plans haven't been pinned down.

The FNV campaign was created by the ad agency [Victors & Spoils](#), which lists clients including Coca-Cola and General Mills. The agency got involved after being asked to cook up a similar effort for broccoli in 2013 for a New York Times story by Michael Moss, author of "Salt, Sugar Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us."

Andrew Nathan, chief marketing officer for Victors & Spoils, noted that fruits and vegetables are already attractive subjects with vibrant colors and interesting flavors. The only thing they lack is the "marketing pixie dust" that makes packaged foods so irresistible, he said.

"Obviously, our inspiration for all this was behaving like a big, iconic brand," Nathan said.

The concept proposed in the New York Times story had already been getting attention; Nathan said Victors & Spoils has since been tapped to create a similar campaign for a major broccoli producer. There have been other efforts to spruce up the way produce is marketed, too. In 2010, baby carrot farmers ran an "Eat 'Em Like Junk Food" campaign for the miniature snacks in Cincinnati and Syracuse, N.Y.

Todd Putman, chief commercial officer of Bakersfield-based bagged carrot maker [Bolthouse Farms](#), said that push resulted in an increase in carrot sales in the two markets, and has helped shape how the company markets its various offerings, including premium juices.

"For years, people have been advertising fruits and vegetables in a very rational way," he said, noting that messages around produce are usually about how many daily servings people should eat.

He said FNV was a continuation of the idea that fruits and vegetables should be marketed in a more "emotive" way.

During her remarks on stage at the Partnership for a Healthier America summit, the first lady expressed excitement for FNV.

"If folks are going to pour money into marketing unhealthy foods, let's fight back with ads for healthy foods," she said.

Among those providing financial and other support for FNV are Bolthouse Farms, which is owned by Campbell Soup, and the Produce Marketing Association, a trade group whose members include Sunkist, Dole, Wal-Mart and Chick-fil-A. Other supporters include the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Alba's Honest Company, which makes baby and home products.

Putman said FNV already has about \$5 million in funding, with plans to continue raising funds. Still, it's up against the considerable resources of big food marketers.

For the first nine months of last year, for example, McDonald's Corp. spent \$587.6 million on TV advertising in the U.S. alone, according to Kantar Media. Coca-Cola Co. spent \$265.2 million.

Michael Jacobson, executive director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest in Washington, D.C., said an advertising campaign for fruits and vegetables could be powerful in influencing eating decisions, but that its effectiveness would depend on how much support it gets and how persistent it is.

"A lot of money for one day won't do anything," he said.