

Food retailers aim for quality organic produce

By [Zeenat Moorad](#)

18 Aug 2010

South African food retailers are taking strides to ensure that their offerings meet the rising consumer preference for organic and locally produced produce.



Farming for the future

Having seen first-hand the degeneration of South Africa's soil health, Woolworths and its suppliers launched an initiative called Farming for the Future late last year.

Supported by the WWF, the programme manages farming methods and inputs to protect the fertility of the soil and produce quality fresh produce.

The holistic approach to farming combines both the best of conventional farming with the best in organic farming.

"We needed something that sat somewhere between standard commercial agriculture which is requiring more and more inputs of fertiliser and pesticides to keep yields up, somewhere between that and organic lies a much more natural happy medium, that is Farming for the Future," said Chief Executive Simon Susman.

More than half of Woolworths' fresh produce is currently grown using Farming for the Future principles and the group says that by 2012 all Woolworths locally grown fresh produce will either be produced organically or through the Farming for the Future approach.

"Our goal is to grow quality produce while minimising any negative effect on the environment and reducing farmer's dependence on chemical fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides.

"We've learned that the way to do that is to build and maintain healthy soil and healthy plants.

"As any farmer will tell you, it takes good soil to produce good food, and without proper soil management now, South Africa will not be able to produce quality fresh produce in the future," said Susman.

Pnp sustainability efforts

In 2007 Pick n Pay launched a five-year sustainability vision that focuses on exploring local and natural farming methods, while reducing waste.

The retailer also introduced the addition of eco-friendly stores and distribution centres.

Pick n Pay's organic range supports local farmers and offers consumers 100% organic products free from synthetic pesticides, herbicides, and fertilisers.

The food retailer is also both a partner and sponsor of The Organic Freedom Project (OFP), a non-profit organisation aimed at promoting job creation and sustainable trade in the region, through the facilitation of farming and processing of organic production.

Vermi system

Shoprite has also taken a positive step towards helping the environment. Freshmark, the group's fresh fruit and vegetable procuring and distribution arm, has installed a Vermi (Earthworm) Compositing system.

The system is a clean and environmentally friendly way to recycle waste into organic compost and vermi tea. Vermi tea is rich in nutrients and effective micro-organisms, making it a powerful plant tonic that encourages healthy growth and suppresses pathogenic organisms in the soil.

Although there is no current South African legislation governing organic food production, sustainable farming methods and organic produce have proven to be more than a passing fad as environmental awareness rises and consumer demand grows rapidly.

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