



News, 8 May 2017

Following successful pilot: Sustainable laser marking of organic melon and butternut squash

ICA's [laser marking](#) pilot project has now been adopted as permanent practice and is being expanded to more organic fruit and vegetable products. The marking is a way of distinguishing organic products while at the same time reducing environmental impact by eliminating the need for plastic wraps and sticker labels.

ICA was the first grocery retailer in Sweden to test laser marking in a pilot project on organic avocados and sweet potatoes to distinguish organic produce from conventionally grown produce. The new, sustainable label is etched directly on the skin using a laser that changes the pigment on the skin, clearly displaying the product's name, country of origin and PLU code. The method is now being expanded for use on more fruit and vegetable items.

"The result from our pilot has shown that the marking works better on sweet potatoes than avocados, so the method will be made permanent for sweet potatoes," says Peter Hägg, Head of Fruits and Vegetables at ICA Sweden. "In addition, we will also begin laser marking organic melons and butternut squash. The new products are now coming to market as the European harvest gets under way."

ICA's pilot project, which began in late 2016, has been well-received by consumers.

"Customers have shown keen interest, and the new marking method has also gained international attention as a noteworthy sustainability project," says Peter Hägg. "We believe that in a couple of years the marking method will be commonplace in Europe, since interest in more environment-friendly packaging has only intensified during our trial period."

Further measures have recently been taken to reduce the use of plastic in vegetable packaging. In March, plastic was replaced with cardboard for most packaging of tomatoes in ICA's range. Based on 2016 volumes, the savings will translate to 26 fewer tonnes of hard plastic.

Sustainable marking – brief facts

Using a laser, only the pigment in the outer skin of the fruit or vegetable is changed. The method has no effect on the product itself. The laser marking is done in the Netherlands and Spain.

For more information

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