Tesco has appointed a brand manager for organics, as its strategy to refocus on organic produce picks up pace.

Tesco has employed an organic brand manager as part of the retailer’s pledge to get organic produce back on the shelves, it was announced at Tuesday’s Organic Trade Board (OTB) meeting, Go for Growth.

Andrea Mulqueen, head of Tesco’s organic fresh produce team, told delegates that in hindsight Tesco had made mistakes in removing certain organic fruit and vegetables from the shelves when the recession hit.

Mulqueen said: “We did reduce the organic offer last year because of the credit crunch and the impact that had on customer spending. It was a time when consumers were trying to reduce their monthly outgoings and reduce debt and ‘the organic line reduction’ was done for the right reasons. Shoppers did stop buying organic produce and it went into decline.

“So in October 2008, Tesco introduced a new buying team for fruit, salads and vegetables for organic. We also talked to the supply base and customers. Now we are nearly all the way back to how it was. We need to support the industry.”

Tesco is taking a store-by-store approach with its four-point plan to get organic produce sales up.

Mulqueen said the plan looks at the range, price, quality and communication and which approach suits each particular store’s demographic and area. “It is about the right range in the right store and getting those customers back,” she continued. “We now have a top-10 list of organic fruit and vegetables that must be available in any one store, like blueberries, leeks and lemons, that are really important to the organic customer.”

Tesco’s organic sales are now outperforming in the market and more than a quarter of the retailer’s fresh produce customers buy organic, which equates to 3.6 million Clubcard holders.

The organic brand manager is due to start today and will promote and organise events for organic food in Tesco stores nationally.