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By Nina Pullman

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Nature & More replaces labels with laser mark

Organic avocados and sweet potatoes with **Natural Branding** are being trialled with Swedish retailer ICA



ICA and Nature & More are branding organic produce using a laser mark

Dutch organic supplier Nature & More has partnered with Swedish retailer ICA in a large-scale trial of laser-branded fresh produce.

Dubbed 'Natural Branding', the technique uses laser marking to replace sticky labels and reduce plastic packaging. It has been developed by Spanish firm Laser Food, which has been trialling it on a small-scale across Europe for several years.

The ICA-Nature & More trial has begun by branding sweet potatoes and avocados, products with skin that poses difficulties for sticky labels.

On organic avocados alone,

ICA and Nature & More will save around 725,000 packaging units in the coming year, equating to around 220km of plastic. Organic produce is usually packed in plastic to differentiate it from conventional, but this disappoints organic consumers who shop with both environmental and health concerns in mind, Nature & More said.

The laser marking process removes some pigment from the outer layer of the skin of the product but does not affect quality or shelf life. The method was approved by EU Organic certifier SKAL to ensure no additional substances are used. The energy needed for a marking is less than one per cent of the energy needed for a sticker.

Paul Hendriks, packaging expert at Nature & More, said: "The most sustainable way to pack is not to pack. I have been saying that for years, but it has been difficult to bring about in the supermarket.

"With Natural Branding it becomes a logical option. We are very glad that ICA, as a front-runner, is taking this sustainable road with us. We think green consumers will be delighted, because research shows again and again that they disapprove of plastic packaging."