

High-end British retailer Marks & Spencer has signed an agreement to trial Spain-based Laser Food's new produce labeling technology on oranges. 

The company will begin testing the new laser label system in several of its stores nationwide sometime in the next few months, becoming the first grocer in the country to do so.

The technology works by removing the pigment from a very small area of the fruit's surface and applying a contrasting natural liquid. By doing this, producers are able to inscribe almost any logo they desire.

This innovative method of labeling produce has several advantages over conventional stickers, the most notable of which is the sustainability aspect, since producers often end up with surplus and useless stickers if logos change.

The practice has also been described as more cost-effective, avoiding consumers' minor annoyance of having to remove stickers, and the company says the system guarantees traceability while providing optimum stock management for retailers.

In a release, Marks & Spencer senior agronomist Andrew Mellonie said his company's initial meeting with Laser Food was set up after officials at the retailer read about the laser labeling system developed by the Spanish specialist.

"We had a meeting with Laser Food after we saw an article in the trade press," he said.

"We thought it was an interesting concept to try because often fresh produce is stickered, which can be difficult to remove, plus there can be a lot of design changes, so growers can be left with stockpiles of stickers that they can't use.

"From this point of view, the concept would fit in with Marks & Spencer's Plan A for sustainability."

The exact trial start date has not yet been confirmed, though Mellonie said it is due to be rolled out in the coming months with supporting material nearby in-store to explain the concept to customers.

Although the British retailer is only trialing the technology on oranges, Laser Food claims the technology could be used for almost any fruit of vegetable.

Despite Laser Food being based in Spain, the company says 90% of its business activities take place outside the country. Its biggest customers are in Italy, France and Poland, but it has plans to branch further afield to the likes of Brazil, Chile and Australia.

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Photo: Laser Food

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