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ORGANICALLY GROWN AVOCADOS

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Biological production at Hans Merensky Holdings started as early as 1949, when the founder, Dr Hans Merensky, laid down broad biological guidelines. In the 1970's, avocado production proved important for Hans Merensky Holdings, as citrus orchards became economically non-viable due to greening disease. However, *Phytophthora cinnamoni* was causing heavy production losses in avocado orchards on seedling rootstocks. The introduction of superior, vegetatively propagated avocado rootstocks, such as Duke 7, was an important improvement. Two decades of rootstock selection and testing followed, and the principles of integrated production were laid down. With an increasing demand for certified, organically grown avocados, Hans Merensky Holdings was well positioned to produce avocados according to the challenging rules of Council Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91 for organic production of agricultural products in the European market.

Under the trade name "Westfalia", organically produced avocados, from the farms of Hans Merensky Holdings, have become the leading brand of organic avocados out of South Africa. Keys to the success of the organic cultivation of avocados are: site selection; use of superior rootstocks and well adapted scions; liberal use of organic soil amendments and strict adherence to the norms (EEC No 2092/91). Challenges further discussed in the presentation include measures to control fruit diseases, root rot, and weeds, as well as the preparation of large volumes of compost.

The production costs of organic avocados in South Africa are considerably higher than those of conventional avocados, while yields are usually significantly lower. However, organic fruit production at Hans Merensky farms is in line with the Founder's objectives, i.e. sustainable agriculture.