

WWF-SA, Woolworths partnership offers greater sustainability

The World Wide Fund for Nature South Africa (WWF-SA) and Woolworths have announced a broad-based, multifaceted 3-year partnership to drive greater sustainability through the retailer's selected products and operations. It brings together significant technical expertise, research capabilities, industry insights and network

Described as a first for African retail, the collaboration is timely, reflecting a trend that recognises that the private sector and NGOs can work together on common interests. It aims to achieve conservation outcomes by helping suppliers to produce more sustainable products and creating awareness about these products among customers.

The partnership recognises the growing congruence in:

- Conservation of energy
- Freshwater ecosystems
- Promotion of sustainable agricultural practices
- Protection of fish stocks

Woolworths will work with its suppliers on targets in its dairy, beef, seafood and textiles operations as well as furthering its carbon and water efficiency strategies. Its close relationship with suppliers and the tight control it has through the entire value chain with the development of its predominantly private label products is a unique opportunity to influence how food and clothing are produced more sustainably.

WWF-SA will be addressing its priorities of meeting the challenge of transforming the food and fibre production system to ensure sustainable production as well as exploring broader opportunities for low footprint business operations.

The two organisations have been working together to protect ecosystems. This involved collaboration on the retailer's successful sustainable agricultural programme, Farming for the Future and WWF-SA's sustainable fishing initiative (SASSI).

Commenting on the partnership, Justin Smith, Woolworths head of sustainability, says, "One of the things we've learnt since we launched our Good Business Journey in 2007 is that, together with customers, suppliers and business partners, we can deliver greater sustainability, to benefit both the environment and the people we support through our business. Partnership has helped us achieve 80% of the 5-year targets we set in 2007.

"WWF-SA has already been a key adviser on our seafood and fresh produce departments. We are excited about this new agreement and we look forward to engaging with them on a wider range of areas across our business. Beyond its expertise, we value its objectivity, results-driven approach and willingness to give us constructive criticism."

Tatjana von Bormann, market transformation manager for WWF-SA, added, "This partnership is a key achievement aligned with our strategic goal of creating green economies. It forms part of our Sustainable Business initiative, where we work with influential companies and their value chains to improve the way products are produced, processed and consumed.

"Through this partnership, the company opens itself up to holistic accountability and transparency on every level of its Good Business Journey. It's a bold move in which it is leading the charge for sustainable retail in South Africa and on the African continent as a whole," von Bormann concluded.