

Organic megastore grand opening

Whole Foods – the grocery chain of 200 stores across North America and which has built a reputation on selling the “organic” lifestyle - arrives with all guns blazing in the UK this week. Its 80,000-square-foot, store is opening on June 6 on London’s up-market Kensington High Street. It’s a swanky location, amongst the glitterati of West London – but then American consumers have already re-dubbed Whole Foods as “Whole Paycheck”.

The company is so confident that the new store - in an Art Deco building with high ceilings, wide aisles and an array of cafés and bars - will draw crowds that it says it is already looking for other sites in London and across Britain. There are plans to open as many as 40 stores in Britain and, eventually, in continental Europe.

Whole Foods is a \$5.6 billion company whose revenues grew 19 percent last year - a pace that Whole Foods executives reckon they can double in the next four years. But success is far from assured for a retailer with almost no name recognition amongst UK consumers coming into the fiercely competitive British grocery sector. We already have five established national supermarket chains - all of which stock organic products. And for elite grocery shopping, Londoners already have the food halls of Selfridges and Harrods or the society purveyors of Fortnum & Mason.

The biggest test for Whole Foods in London will lie in its sourcing and buying policies. How much of the produce on sale will be organic and how local will it be? The company has a partnership with LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming), an organisation that provides certification for produce has been farmed “responsibly” but **not** organically. On the issue of food miles Whole Foods in North America has set a radius of 200 miles, or 320 kilometres, to mean “local.” That criterion used in London would include France and Belgium.

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