

Celebrating 30 years: How Food Lover's grew into SA's largest privately-owned retailer

From a single fruit and veg store opened in Cape Town, Food Lover's Market Group has thrived over the past 30 years to become the country's largest privately-owned retailer. It now boasts an expanding footprint of modern grocery retail stores and a handful of attractive brands now part of its stable.



Fruit & Veg City Access Park 1993. Source: Supplied

The family-owned group has steadily grown to include popular grocery retailer Food Lover's Market, convenience chain FreshStop at Caltex, import and export company FVC International, liquor chains Diamond Discount Liquor and Market Liquors, and artisan coffee brand Seattle Coffee Company.

Brothers Brian and Mike Coppin opened Fruit & Veg City in Access Park, Cape Town in 1993, stripping, painting and merchandising the store themselves with the help of friends and family.

From opening a single store with a team of six colleagues, the Food Lover's Market Group now boasts 17,000 team members across the entire business. Some early employees are still working in the business, having grown into other roles as the company expanded.



Mike Coppin and Brian Coppin, Food Lover's Market Group cofounders. Source Supplied

"This 30-year milestone offers us a great opportunity to reflect on our history as a business and recognise the many people who have been part of our success over the past 30 years," says Brian Coppin, CEO of the Food Lover's Market Group.

"Few people remember the first steps of starting a business, but it feels like yesterday to us. We remember the thrill of working alongside family, new friends and partners to open that first store in Access Park in Cape Town. We held onto our dream, often wondering if we would achieve what we set out to do, but we never gave up."

Growth journey

After the first Fruit & Veg City store launched in 1993, the footprint steadily grew and by 2004 the retailer had expanded to 60 stores nationwide. The following year Fruit & Veg City rebranded to Food Lover's Market, with the first store opening in Hillfox, Johannesburg. In 2009, the group established its forecourt retail brand FreshStop at Caltex service stations. A year later, Food Lover's Market launched the first Food Lover's Eatery store, a fresh food emporium designed to offer meals on the go.

The next few years would see the group acquire Daimond's Discount Liquor and Seattle Coffee Company in 2012 and 2015 respectively.

In 2016, the growing Food Lover's Market Group [attracted investment](#) from emerging market investor Actis, who acquired a minority stake in the business. In the years following, Food Lover's would significantly expand its focus beyond fresh produce into general grocery retail.

While Fruit & Veg City is the origin of the business, today Food Lover's Market has evolved into a modern experiential retail store that includes gourmet butcheries, delis, grocery and health & wellness departments.

"Our philosophy is always to ensure we have the best store in the community - we've thought long and hard about what it takes to do this in the current economic climate and have realised that it's about offering a 'whole' shopping experience. It's not just about theatre - although we are the best at creating that visual appeal in our stores. It also supports the community by offering value, quality and choice."



Food Lover's Market Bothasig. Source: Supplied

The business continues to expand, and in the latter part of 2022, the brand [opened its Bothasig flagship store](#) to a positive response from the local community. This was closely followed by the refurbishments of Food Lover's Market Weskus Mall and KZN stores in La Lucia, Ballito and Crescent.

The group states that a significant national expansion is on the cards in the next few years.

These new-generation Food Lover's Market stores have been designed to offer customers a one-stop shopping experience. Says Coppin, "Whether we end up with 100 or 200 stores, they have to be the best stores in the community, and that is

what we are trying to target."



Food Lover's pumps R20m into West Coast store revamp

25 Nov 2022



Earth Lovers

In 2017 Food Lover's Market established Earth Lovers - a division dedicated to building a company that incorporates social and environmental sustainability in everything the business does. To this end, the Food Lover's Market Group states that it is committed to creating a sustainable business model for years to come.

This includes building stores that are energy efficient with LED lighting and energy-efficient refrigeration, as well as waste minimisation processes. The retailer also notes that it's committed to reducing waste to landfill, and stores are continually looking at more efficient packaging and recycling opportunities - having been the first South African retailer to ban plastic bags at till points.



#BehindtheBrandManager: Travis Coppin of Food Lover's Market

Lauren Hartzenberg 30 Apr 2021



Passion for retail

"More than just an ambitious dream, for my brother and I, it is our love of retail and the desire to offer something different - but an offering that is well-priced and of great quality - still inspires us daily."

Coppin concludes, "From our family to yours, it's been a labour of love for 30 years, and we want to thank everyone in our business, our customers and our suppliers - you've seen us grow, and it's all because of you."

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