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Willys concludes successful remodelling programme with store no. 84

In 2001 Axfood made the decision to gather all of its large discount stores under a single brand: Willys. The conversion of the Matex store in Vellinge to Willys marks the conclusion of a sweeping and successful remodelling programme.

Thirty-five Matex/Exet stores have been converted to Willys stores. However, during the two years that this conversion work took place, entirely new stores have been built and several others have been acquired. A total of 56 stores have been added to the chain up to today's date. The chain comprises 81 wholly owned stores and three franchise stores. The decision to gather the large discount stores under a single brand was made as part of Axfood's overall strategy to establish chain operation and create value-added for its shareholders and customers alike.

"We have conducted very extensive refurbishing of existing stores, built six new stores, and acquired and remodelled 15 stores, while at the same time increasing our profitability," says Anders Strålman, president of Willys AB.

Since embarking on its campaign of store conversions, Willys AB has had very favourable development in sales as well as earnings. Last year Willys had sales of SEK 10.5 billion, and today it is by far Sweden's largest discount chain.

The Greater Stockholm area is currently prioritized for establishment of new stores. This spring Willy will be opening one store in Bro, while in Rissne Sweden's largest Willys is currently being built. The chain also has far-advanced plans to open a store in Lidingö.

Willys stores are discount supermarkets with a wide product offering. The stores have a range of approximately 7,000 items, covering 95% of consumers' annual grocery needs. Willys has a particularly strong focus on fresh products, such as fruits, vegetables, meats, and dairy products.

The main reason why Willys can keep its prices so low is that its stores are run highly efficiently with low overheads. This efficiency is enhanced through large-volume purchases via Axfood's joint-Group purchasing organization. Shoppers usually pick products directly from pallets in the stores

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Willys AB's business concept is to have Sweden's lowest grocery prices. The chain comprises over 80 wholly owned stores, with annual sales of approximately SEK 10.5 billion. Willys AB is thus Sweden's market-leading discount food retailer. Willys is part of Axfood AB, a retail food group comprising the wholly owned store chains Hemköp, Willys and Willys hemma and wholesale operations through Dagab and Axfood Närlivs. Additionally, Axfood works with a large number of independent merchants who are tied to Axfood by franchising or other agreements. In all the Group comprises some 500 stores in Sweden, of which about 220 are wholly or partly owned. Consolidated annual sales are approximately SEK 33 billion, with approximately 8,600 employees. Axfood has approximately 290 stores in Finland, of which 80 are wholly owned and the remainder are operated by independent merchants. Axfood has a market share of 18% in Sweden and approximately 8% in Finland, making it one of the largest, listed retail food groups in the Nordic region. The company is listed on the Stockholm Stock Exchange O-List, Attract 40. Axel Johnson AB is the principal owner with approximately 45% of the shares.