Sometimes a successful agroecological enterprise is a trendy restaurant in the middle of a city. Case in point, Bridges Organic Restaurant in Nairobi, Kenya’s capital.

The idea started as one family’s desire to break a history of diabetes through a radical change in diet. The founders discovered that the healthiest, safest and most nutritious foods were organic. But there wasn’t a single accessible organic food spot in the city to serve people who spend the day working in the city. After a stint at Kenya Institute of Organic Farming (KIOF), the proprietors felt confident they had a product to give the market. Good health in the form of healthy, organic food.

Today, Bridges Organic Restaurant runs two outlets in the heart of Nairobi, employs over 30 permanent staff, runs a wellness club through which it carries out trainings on healthy eating and cooking and runs an online platform for organically grown fresh and dry products. It also works with 20 organic small scale farmers from across the country. They supply the restaurant with organically grown ingredients for their meals, on a long term contractual basis. This is a long way from the 9 staff and 5 organic produce suppliers the restaurant had when it opened its doors from 2006.

This success is a credit to the proprietor’s passion and commitment to availing healthy food and supporting holistic lifestyles within the city. But the presence of a strong organic farmer community in accessible locations surrounding Nairobi has also contributed to the growth over the years. This has ensured consistence of quality and quantity at the restaurant. The founders and staff continue to receive technical and advisory support from Kenya Institute of Organic Farming. The enterprise has also benefited from embracing IT in all its operations and more recently from entering the world of virtual marketing with its online market.

Some of the challenges the enterprise has found are not much different from those faced by many other small businesses in Kenya. High licensing costs, poor organisation of supply chains and more recently COVID-19 restrictions which saw the economy practically shut down. There are other challenges though, that are quite unique to the organic farm produce, value chain. For instance, the business has had to overcome low consumer awareness on the benefits of organic foods. The high cost of bio inputs raises costs along the value chain and the supply chain of farm to plate is not yet seamless.

Despite the challenges, Bridges Organic Restaurant has secured a place in the food industry in Nairobi. The restaurant is family run and was founded with the proprietors’ savings. Later they were able to access loans from banks and SACCOS. Over the years the restaurant has partnered with NGOs on agroecological and sustainable farming campaigns. KIOF also supports the enterprise with quality assurance and certification of organic farmers who supply the restaurant.

Going by the market response so far, the owners of Bridges Organic Restaurant are convinced there are vast opportunities for ecological enterprise like theirs. Kenyan citizens are becoming more conscious of the relationship between the food they eat and their health. The future is bright for Bridges Organic Restaurant. The proprietors see in it, an Ecommerce platform that will expand to its true potential and include a wider variety of certified organic food options, precooked meals and staple cereals.

They are also working towards increasing traffic at their restaurants and hope to expand to franchising with time to reach other cities in the country and ultimately, the region. They also want to see an increase in restaurant sales both to fund expansion and also to attain the goal of reaching more Nairobi city dwellers with healthy nutritious organic foods.