



Jason Perry of Pittards presents some new footballs to the children of the school in Ejersa that the tannery built and continues to support. CREDIT: PITTARDS

Tannery of the Year winner could take on shoe production

The Ethiopian Tannery Share Company (ETSC), now owned as well as run by UK-based tanning group Pittards, won the 2009 Tannery of the Year competition for its commitment to corporate social responsibility. Already named regional winner for Africa at the leather industry's sustainability 'Oscars' in Hong Kong at the end of March, the company fought off competition from Europe, China, the Americas and the rest of Asia to become the first global winner.

The judging panel, made up of independent business leaders, mostly from outside the leather industry, praised especially ETSC's commitment to the 600-plus people who work in the tannery and to the community in the nearby village of Ejersa. For example, the people there now have a supply of clean drinking water because ETSC paid the contribution

A fruitful partnership between the Ethiopian government and Pittards has led to an official request that the UK-based company expand its African operations to include shoe manufacture.

the community had to make to match a government water grant. A possible next step will be to use the hot water supply from new bore holes it has sunk for production reasons at the tannery to supply a shower block in the village as well.

The tannery built and continues to support the local school; the teachers are able to work long days and teach the local children in two shifts partly because

they eat in the tannery canteen between morning and afternoon classes. On a recent visit from headquarters in the UK, Pittards' Jason Perry decided to take ten new footballs to donate to the school. He expected to hand them over to one of the teachers in the canteen, but found to his surprise on arriving at Ejersa that the children wanted him to present the new balls at a formal ceremony in front of the whole school; they all wanted to be there for the big moment.

A clinic attached to the tannery offers blood tests and health advice on a wide range of important topics—including HIV and malaria—to the whole community. It's not always popular with the locals when a tannery sets up for business in the neighbourhood, but you will understand why the good people of Ejersa take a different view.

Pittards began operating the ETSC on behalf of its previous owner, the Ethiopian government, in 2005. The transfer of ownership that went through at the end of last year is a clear indication that both parties were pleased with how well the partnership has worked. And the government is still a very interested observer in what goes on at the facility. So much so that, at the firm suggestion of the government in Addis Ababa, ETSC may soon extend its activity to footwear manufacturer. This is the message the Pittards chief executive, Reg Hankey, gave at the Beast to Beauty 2010 conference in London in June.

The tannery's output at the moment is predominantly leather for gloves, 60,000 sheepskins and 12,000 goatskins a week. Goat has always been a good option for footwear, especially as an alternative to calf leather in women's shoes, but it is helping ETSC satisfy its clients' glove demands. At the same time, though, the facility is processing 1,500 bovine hides a week and these have been turned into leather for local footwear manufacturers such as Ambessa, which is state-owned.

Reg Hankey says the Ethiopian government has placed great emphasis on educating its people, but it knows that education can only take people out of poverty if they have jobs to go to, and it wants established companies such as his to help it create more jobs. Asked how the tannery can achieve this, he says: "Shoes, shoes, shoes. We are seriously contemplating whether we can make shoes in Ethiopia. The government is looking to basic industries to help, and leather is part of that. That won't change because Ethiopia has the tenth largest animal population in the world, so the raw material is there. As far as people are concerned, we have recruited six chemistry graduates in the last 12 months without any problem at all. Our production levels in Ethiopia are just as good as they are in the UK. We have highly skilled people there, people who just want to do as well as they can to help their families."

Encouraging people to use their talents to the full, and turning at least some of the available raw material into shoes in-house, adding further value to it, is a logical next step for ETSC and for Ejersa. 🌐



The Ethiopia Tannery Share Company became the first global winner at the 2009 Tannery of the Year Awards. Now the government in Addis Ababa is urging it to start making its own shoes. CREDIT: WTP



Pittards chief executive, Reg Hankey, says footwear production at the Ethiopia Tannery Share Company is a very real proposition. CREDIT: WTP