



SME CASE STUDY VIGNETTE NO. 6

BRITISH *Pasture* LEATHER

<https://www.britishpastureleather.com>

01 | Introduction

British Pasture Leather was founded in 2021 by Sara Grady and Alice Robinson. Its purpose is to provide brands and designers with a finished leather product entirely sourced from regenerative farms in the UK and processed in local supply chains. British Pasture Leather's vision is to link leather with exemplary agriculture and to forge new connections between farming, food, and material culture.

The company's business model challenges mainstream leather production where raw animal hides are regarded as an anonymous commodity with no distinction to indicate the type of farming they originate from. Leather is often linked to environmental problems arising from industrial farming such as deforestation and greenhouse gas emissions. British Pasture Leather, by contrast, offers a nature-positive alternative, as their leather is - fully traceable - sourced from animals raised for food production in beneficial regenerative systems. As such, British Pasture leather returns value to the farmers through meaningful use of the hides.

British Pasture Leather's founders believe that the UK with its pastured landscape and existing heritage industries processing fibres and materials coming from farms, as well as a strong design community, is particularly suited for their business venture. To create their leather supply chain, they have worked with farms and their local abattoirs, with tanneries and finishing facilities, all based in Britain, to champion local production. Being mindful about sustainability and environmental impact, they have chosen to use a vegetable tanning process for their hides. Although this is a longer process than conventional leather tanning, it not only creates a beautiful quality of leather, but also makes the leather fully biodegradable.

Still in the development phase of the business, the company has thus far produced small volumes to present to designers and brands, and in 2024 the company's first commercial product was brought to market.



Photo credits: Jason Lowe, www.jasonlowe.eu

02 | Good practice and environmental reporting

British Pasture Leather works with farms engaging in regenerative practices. As ‘regenerative’ is not (yet) a codified concept, the company conceptualises regenerative practices as farming practices that are improving land and ecosystems and ensuring the highest level of welfare for the animals involved in those systems. Such farms raise their cattle in a way that is aligned with the animal’s instinctive nature: the cattle are pasture fed (which is the diet they are meant to be eating), and are living on the land.

We are the only ones that have visited every type of facility along that supply chain. So, from the farm to the hide yard to the tannery, to the finishing facility to the design workshop, to the retail environment.

The farmers don't move up that supply chain, and the designers don't move down it, and the ones in between don't go see each other.

And so, we are really interestingly positioned to propose a new way of looking at leather production from the perspective of connecting those dots with a real ethos of sustainability at the heart of it.



Photo credits: Jason Lowe, www.jasonlowe.eu

Apart from having full traceability to the farms that they source from, British Pasture Leather has also chosen to work with the ‘[Pasture for Life](#)’ farming certification programme to lend credibility to its efforts. Pasture for Life champions the grazing of animals on pasture, as this brings “positive impacts for biodiversity and carbon¹, human health and wellbeing, and animal health and welfare”. In other words, when holistically managed, herds of cattle on pasture have a beneficial impact on the ecosystem and the services it provides. Pasture for Life certifies 100% pasture-fed farms, and a certification requirement is engagement in farm practices that take biodiversity into account (e.g. mapping of habitats, maintaining and managing of wildlife habitat, water pollution control, allowing for diversity within pasture and maximising the environmental value of field boundaries). Currently, the organisation provides evidence for positive biodiversity impact of pasture-fed farming in the form of qualitative case studies but also promotes technology and tools for certified farms to utilise such as soil health and biodiversity monitoring apps and carbon toolkits.

Given the nascency of metrics development related to regenerative practices, British Pasture Leather emphasises the importance of a strong narrative around their nature-positive business model. At the same time the founders recognise that fashion brands are interested in the story but also demand metrics related to the environmental impact of leather production. A specific challenge that British Pasture Leather encounters is the measuring of the environmental impact of leather processing, due to the current limitations of the local infrastructure of the UK processing facilities.

¹ | i.e. potential for carbon sequestration

03 | External Financing

Apart from the founders having put personal funds into the business, British Pasture Leather has thus far benefited from a range of external funding streams.

They have benefited from a successful application to the UK Small Business Lending scheme, and they have also received a loan from an individual who supports the mission of the business.

Further, British Pasture Leather has been successful in obtaining grants for specific R&D projects. This included grants from the Royal Countryside Fund, which supports rural sustainability. As this fund only gives grants to charitable foundations, British Pasture Leather partnered with Pasture for Life to conduct the first pilot production of its leather. Other grants were obtained from the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce; the West of England Creative Business Programme; and the Business of Fashion Textiles and Technology (BFTT) project, which focuses on delivering sustainable innovation within the entire fashion and textile supply chain. The BFTT grant enabled British Pasture Leather to utilise an R&D researcher, who engaged in some research around the leather finishing process.

As a next step, British Pasture Leather, is looking for equity investment. The company has received approval for the UK Government SEIS programme, which provides a tax incentive for investors, and the founders hope that they will be able to raise investment through the programme in order to grow and develop their business. They expect, however, that their investors will align with the mission of the business and fully buy into British Pasture Leather's business model, which is more time and labour intensive, and therefore carries a higher cost than conventional leather production, but which is beneficial for nature, the farming community and the UK leather production industry.

04 | Future Plans

British Pasture Leather looks to expand the number of farms and processing facilities it works with to make their business venture more efficient and more commercially viable. As part of this, the business seeks to encourage more farms that engage in pasture-fed, regenerative practices to join Pasture for Life. The company also seeks to engage with more UK leather processing facilities. The founders highlight a need for infrastructure support to preserve the UK leather industry, which has been diminishing over the years. This would also mean an enabling of modernisation or rebuilding of leather processing facilities so that they become state of the art with regards to environmental credentials. Such support would also include incentivising farmers to produce higher value raw materials, and assisting them with measuring positive environmental impact.

British Pasture Leather envisages a public-private partnership focused on developing a nature-positive leather production eco-system in the UK, which would involve government support as well as support from private investors, industry, and charities.

ABOUT

Funded by the Natural Environment Research Council, our case study series sheds light on early-stage SMEs journeys in obtaining external financing, SMEs navigating challenges in accessing finance for nature-positive innovation, aligning with environmentally conscious investors through shared metrics, and the evolution of SME investors in becoming 'nature-positive'. For further details, please see www.cusp.ac.uk/sme-finbio.