

QUARTERLY RETURN 120 • SUMMER 2021

IT IS THE MEETING OF HEARTS AND MINDS

KEEPING CONNECTED

Our online Supporter Events proved to be a great success, connecting us with customers in different regions.

SLOW FASHION IS BLAZING A TRAIL

In a special feature, we meet two customers who are creating ethical clothes for parents and children.

VOLUNTEERS' WEEK

Gave us a great opportunity to say thank you to our 72 volunteers.

WELCOME TO YOUR SUMMER EDITION OF QR, WHICH IS PACKED FULL OF NEWS INCLUDING AN UPDATE ON HOW WE MARKED WORLD FAIR TRADE DAY ON 8TH MAY AND VOLUNTEERS' WEEK IN JUNE.

Both occasions provided an opportunity for us to reflect on how much we have achieved together and I want to send a special thank you to our volunteers for their valued contribution over the last year.

Our series of online supporter events proved a great success and we enjoyed seeing over 100 of you attend each session. On Wednesday 19th May, we were joined by cocoa co-operative Asunafo from Ghana and dried fruit and nut buyer Tropical Wholefoods. The following week, we welcomed COCAGI, a Rwandan coffee co-operative, alongside Cafedirect, the UK's first and largest Fairtrade hot drinks brand. You can read more about these on pages 6-11 and we look forward to reporting on the Latin American events in your Autumn QR.

Also included in this edition is an interview with our new Head of Lending, Paul Sablich. His name may be familiar as Paul has been with Shared Interest for over a decade, serving since 2015 as Regional Manager for Latin America. On pages 4-5, he reflects on his time with us and looks at the Lending Team's priorities, as Covid-19 restrictions begin to ease in many of the countries we work in.

Sadly, this is not the case in India, where the second wave of the pandemic has overwhelmed the healthcare system. Cotton farmers there were still recovering after the global fashion industry ground to a halt in 2020. On pages 12-15, we hear from two buyer customers who source their clothing from this part of the world. Childrenswear retailer Little Green Radicals

and breastfeeding vest pioneer The Bshirt share their commitment to Fairtrade and Organic cotton. Both companies work with the same ethical producer in India, which has a zero wastage policy.

Back in the UK, we are looking to recruit two new members to our Board. The two posts arise as Non-Executive Directors Martin Kyndt and Paul Chandler come to the end of their term of office in March 2022. A summary of the experience required is on page 3 and we welcome applications from our members and their wider networks.

As always, if you would like further information on this, or any of the other topics discussed in your newsletter, please contact our Membership Team, who will be happy to help. We look forward to bringing you more news in the Autumn. Take care until then.

Best wishes,



Patricia Alexander
Managing Director



Front Cover: Eulogio Puma Checcore, a brazil nut farmer, poses for a portrait in the Peruvian Amazon.

SPREADING FAIRNESS THIS WORLD FAIR TRADE DAY

Saturday 8th May was World Fair Trade Day, with the theme 'Build Back Fairer'. This year, we took the opportunity to encourage families to pause and consider the role that fair trade plays in building a better world.

In the face of the climate crisis and global pandemic, farmers around the world play a vital - but often forgotten - role in feeding our families. This year, we wanted to bring the fascinating stories of farmers, artisans and growers into people's homes, so that families can learn more about where their food originates.

On the run up to World Fair Trade Day, we worked with The Green Parent magazine to introduce their readers to our Little Book of Fairness. Presenting Shared Interest mascot Captain Cocoa, the Little Book shows the journey our food takes from soil to supermarket shelf. If you would like a copy for your family or local school, please contact us at info@shared-interest.com

You may have also spotted us on the front cover of The Big Issue magazine, featuring long-standing customer Candela Peru (featured in QR 118). The co-operative works with Fairtrade Brazil nut gatherers called Castañeros, living along the Madre de Dios River in the Peruvian rainforest - known for having the greatest diversity of plant and animal species on earth.

Candela Co-Founder Gastón Vizcarra said: "We truly have a unique relationship between our Castañeros and the forest, and Shared Interest helps that relationship to flourish. The rights to harvest the nuts, the finance to pay the farmers, the expertise to create wonderful products, and the routes we now have to market. Every part of the process is crucial, and we depend on each other to keep this circle connected."

NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR(S) VACANCY

We are seeking two passionate and motivated Non-Executive Directors to further enhance the knowledge and expertise on our Board. We see this as an exciting opportunity to use your talents and expertise to make a positive difference to the lives of people across the world.

In order to complement our current Board, we would like to hear from candidates with knowledge, skills and experience in one or more of the following areas:

- Fair Trade
- International Development
- Charities
- Co-operatives
- Fair Trade Retail

Successful candidates will have previous experience as a non-executive. If you are interested and would like to apply, please forward a copy of your CV together with a covering letter to recruitment@shared-interest.com

Closing Date for Applications: 31st August 2021.



VOLUNTEERS' WEEK

Volunteers' Week provides the opportunity for us to join the nation in recognising the fantastic contribution people make to our communities by offering their time and commitment. We currently involve 72 volunteers and could not achieve our impact without the support of these dedicated individuals.

From inspiring others to invest through talks, to translating our website so we can communicate better with our customers, our volunteers really do make a big difference. We also know from their feedback that they consider Shared Interest to be 'something they value and feel proud to be part of'. Together, we have been able to engage and inspire people here in the UK, to get involved in Shared Interest, and ultimately help more producers around the world.

As we were unable to meet in person for over a year, we feel it is more important than ever that our volunteers know just how valued they are. This year we ran our first virtual Volunteers' Festival with the aim of bringing everyone together online. Running across two consecutive days, the Festival provided the opportunity for volunteers to hear how our charity, Shared Interest Foundation, is transforming the lives of young cocoa farmers in Ghana. On day two, Guest Speaker Joanna Pollard shared her campaigning experiences as Chair of the Fairtrade National Campaigner Committee. There was also a Q&A session with our team in Central America, and an opportunity to find out more about keeping your carbon footprint to a minimum.

You can view the sessions at www.shared-interest.com/events

THE MEETING OF HEARTS AND MINDS

“It is the meeting of hearts and minds.” That is how our new Head of Lending described Shared Interest when he joined us in 2009 as Regional Development Executive for South America.

Speaking at our Annual General Meeting at that time, he added: **“I want to work for Shared Interest as I see fair trade as a tool to generate equity in the world. It is important to be part of the solution, to create the right environment for fair trade to take place. To do this, I think we need to work with wisdom and compassion.**

Paul said. “Over a decade on, I still strongly believe in those words. In fact, they are more valid than ever. As Head

of Lending, I want to continue this way of working – with knowledge, experience, and motivation intertwined.

“When I first came to Shared Interest, I had several years of experience in the financial sector and a strong desire to put this to good use, by helping people in disadvantaged communities. What was most important to me was getting out into the field, meeting with farmers and artisans face to face, and fully understanding their problems and needs.

“It was during this time that I began to fully comprehend the vastness of the regions covered by Shared Interest. It occurred to me that I was visiting remote communities in my own country that I was not aware of before.

“Visiting farming co-operatives served as an important reminder of how important our work is – to provide finance so that they can provide a better income for their farmers and - through the Fairtrade Premium - better services to communities. It is like a ripple effect.

“When I became Regional Manager of Latin America in 2014, my role changed – not just geographically but the focus of managing the entire portfolio in this region. As Head of Lending, I am now looking forward to extending my knowledge across all 51 countries and the rich diversity of products and businesses we support.

“A benefit of being with the organisation over a long period is that I can see how we have been able to make a difference. We have strengthened relations with producer groups, we have found better ways to support them, and we have expanded into new supply chains in different countries. We have seen businesses grow and Shared Interest has been a fundamental factor in their evolution.

“For instance, I have had the pleasure of working alongside Candela Peru for many years. They have been a customer of Shared Interest for over two decades, focusing on the rich diversity of the Amazonian rainforest. They work with more

than 600 families to ensure their communities are protected, through the sustainable sourcing of Fairtrade products such as Brazil nuts.

Candela Co-Founder Gastón told us recently: “A partner is somebody who you trust. It is a long term relationship and it is somebody who turns out to be a friend and that is the experience we have had with you.” For me, this sums up the way that Shared Interest works - hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder.

“And it is this way of working together, which will help farmers face new challenges, especially those related to climate change. Weather cycles are changing and it can lead to severe disruption. An example is the El Niño phenomenon, a cyclical event that increases the temperature of the Pacific Ocean. Global warming is increasing the frequency of its extreme effects, leading to intensifying droughts, worsening floods, and shifting hurricane patterns.

“In 2017, the Northern coast of Peru was severely affected by landslides and flooding. Some producer organisations lost everything and we worked alongside them, recognising the uncertainty that they faced. It was a hugely difficult time for farmers and it has taken years to recover.

“We need to remember that Shared Interest operates in the developing world, where there is often sociopolitical and economic instability. Many are low-income countries and will be further stretched by the challenges of climate change and Covid-19. We are hopeful that the worst is behind us in terms of the pandemic, with the global vaccination programme underway. However, there will always be more challenges to come and we will build on over 30 years of expertise, to remain a reliable source of finance in an uncertain world.

“Above all else, we want to support businesses, communities and people through times of adversity to reach their full potential. After all, this is the true spirit of fair trade – to work with wisdom and compassion. This is why we will continue to explore new regions and products and supply chains, to ensure our finance touches the lives of those who need it most.”

OUR LENDING TEAM

Our Lending Team has evolved over the past 31 years, and is representative of our international focus. We opened our first overseas office in 2006, and now we have a regional presence in Costa Rica, Ghana, Kenya, and Peru.

Here, you can see the structure of the Lending Team and the roles involved. It is thanks to our in-country presence that we have the relevant geographical knowledge and cultural understanding to ensure we can reach even the most remote communities in the developing world.



SUPPORTER EVENTS

As this edition of QR goes to print, our series of online supporter events are proving a great success. Participants have had the opportunity to hear directly from farmers and artisans, as well as our in-country team, and we have received a fantastic response so far.

In May and early June, over 100 people joined each of our sessions focused on Africa. With our Latin American events taking place later in June, an update on these will follow in your Autumn QR.

FOCUS ON WEST AFRICA

In your Spring newsletter, we reported on the challenges faced by cocoa farmers in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, where 70% of the world's cocoa is grown. Daniel Amponsah, President of fast-growing cocoa co-operative Asunafo, joined us from Ghana to explain how farmers have been affected by movements in pricing and certification, along with Manager Patrick Owusu. Meanwhile, Tropical Wholefoods Co-Founder Adam Brett helped us to understand more about their holistic approach to their fair trade and organic snack production process, which involves the sourcing of dried fruits and nuts from Burkina Faso.

Our Regional Manager for Africa, Andrew Ridley, said: "Our presence in West Africa has grown steadily since our Ghana office opened in 2012, and now represents over 20% of our customer base with 43 organisations benefiting from collective facilities of £11m. Cocoa remains the dominant product and the majority of farms are located in Côte d'Ivoire. Other products we support in this region include nuts, fruit, coffee, and spices. We also continue to work with handcraft producers, many of whom have struggled over the past 18 months due to their dependence on the tourism and hospitality markets.

"We consistently strive to diversify our lending portfolio and last year we started working with our first soya bean co-operative, based in Togo – a country we have not worked in before."

"OUR LENDING IS IMPORTANTLY ABOUT IMPACT AND WE ESTIMATE THAT IN THE LAST YEAR WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SUPPORT THE LIVELIHOODS OF APPROXIMATELY 67,000 FARMERS AND ARTISANS, AS WELL AS AN ADDITIONAL 2,500 INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE EMPLOYED DIRECTLY BY THE CO-OPERATIVES WE SUPPORT. ONE OF THESE CO-OPERATIVES IS ASUNAFO NORTH FARMERS UNION."

Regional Manager for Africa, **Andrew Ridley**

Kodzo Korkortsi, Foundation Manager of our charity, Shared Interest Foundation, updated us on the Growing Fairer Futures project in Ghana, which is encouraging young people into cocoa farming.

ASUNAFO

According to research carried out by the World Cocoa Foundation, the average West African grower farms less than 3.5 hectares, with no access to irrigation or modern farming techniques. However, by becoming members of large co-operatives such as Asunafo, smallholder farmers in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire supply big brands such as Mondelez International, one of the largest chocolate companies in the world, owning the Cadbury brand.

Asunafo Manager Patrick Owusu began by explaining how Asunafo initially contacted Shared Interest for a loan to buy fertiliser so farmers could improve the quality of their crops. Following the success of this project, they went on to receive finance to purchase a truck, which is helping the co-operative transport their increasing production of cocoa.

Asunafo President Daniel Amponsah said: "Our mission is to help farmers have a better life, and working with Shared Interest has supported us to fulfil this. Through the continuous support of our key partners Mondelez International, Tony's Chocolonely, Fairtrade Africa, Shared Interest Society and others we have been able to do a lot for our community - we are helping to build schools, provide good water facilities, and help farmers improve their farms. One of our more recent projects involves encouraging young people to establish their own cocoa farms.

"We also have aspirations to improve the income of our farmers through skills development training. All of this will help us grow - we hope to become one of the largest cocoa farming co-operatives in the region."

"OUR MISSION IS TO HELP FARMERS HAVE A BETTER LIFE, AND WORKING WITH SHARED INTEREST HAS SUPPORTED US TO FULFIL THIS."

Asunafo President, **Daniel Amponsah**

Q: HAS THE MINIMUM EXPORT PRICE AND THE 'LIVING INCOME DIFFERENTIAL' INTRODUCED BY THE GOVERNMENTS OF GHANA AND CÔTE D'IVOIRE HELPED COCOA FARMERS?

Our Customer Representative for West Africa, Kwami Dekonor, said: "The farmers we have spoken to have appreciated the project and think it will impact positively on their lives in the long term. However, in the shorter term, they believe that more collaboration is needed between buyers, farmers, and regulatory authorities to ensure that everyone understands the commitment involved."

As reported in Spring QR, Yves Kone, Managing Director of Cote d'Ivoire Regulator Le Conseil du Cafe Cacao, described how some cocoa buyers are backtracking on the commitment made, in a letter to the World Cocoa Foundation in November last year. He believed that some buyers are now refusing to buy directly from Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire.

Q: HOW DO YOU SELECT THE PRODUCER GROUPS THAT YOU WORK WITH?

Regional Manager for Africa, Andrew Ridley, said: "Under normal circumstances, our in-country teams are out in the field, building relationships with producers and attending trade fairs but recently this activity has taken place online. With coffee and cocoa continuing to represent over 60% of our portfolio – as these are predominant Fairtrade products - we are continuously looking to diversify the product range we support. As part of the application process, we carry out due diligence and have developed additional controls during Covid-19 restrictions. There are a number of other factors included in our lending criteria. We ask that customers have a minimum of three years of financial accounts, that they follow Fair Trade Principles, and have established trading relationships who can provide references. Overall, we want to ensure our finance reaches those who need it most whilst also balancing this with the risks involved.



Mango producers working for Association Ton in Burkina Faso.

TROPICAL WHOLEFOODS

Tropical Wholefoods Founder Adam Brett said: “I was born in Uganda and came to the UK when I was ten years old. When I returned as an adult, it was to do something to help Uganda recover from decades of civil war and Tropical Wholefoods was founded.

“In 1991, the business initially focused on drying fruit products, which had been organically grown, to sell in the UK. We also began to source dried fruits and nuts from Burkina Faso in West Africa. Having a supply in both countries is beneficial because of the seasonality of the products – it gives us year-round production.

“In 2000, we merged with Fullwell Mill Ltd in Sunderland and this is where we manufacture all of our products, including a wide variety of snack bars. It is also where we pack our fruit and nut mixes.

“The other part of my work over the last 25 years has involved forming partnerships with likeminded organisations and collaborating to produce a range of other Fairtrade products. We want to work across the whole supply chain, to ensure it is sustainable each step of the way.”

This holistic approach even extends to helping farmers implement technology to trade more efficiently. Adam added: “I have helped build software systems that assist in achieving this. However, the key factor remains that farmers and processors should always receive a fair percentage of the final price of the product.”

Tropical Wholefoods has recently launched a new snack bar called Just Five. Adam explained: “Every snack bar has just five ingredients, and all these ingredients are ‘just’ – by this we mean they are fairly sourced and purchased within supply chains we know, understand, and believe in.”

Q: HOW EASY IS IT TO PURCHASE DRIED FRUIT AND NUT PRODUCTS?

Sourcing in bulk from partner producers brings its challenges but the food safety and quality issues are less complicated than they are for fresh fruit and vegetables, for example. A major reason why I focused on buying dried fruit and nuts is that it is possible to ship them by sea rather than by air because they are far more durable. Although we have to take great care with the production process, once they are packed, they are stable for a maximum of 12 months. However, Brexit has made things more complicated for Tropical Wholefoods, on both the import of goods into the UK, but also because we frequently transit goods through Europe. We are managing this and working with it, and we hope this will become easier now that trade deals have been finalised.

Q: IS ALL YOUR PACKAGING RECYCLABLE?

Achieving fully recyclable packaging remains at the top of our agenda. However, the situation is quite complex as a wrapper that comes into direct contact with food has very stringent health and safety requirements. It has to be a very good barrier for moisture and other toxins that might pass through from the outside world. We do the best we can and the film in our wrappers can be recycled in some parts of the UK. We have carried out extensive testing on a wide variety of alternatives and we also do a lot of work on the recyclability of the packaging that does not come into direct contact with the product.

Just Five bars are available now at
www.tropicalwholefoods.com/shop-online
 or www.traidcraftshop.co.uk

FOCUS ON EAST AFRICA

Over five million people are either coffee growers or work in the coffee sector in East Africa. In fact, this region is home to some of the world’s leading premium coffee-exporting countries, including Rwanda.

Research shows that Rwandan coffee production remains a smallholder activity, with an average sized coffee farm containing 200 trees. It is reported that over 400,000 families rely on coffee farming for their main source of income, using traditional techniques. The country has the ideal conditions to grow Arabica coffee due to the rich volcanic soil, rainfall patterns, and moderate temperature.

As part of this coffee-focused event, we were delighted to hear stories from different parts of the supply chain when Pastor HABIMANA Japhet from COCAGI growers’ co-operative joined us from Rwanda, alongside guest speaker, Chris Thomson, Head of Sales and Marketing for Cafédirect – a customer of Shared Interest from 1997 to 2013.

Due to technical difficulties, Pastor Japhet was unable to join us for the entire event. However, our Lending Manager for East Africa, Immaculate Ochieno, spoke about the impact of the finance on the co-operative.

Kodzo Korkortsi, Foundation Manager of our charity, Shared Interest Foundation, updated us on an income diversification project currently running in Uganda with a group of coffee farmers.

Kodzo, said: “Prolonged droughts and flooding have had a negative impact on coffee crops in the region, causing a decrease in income over recent years. This project aims to enable the farmers to better adapt to climate change, and diversify into passion fruit farming as a second source of income in order to increase their household resilience.

“We distributed 3,650 trees to give shade to the coffee plants and organised training for farmers in good agricultural practices. We also distributed tools and equipment to use on their farms to increase the quality of their yield. We helped the farmers to diversify into passion fruit farming by distributing 18,000 trees, which will be planted on their farms. The aim is to increase the farmers’ income by 58%.”

Coffee berries being picked on a farm in East Africa.





COCAGI coffee producer, at their coffee washing station in Rwanda.

COCAGI

COCAGI has been a Shared Interest customer since 2009, receiving loans to expand their washing stations and to buy a truck to transport coffee cherries from the buying centres.

Our Lending Manager for East Africa, Immaculate Ochieno, told us: “COCAGI has more than 1,000 members and almost a third are women. The co-operative has been working hard to ensure gender equity within their co-operative. In 2013, they established a fund to which both COCAGI and the women within the co-operative contribute. A large number of farmers are single mothers and the fund has helped them to respond to the needs of their households.

“Thanks to support from Shared Interest, COCAGI production levels have increased, which in turn generated more sales, and the additional profit was used to buy land for women to grow their own coffee.

“COCAGI has also remained focused on increasing access to health care. They have provided health insurance for all members of the co-operative since 2013.”

Q: WHAT IS ‘CLIMATE SMART AGRICULTURE’?

Climate smart agriculture is the implementation of farming techniques, which help protect their crops against the effects of climate change, such as droughts and flooding. An example is the strategic planting of trees to position them so that they provide enough shade to protect the coffee plants against harsh sunlight. Another subject area is soil erosion, and what can be done to prevent heavy rains washing away the nutrients from seedbeds. Certain crops can also be planted, which are drought resistant for example.

Our charity, Shared Interest Foundation, works with in-country experts to provide this type of specialist training.

Q: IN THE SUPERMARKETS THERE ARE OFTEN OTHER CERTIFICATION SCHEMES COMPETING WITH FAIRTRADE. DO THESE OTHER SCHEMES PROVIDE SIMILAR BENEFITS FOR THE GROWERS?

Fairtrade has the highest fixed Premium of any independent certification scheme, which goes directly to the producers’ co-operatives on top of market price. In direct response to the Covid-19 crisis, Fairtrade International announced increased flexibility to its Standards. This means that many of our customers are able to spend Fairtrade Premium funds to safeguard the health and livelihoods of farmers, workers, and their communities. Fairtrade also guarantees producers a minimum price for their products, even if the market price is lower. When the market price is higher than the Fairtrade Minimum Price, producers will receive the higher market price. This helps farmers to secure stable, fair prices. Each certification has a different focus and range of benefits. We believe that Fairtrade has the highest focus on the welfare of farmers and, while other marks have some good qualities, we consider Fairtrade as the gold standard.

CAFÉDIRECT

Chris Thompson, Head of Sales and Marketing for Cafédirect, began by telling us about their unique business model. He said: “We are proud to be the UK’s first and largest Fairtrade hot drinks brand, improving lives all over the world. We are a certified BCorp, which focuses on the three areas of people, planet, and profit. Also, over half of our sales are certified as Soil Association Organic and all of our products are Fairtrade certified.

“Unlike any other coffee company, we have invested over 50% of our profits into a charity we founded in 2010. Producers Direct works directly with farmers to improve sustainability and livelihoods, right across the coffee growing world.

“The charity is run by farmers, for farmers, taking leadership and developing innovative solutions to the challenges they face.

“Today Cafédirect sources coffee from 24 grower co-operatives across 13 countries, improving the lives of more than 1.3m people. This reciprocal relationship enables Cafédirect to provide consumers with great tasting, fair, high quality coffee.

Chris discussed how the pandemic had a substantial impact on their coffee growers in Peru and across Africa, but also on colleagues in the UK. He continued: “We quickly pivoted as a business, having seen a real significant shift in consumer behaviour. Retail and online sales were very strong, as businesses moved to work remotely, and positively we finished the year with a 20% sales increase.”



Q: IS ALL CAFÉDIRECT COFFEE ROASTED IN LONDON OR ONLY THE SMALL SPECIALTY BATCHES?

Our London Fields Roastery is specifically designed to roast only high-grade coffees in small batches. It is only a short walk away from the Cafédirect office. The roastery is the heart of Cafédirect and it is where some of our greatest ideas come from.

The team at the roastery work tirelessly to find the best roast for each coffee, testing different profiles, cupping each batch, and selecting the perfect one. By small-batch roasting, it is easier to control the process ensuring a superior quality that can’t be matched on a large scale.

Q: DO YOU FORESEE A TIME IN THE NEAR FUTURE OF CAFÉDIRECT AND GROWERS REACHING ‘100% ORGANIC’?

Our percentage of organic coffee has increased substantially over the last few years. Our flagship range of Machu Picchu is organically grown within the Inca heartland of the Peruvian Andes. Our new Mayan Gold coffee from Mexico is also certified Organic, along with our entire London Fields Roastery range. Wherever possible, we will choose organic. It can be more challenging to procure but we will always champion as much as we can.



Georgios Kokkalis, Head Roaster at Cafédirect.

Image Top: Farmer working for Llano Bonito co-operative in Costa Rica.



Founders of The Bshirt, Lisa Lessware and Philippa Doyle.

BREASTFEEDING CLOTHES WITH A CONSCIENCE

Created by two mums, The Bshirt is an award-winning brand known for its innovative breastfeeding clothing design and ‘slow fashion’ approach to maternity clothes. According to Co-Founders Lisa Lessware and Philippa Doyle, this means that they consider the lifetime use of their clothing range and focus on seasonless, classic items.

From her experience as a Breastfeeding Peer Supporter, Lisa knew that some women felt forced to wear outfits that were uncomfortable and restrictive so that they could cover themselves when feeding in public. She often suggested that they cut holes in a T-shirt to wear as an undershirt as she found it a great solution when she fed both her sons.

Eventually, Lisa started making this ‘breastfeeding layer’ for friends and one day she showed her creation to Philippa, who loved the idea. Lisa, said: “We struck up a friendship when we had our children and we are both really passionate about breastfeeding. When we discovered that the UK has one of the lowest breastfeeding rates in the world, we decided to do something about it.”

Together, they spent the next two years perfecting the designs of the vest, intended to adapt a woman’s existing wardrobe for easy breastfeeding. The Bshirt was launched in 2017 and just two years later, Lisa and Philippa won a Parent & Baby Award for Best Ethical Breastfeeding Clothing Brand. Last year, they became a British Association of Fair Trade Shops (BAFTS Fair Trade Network UK) member, and a Shared Interest customer. This year they plan to apply for certified B Corporation (BCorp) membership.

Lisa said: “Shared Interest finance helps us to finance our stock purchases in an affordable way, allowing us to grow, and expand our product ranges. Finance from Shared Interest allows us to place orders when we need the stock, not just when we have the cash.”

All Bshirt products are certified Fairtrade and Organic. Lisa said: “As a slow fashion brand and to encourage longevity, there is also a preloved section on our website. Customers sometimes order the wrong size when purchasing online and some UK retailers simply send the returned items to landfill, because the cost of repackaging them is often more than the original cost of the stock.

“We feel that practice is horrendous and we offer returns, which are in good condition, for sale at 50% of their original retail price. This allows items to have another cycle of life and keeps them out of landfill. Clothing waste is the second biggest pollution problem - second only to plastic - and we feel it is our responsibility to sell responsibly.

“We hope that one day all companies will think of how they can improve the lives of their customers, rather than exploiting them with ‘must have’ consumerism. We cannot continue

to create waste at the current rate if we are to preserve this planet for our children’s future.

“WE SURVEY OUR CUSTOMERS AND THE RESULTS SHOW THAT 83% OF WOMEN FEEL MORE CONFIDENT BREASTFEEDING IN PUBLIC WHILE WEARING THEIR BSHIRT. SINCE OUR LAUNCH, WE HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE TO OVER 25,000 WOMEN. WE HOPE WE CAN HELP IMPROVE BREASTFEEDING RATES IN THE UK AND ULTIMATELY MAKE MUMS AND BABIES HEALTHIER AND HAPPIER.”

Co-Founder, **Lisa Lessware**

“This is why we will never sell or promote ‘wardrobe replacement’ items - all of our products are designed to adapt a woman’s existing wardrobe to become breastfeeding friendly.

Speaking about the Covid situation in India (in June 2021), Lisa continued: “We are in regular communication with the producers. The whole state of West Bengal is suffering from the pandemic and now it is at the mercy of cyclones. It is not a good time for them and they are trying to maintain production but everything is delayed, even the knitting of the yarn.”



WHAT IS A BCORP?

Certified B Corporations (B Corps) are businesses that meet required standards of social and environmental performance, public transparency and legal accountability. The movement began in the USA in 2006 and came to the UK just under a decade later with the creation of B Lab UK. As part of our ongoing research into certifications available globally (which we included in our last Strategic Review), we continue to monitor their progress. There are currently 400 organisations with B Corp status here in the UK, representing 48 industries and over 22,000 employees.

Image Above: Deeps Textyles producers working at a factory in India.

DEEPS TEXTYLES

Nestled in lush greenery near Kolkata, Deeps is a family run producer group in the beautiful Indian countryside. Deeps collaborate with Swadhina, an organisation that works to improve the lives of women in the remotest corners of rural India. For the past 30 years, they have been providing women with a regular income to help them become independent, empowered, and self-reliant. Deeps provides specialist training for its female employees as well as healthcare to give more opportunities for a better life and better future.

Founder Deepangshu Ghosal said: “We have an unflinching focus on sustainability and social responsibility – all the way from the product we make, the material we use, for the workers who work for us and the planet that we inhabit.”

Little Green Radicals Managing Director, Nick Pecorelli, said: “We have been collaborating with Deeps for over eight years and they have grown to become a very important part of our team.

“WE HAVE BEEN WORKING WITH DEEPS FOR OVER FIVE YEARS NOW AND DISCOVERED THEM THROUGH THE FAIRTRADE INDIA NETWORK. RIGHT AWAY WE KNEW THAT WE WANTED TO WORK WITH DEEPS BECAUSE OF OUR SHARED VALUES”

The Bshirt Co-founder, **Lisa Lessware**

“They have always put a huge emphasis on the environment and run a zero textile wastage policy to reduce their environmental impact. Scraps of fabric are reused and made into new products such as face coverings, or recycled.

“They make amazing interlock fabric which we use for babygrows, T-shirts and joggers. It is not your average T-shirt fabric as it’s beautifully soft and thick, and very long lasting. Deeps are also fantastic screen-printers. Their skilled artisans print each colour onto our organic fabrics by hand. No easy task with some of our multi-colour designs!”

Young girl wearing a top from the Little Green Radicals range.

BLAZING A TRAIL IN ETHICAL CHILDRENSWEAR

Based in London, Little Green Radicals began with the simple idea of making beautiful clothes for children, produced with the greatest care and attention to detail. Founder Nick Pecorelli wanted to carry this thoughtful approach right through the supply chain and they used Fairtrade and Organic cotton from the very beginning.

Nick started out in 2005, by creating a range of T-shirts and playsuits with witty eco-led slogans like 'Give Peas a Chance'. He said: "I later relinquished control of design to our very talented Director of Design and Brand, Josie Bragg, who has given Little Green Radicals something that no one else could have imagined.

"We are privileged to work with fantastic cotton growers like Chetna Organics from Yavatmal in India, who now have nearly 36,000 cotton farmers sharing their knowledge and experience.

"A transparent supply chain is at the heart of Little Green Radicals, including the places where the cotton is spun into thread, turned into fabric, and made into clothes - and all the cotton we use is organic too. This is particularly important because, otherwise, the intensive pesticide used is harmful to farmers and their families.

"Above all else, we are energised by a desire to improve what we make, the way we treat the people who make it and our

impact on the environment. Our ambition remains for Little Green Radicals to blaze a trail for an ethical fashion revolution."

The company has gone on to receive numerous accolades, including design awards from Parent & Baby Magazine and the Junior Magazine.

Shared Interest has supported Little Green Radicals since 2019, providing the finance needed to help them grow. Nick continued: "Shared Interest finance has helped us increase our orders and has given us the freedom to be more flexible at times when our suppliers are facing difficulties, such as during the pandemic."

Like many businesses in the retail sector, they have faced a number of challenges over the past year. Following Brexit, increased courier charges and processing costs were applied for sales into Europe. The pandemic also had a major effect on how they do business. As the world went into lockdown, sales via their website grew. Fortunately, Little Green Radicals



already had a strong online presence, and they plan to build on this success.

Managing Director Nick Pecorelli said: "The paradox of Brexit is that it has forced us to invest more inside the EU and we now have a new warehouse in Poland for our EU operations, and we now expect greater growth inside the EU than elsewhere.

"The pandemic is posing a major challenge in India but our Shared Interest facility means we can make earlier and more significant payments to our producers. We know this has provided security at a time when they are not able to be fully operational."

Continuing their pioneering approach, Little Green Radicals have a strong focus on protecting the environment. Last year, they introduced 100% biodegradable bags and converted their baby skincare range - produced by a team of artisan producers in Dorset - to plastic free. More recently, Little Green Radicals created a new range of rainwear made using waterproof fabric from recycled plastic bottles and lined in their signature organic Fairtrade cotton.

"ABOVE ALL ELSE, WE ARE ENERGISED BY A DESIRE TO IMPROVE WHAT WE MAKE, THE WAY WE TREAT THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE IT AND OUR IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT. OUR AMBITION REMAINS FOR LITTLE GREEN RADICALS TO BLAZE A TRAIL FOR AN ETHICAL FASHION REVOLUTION."

Founder, **Nick Pecorelli**

Nick concluded: "Fairtrade and environmentalism are at the core of what Little Green Radicals does and we continue to find new ways to improve our social and environmental footprint. In the coming year, we will be launching new initiatives to promote the circular economy and to increase inclusivity."

You can read more about the Little Green Radicals journey and purchase products on their website www.littlegreenradicals.co.uk

COUNCIL COMMENT

This year's World Fair Trade Day brought a unique opportunity. As the world tries to recover from the devastating impact of the pandemic, the World Fair Trade Organization announced the annual event as a chance to 'reboot'. To create 'a tomorrow where economic resilience, social fairness and environmental sustainability go hand-in-hand.'

One of the reasons I support Fairtrade is because of its environmental focus. It offers a promise that farmers are working to improve soil and water quality, avoiding the use of harmful chemicals, as well as managing waste, and protecting biodiversity.

Because of this promise, climate crisis mitigation training is becoming a more prevalent part of the certification. It is proving an effective way of encouraging more sustainable techniques such as growing trees and certain types of crops together. Not only does this provide shade from the sun but it also makes the soil more fertile, to achieve a better yield. It was good to see this theme discussed at the recent Supporter Events, and that climate smart agriculture is now part of the training delivered by our charity, Shared Interest Foundation.

I was also delighted to hear about their project in Nicaragua, funded by the Society's Carbon Offset scheme. The coffee co-operative involved learnt how to encourage reforestation, increase soil fertility, and improve yield through water management techniques and strategic tree planting.

However, when World Fair Trade Day arrived on Saturday 8th May, we may have all asked ourselves what we can do as individuals, to build back fairer. By supporting Shared Interest, we have already taken a vital step in the right direction. Of course, as consumers, we must continue to support fair trade enterprises wherever and whenever we can.

We can also encourage family and friends to get involved in fair trade - especially those of the younger generation. It was fantastic to see the Shared Interest Little Book of Fairness cover the theme of climate change in an accessible way for primary school children. Through fair trade, we can bring about the changes needed so that they inherit a world with a more sustainable way of life.

Geoff Shearn, Member of Council



Quarterly Return is the newsletter of Shared Interest Society. Shared Interest Society Ltd is a fair trade lending organisation, which is a member of Co-operatives UK. It uses the pooled investments of its members in the UK to make real and lasting improvements to people's lives in the developing world.

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BECAUSE WE CARE:

