

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

## Kering invests in lab grown leather startup

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*VitroLabs develops lab grown leather that is less damaging than petroleum-based alternatives. Image credit: VitroLabs*

By LUXURY DAILY NEWS SERVICE

French luxury group Kering is reinforcing its sustainability efforts by joining the Series A financing round of a lab grown leather startup.

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California's VitroLabs raised \$46 million in its Series A funding, led by venture capital firm Agronomics. Kering will also continue partnering with VitroLabs to support the startup's product quality testing, tanning and finishing.

"At Kering, a chapter/pillar of our sustainability roadmap is dedicated to sustainable innovation and actively looking for alternative materials that can reduce our environmental impact over the long term is part of the solutions we have been exploring for years," said Marie-Claire Daveu, chief sustainability and institutional affairs officer at **Kering**, in a statement.

"We believe that innovation is key to addressing the sustainability challenges that the luxury industry is facing, which is why we are very interested in the potential of biomaterials such as cultivated leather."

### Lab grown leather

Founded in 2016, VitroLabs is developing a scalable tissue engineering platform to produce cell cultivated leather that resembles the look, feel and performance of traditional animal leather.

The process begins with a one-time collection of cells from an animal, typically through a harmless biopsy, which are grown in a nutrient-rich environment and divide and form into tissue without needing the animal as a resource again.



*Like leather, plant-based Demetra uses tanning processes. Image courtesy of Gucci*

"At a time when environmental stewardship is more important than ever, biotech companies have the opportunity to lead the way in changing how we produce materials and build supply chains, working hand in hand with existing artisans and craftspeople who are the cornerstone of the \$400 billion leather goods industry," said Ingvar Helgason, cofounder/CEO of [VitroLabs](#), in a statement.

"By launching the first production of cultivated leather, we'll hit a major milestone in fulfilling our mission to lead the shift towards a more sustainable future," he said. "At VitroLabs, our cultivated animal leather preserves the biological characteristics that the industry, craftsmen, and consumers know and love about leather, while eliminating the most environmentally and ethically detrimental aspects of the conventional leather manufacturing process associated with its sourcing."

Other VitroLabs investors include Invest FWD, Khosla Ventures, Regeneration.VC and actor and environmentalist Leonardo DiCaprio.

Alternative materials are increasingly important for luxury brands as consumers gravitate to more ethical options.

Last year, Kering's Gucci introduced Demetra, an animal-free, plant-based material that was developed using the same processes as leather tanning ([see story](#)).

Rival French luxury group LVMH and its Italian fashion label Fendi also recently announced a strategic collaboration with Imperial College London and Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London for a two-year research initiative focusing on biotextiles. The goal is to leverage academic research to prototype new lab-grown fur fibers for luxury fashion ([see story](#)).