



# OPIC PROGRAMS HELP U.S. SMALL BUSINESSES INVEST OVERSEAS

## TEA IMPORTERS, INC. OF WESTPORT, CONNECTICUT

### OPIC Client Profile

OVERSEAS PRIVATE INVESTMENT CORPORATION



Joseph H. Wertheim, President of Tea Importers, Inc., a small business located in Westport, Connecticut, has credited the Overseas Private Investment Corporation for enabling his company to make investments in tea plantations in Rwanda and Ecuador. "OPIC has been a great help to us and we can state unequivocally that without their assistance we would not have considered making the investments in the two tea plantations."

With financing that included a loan from OPIC in 1975, Tea Importers established the only private tea factory in Rwanda. Tea Importers repaid the loan in 1990. Meanwhile, the company also purchased OPIC political risk insurance.

During the 1990 - 1994 civil war in Rwanda, rebels shelled the company's tea processing factory and looted vehicles, office furniture and computers. OPIC's payment of four political violence claims for losses totaling nearly \$250,000 encouraged Tea Importers to stay and rebuild. It was the first tea factory to resume production after the war.

In 1998, the tea factory in Rwanda produced approximately 6.6 million pounds of tea which represented 20.3 percent of the country's total pro-

duction. The company was also the fourth largest tax payer to the country that same year. They are the only source of cash income to approximately 35,000 people in the area. The project supports 3,500 independent tea growers and employs 200 permanent staff and 1,000 seasonal workers.

Besides the economic benefits of the Tea Importers project for the company and for Rwanda, the local population now has proper housing and facilities — schools have been built, health care is provided, and, according to a World Bank Study, the farmers in the area have a better income per acre of land than in other parts of the country.

Tea Importers is in the process of rehabilitating a tea property in Ecuador with help from OPIC in 1998. "Again, we only considered doing so with the help of OPIC's insurance coverage," says Mr. Wertheim. OPIC support for U.S. private-sector investments in emerging markets will continue to provide opportunities for U.S. companies like Tea Importers. The long-term support and advocacy that OPIC can provide as a representative of the U.S. government makes the agency a valuable resource for small businesses and other companies entering new markets.

