

Jersey horticulture

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A while ago I [reported stories in the Telegraph](#) concerning the arrangements made by [some major UK horticultural companies](#) to supply plants to the UK from the Channel Islands.

They no doubt had their sources.

I quoted [other sources to add to the story - providing sources](#) that seemed perfectly reputable.

However, I have now received a note by email saying some emphasis was wrong with regard to the story about Mr Fothergill and its Jersey supplier. I have no idea what the person sending me the information wanted me to do with it. They certainly did not ask me to publish it. But I think it only fair to do so, in full since they are aggrieved:

Good morning Mr Murphy,

Somebody has recently brought my attention to your recent blog post with regards to Blooming Direct & Mr Fothergills and I have read this article with interest, and with a great deal of frustration at the sheer number of inaccuracies & false statements that you make. I would like you to address these with immediate effect please.

* *Mr Fothergills has a contract of “cultivation & supply” with the Horticultural business J.R Jersey Horticulture Ltd, not Blooming Direct. J.R Jersey Horticulture is a specialist grower of young ornamental plants. We own our own large scale modern nurseries equipped to grow top quality plants. We are locally owned, managed & produce great quality produce.*

* *Blooming Direct was set up as an independent retailer before Mr Fothergills arrived on the scene, and the concept was formed 2 years previous by myself. My partner & myself do indeed have “many years” experience in this sector, contrary to your questioning. We have over 25 years of plug plant growing & distribution with the Jersey firm, Flying Flowers.*

* *Mr Fothergills approached J.R Jersey Horticulture to grow their plants because they*

were having big quality issues and wished to have their product grown & packed by the nursery that produces them. As soon as we agreed to produce plants for Mr Fothergills we agreed that it best to de-merge Blooming Direct to avoid any potential conflict of interests what with being a wholesaler as well as a retailer.

* *J.R Jersey Horticulture Ltd & Blooming Online Ltd (t/a Blooming Direct) are both 100% Jersey owned by Jersey residents.*

* *You state that Mr Fothergills "bought a Jersey business". This is incorrect.*

* *I note you thank your Jersey sources for their research, perhaps they should get their facts straight before you publish.*

I hope that this has given me the opportunity to give you the facts.

Kind regards,

Joel Richardson

JR Jersey Horticulture Limited

I think my [second story](#) did, to be honest, show an understanding of all these issues, and certainly made clear that there was a contract for supply with Blooming Direct in place and that it undoubtedly had a business of its own. None the less, I am happy for the clarification to be published. I think if there was error the Telegraph might have made it, but I'm not sure I did. Anyway, I hope matters are put right now.

Equally, I note that answers to two fundamental questions, which were the reason for my blog, have not been addressed. The first was this comment made by Mr Fothergill's to the Telegraph:

John Fothergill of Mr Fothergills, one of the handful of large horticultural companies with packing sheds operating out of neighbouring Jersey, accepted that the company was based there purely for tax reasons.

"To be blunt we are here for the VAT benefit and we would have to rethink things if this changes."

I think that justifies my concern whoever owns the business.

Second, I noted of Blooming Direct, based on a [report here](#), that :

The company is a family run horticultural business and is totally committed to maintaining high standards of quality. Blooming Direct attracted funding support from the States of Jersey (local government) by way of a "Rural Initiative Scheme" aimed at promoting diversification and enterprise within local agriculture and horticulture. This funding has enabled the company to bring quality garden products to their customers in

and out of Jersey.

As I then said:

So the States of Jersey went out of its way to help establish a business that would exploit the VAT scheme when local ownership became a condition of its use? And Fothergills reorganised their business by chance at that same time to make sure the "preferable VAT arrangements already in place were not compromised"? All very odd. And just a coincidence? Or indication that the States was going out of its way to encourage business that exploited this loophole?

I'm not disputing for a moment that the business undertaken is legitimate. But the questions asked are appropriate, I think, given what was going on at the time and the comments made by Mr Fothergill. So clarification is good, but answers to the broader issues raised would be good too.