



## Public Accounts Committee

### Response to COVID-19

## Witnesses: Jersey Farmers' Union and Jersey Royal Company

Monday, 21st February 2022

**Panel:**

Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier (Chair)

Connétable J.E. Le Maistre of Grouville

Connétable A. Jehan of St. John

Mr. A. Lane

Mr. G. Phipps

Dr. H. Miles

Mr. P. van Bodegom

Mr. S. Warren, Deputy Comptroller and Auditor General

**Witnesses:**

Mr. P. Le Maistre, President, Jersey Farmers' Union

Ms. J. Rueb, Secretary, Jersey Farmers' Union

Mr. M. Renouard, Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company

Mr. C. Gallichan, Woodside Farms

[13:58]

**Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier (Chair):**

Good afternoon, all. We are going live and welcome to the public hearing of the Public Accounts Committee with the Jersey Farmers' Union and Jersey Royal Company. Before we start with the questions, we invited you to give us oral evidence at the public hearing following your written

submission to our COVID review. The report is due to be published in April and we are grateful for you coming in today to speak to us. Before we will start with the questions, we will go round the table. Deputy Inna Gardiner of St. Helier, chair of the Public Accounts Committee.

**Mr. G. Phipps:**

Graham Phipps, independent member of the Public Accounts Committee.

**Deputy Comptroller and Auditor General:**

I am Steve Warren. I am the deputy comptroller and auditor general.

**Connétable A. Jehan of St. John:**

Andy Jehan, Constable of St. John, member of the panel.

**President, Jersey Farmers' Union.**

Peter Le Maistre, president of the Jersey Farmers' Union.

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

Mike Renouard from the Jersey Royal Company.

**Woodside Farms:**

Charlies Gallichan from Woodside Farms.

**Secretary, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

I am Jane Rueb, secretary at the Jersey Farmers' Union.

**Mr. A. Lane:**

Adrian Lane, independent member of the panel.

**Mr. P. van Bodegom:**

Paul van Bodegom, independent member of the P.A.C. (Public Accounts Committee).

**Connétable J.E. Le Maistre of Grouville:**

John Le Maistre, Constable of Grouville, States Member of the committee.

**Dr. H. Miles:**

Helen Miles, independent member.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Thank you. We will start with a general question. Would you please provide your views of your experience of the COVID-19 pandemic and communication that you had with the Government of Jersey about the impact on the agriculture sector at different stages of the pandemic?

**President, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

Thank you very much. I think I speak for everyone in the agricultural industry when firstly we appreciate that Jersey had not experienced a pandemic for over 100 years and I think the general view is that the States of Jersey seemed pretty well prepared when the pandemic appeared.

[14:00]

We think the lockdown happened in late March 2020 and I think it happened at the right time. The first slight concern we had was that I think, sort of just pre-lockdown, it was not 100 per cent certain that our industry was going to be on the essential employees' list and we made representations to a few States Members and civil servants. I think it became obvious that agriculture had to be an essential service, for obvious reasons. I think the other general point I make is that certainly early on the message from Government was pretty clear that the message got out why we were in lockdown, what the rules were, as it happened, and those were communicated pretty well to our industry so that we were clear that if we wanted to carry on in business what we had to do. I have 2 gentlemen who were particularly impacted; Mike Renouard is the managing director of the Jersey Royal Company and will talk about or he will perhaps why potatoes, in particular, were affected. Woodside Farms are the biggest supplier of local vegetables in the Island, and that was another area because of the closure of the hospitality area was particularly badly affected. On a more general point, the lockdown happened at the end of March 2020 and, for those of you who are not aware, we are in a situation with the potato industry, which is the main industry in the Island other than the dairy industry, which is pretty constant. January, February, late March we plant potatoes and then we have a very small window now with not a lot going on and by the end of April we are into the full lifting of the potato crop. This requires a lot more staff in the planting for 2 reasons. One, we have to not only lift the potatoes but we have to pack them all. Every Jersey Royal now is packed in the Island. Thirty or 40 years ago what packing meant was actually just size grading. Now, as Mike will tell you, the vast majority of Jersey Royals that leave the Island are washed and are in customer small punnets or bags or whatever it is. We need a large increase in staff in April and that was our first issue because obviously when the pandemic hit everything went into lockdown and so after Britain and other countries began to follow we were looking for about 300 staff who were expected to come to Jersey. Basically, in very simple terms, this led to shortages of staff. Some were not prepared to leave their homes because I think we will all admit in those early days we really did not know what or how serious the pandemic was going to be. So you can imagine people in Europe who normally have come to Jersey suddenly have said: "Hold on, I think I will stay

with my family.” The other problem was that once we were into the sort of recognised position of people isolating when they arrived you found that you might have to isolate and take tests before you left your home country, then come to Jersey. But we managed to persuade roughly about just over half of probably our demand to come to the Island to work. Some of the other shortfall was made up, particularly from the tourism industry or hospitality who were closed down. We found people from hotels who came to work on the farm. This provided us with quite a lot of support but the shortage really was evident that while people were quite happy to come and go in a packhouse or perhaps work on a potato harvester, the skilled jobs - the actual drivers - we were short of. I can only speak for our own farm, we ended up working extremely long hours - the principals and the tractor drivers that we did have - to make up for the shortfall. The other issue that, just on a general point, as I say, I think the message from Government was clear. We found it more difficult in our industry to get the message across to the public when they saw, for example, I think in the first lockdown we were still planting some potatoes and they would see 20 people in a field and they say: “How on earth is this ...?” But, at quite a lot of expense, we would split those people up into small groups. For example, again on our own farm, we have 3 blocks of accommodation and we separated them out into separate and in the field, even though it looked like there were 20 people, there were probably 4 bunches of 5 who were all in separate little groups. That was, to be honest, the only way we could manage working. When it came later on to the potato harvesters a number of growers put up Perspex screens, similar to what you see in shops, so that if you have 6 or 7 people on a harvester you could split them in 2. All these things we sort of managed to get around but I think the general public, certainly in that April period when they were out with their one or I think in the end it was 2 hours a day exercise, were asking the question why we still had 20 people in the field. There was some sort of bad communication there but probably no one’s fault.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

I do remember as a States Member we received several emails and telephone calls asking how did it work. Obviously, as States Members, we connected to you. From what I have heard, I have heard 3 major parts and I think we will go to explore them a bit deeper. One is general: what does it mean “essential industry” and what are its implications? The second one was around agricultural workers and arrangements and the shortages. The third one is about industry, supported communication from the Government to the industry, from the industry to the Government, including ongoing support with isolation and other things. So we will probably ask questions within these 3 areas, if it is okay.

**President, Jersey Farmers’ Union:**

That is fine. That is my sort of brief outline of where we started and where we found ourselves. Yes, please ask questions.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Did they get it correct, the kind of the major ...? If you would give us a bit more details about when the Government classified you an essential industry during the pandemic how did the Government communicate with you about the implication of this status and any associated expectations? For example, did you have clear understanding of the exemptions granted to the essential industry? What are the exceptions? Did you have clarity? What guidance was provided? Did you get specific guidance around COVID-19 as you were running the business day to day?

**President, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

I think that was all very clear. I mean I think the implementation of it was much harder. It seems all very simple to say: "Just split your people up, for example, into little blocks." I will give you a simple example, most of our vans in the Island take 8 or 9 people and suddenly you had to split them into 2 vans of 5. You needed more transport. When we were bringing the staff in we had to isolate them and you had the worry that when they came in, if they had tested positive, that you had to make sure they did not mix with anyone else. I know the Jersey Royal Company went into hotels because of the number of staff. Mike might mention that in a minute. But even on the smaller farmers we were keeping rooms empty so that we had a ... we were keeping new staff away from our existing staff. All these things. I think it was very clear. Once we were designated as essential employees I think that was very simple. It was very clear what we had to do but, at the end of the day, I think where we felt disappointed was that later on when we saw all the other help being given to other industries that the cost of keeping going to providing food for the Island was much more expensive than we realised at the outset. I do not know, Mike, if you want to say something about accommodation and all those sorts of things.

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

Yes. When we are in peak flow we have about 340 to 350 people on the farm. At a time when the pandemic hit, as Peter said, we were in the middle of planting or getting towards the end of planting, so the guidelines were very clear. Putting that into practice was difficult, as Peter mentioned, trying to isolate people. In the field we had gang masters in blue vests. The only role that they were undertaking was making sure that the staff were 2 or 3 metres apart, whatever the guideline was at the time. I think it was 3 metres at the time. Housing people, we were asked by the COVID team to keep some accommodation spare so we could isolate people there. That was not really practical because the whole accommodation blocks are taken up. We do not carry spare accommodation. It is too expensive. So when we were bringing in the extra 100, 150 people to get us up to our peak numbers we were asked by the COVID team to isolate them in hotels. That is going down to their own cost. Communications are very difficult. A lot of our workers bring their own mobile phones with them, they did not work with the communications with the COVID team and yet the COVID team were saying: "We cannot speak to you as a company because this is all personal data so we need to speak to them directly" and that was very difficult because the communications were not getting

through. We did not know whether people were isolating, were they clear of their isolation. We had some people who were told they could go and then we had a phone call saying no, they cannot. It was a very confusing situation at the time. The cost of isolation was fully borne by ourselves. When we did ask for some Government aid on that, alongside other industries, we were given a flat no: "That is your cost, you need to bear it." That was a major cost to us.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

What you are describing is that the guidelines were very clear but nobody sat down to see you together to say how you actually would be able to implement it.

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

It was completely down to us how we had to implement it. I remember the first couple of weeks we must have had 2 or 3 phone calls a day from the general public, from the Honoraries, from States Police, we had field visits from the States Police and Honorary Police going round ... understandably the public were concerned and when they got there we had a clean bill of health because we were doing everything right. But trying to isolate people in vehicles, we had to rearrange our whole accommodation blocks because we wanted to separate people into working groups. We had to make sure that we had the right people in that group. You had some tractor drivers in there, some van drivers in there, the manual workers, all within that group. So we had to pretty much pick everybody up out of their accommodation and rearrange it all. It is a massive task when you have 300 people onsite.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Going back, this particular communication when the COVID rules came in, when you have been regarded as an essential industry, when the guidelines were given, what could be improved for the future? Looking back, what the preparation for - hopefully it does not come - the next pandemic but if something was to come we would have to engage with industry.

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

I guess back in 2020 there were no rules for anything. We had never suffered this before. We were thankfully allowed to keep going as an essential industry but we had to play by the rules. There were no rules determining how we did that. It was just to make sure that somebody did not turn up and shut us down.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

What would you improve? What should be done differently?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

I guess better communication with the agencies would have helped. If we had had a few days just talking to the agencies rather than them turning up and saying pretty much ... not wasting their time but having them to try and police us. It would have been better to have better communication with the agencies and say: "Right, this is what we are doing. There is no need for you to come and find out what we are doing. Let us tell you beforehand." It was an emerging situation all the time. Things were changing on a daily basis.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Do you have something to add on to that?

**Woodside Farms:**

I have a lot to add, if I may, and I would like to be perhaps a little bit more direct. I think we suffered more than other businesses due to the nature of our business.

[14:15]

You are asking us what could be done better. I would like a straight answer on why Government felt unable to support agriculture at all financially. I can just talk about our own experiences. Woodside Farms is a much more diverse business than many other farms. We are responsible for growing a very significant percentage of the vegetables that are grown for sale on-Island. A wide range of vegetables: potatoes, carrots, onions, cabbages, et cetera, so a very different type of business. We are also engaged with the production of Royals. So all the problems that Peter and Mike have talked about, we had those problems. So isolating staff, sourcing staff, police turning up in fields. It seemed strange at the time that we had 20 people working outside in fields as individually as possible and yet the police that turned up to talk to us got back in the car, 2 of them together. But anyway that is another story. So we had all those problems. We also had some more direct issues. The lockdown across Europe and globally happened towards the end of March. It was the week before Mothering Sunday. We had £100,000 worth of daffodils in cold stores on a Friday. We had orders in the book ready to go out on the Monday. On Monday those orders had reduced to nothing, so I think that week we sold 13 boxes, which we could not afford to freight anywhere. So I had to buy 13 boxes from Lincolnshire and move them across the country, but anyway. We dumped £100,000 worth of daffodils the first week. The local market, I suppose you can split it into 2. So we focus on the retail sector, which is supermarkets and shops. The other significant thing is obviously wholesale, which is really focused on hospitality. Significant primary growth on hospitality is chips. So processing potatoes. The world had a complete meltdown on processing potatoes. The moment McDonald's shut, Burger King, KFC, processing potatoes, it cost them ... late February they were worth £350 a tonne and in March, when the lockdown happened, you were lucky if you could get a bid on them. Normally we export surplus potatoes. Could not export them, could not do

anything with them so we dumped hundreds and hundreds of tonnes of potatoes as well. The list of supported businesses in the Island read like our customer list. So all recognised as having difficulties because they were shut, could not sell the products that they wanted to sell. No recognition that we had spent a year growing these products and then had to dump them. So I am interested to see how that was not a direct impact on agriculture. So we have been through all of that. That sort of continued, the knock on hospitality has been very significantly damaging to our business. The other level of non-support for agriculture business went further than that because we were engaged with some other businesses. For years our local Environment Department were wanting us to diversify and support our business in other ways, et cetera. One of those things was freight. So we established a freight business in 2015, I think it was, and it had been growing steadily. It was doing okay. The lockdown, it was well-documented, it completely ... a huge impact to all the local freight businesses. There were 4 significant companies at the time. There was Ferryspeed obviously, PDFS, us - Woodside - and Channel Seaways. Paul Davis unfortunately fell by the wayside instantly. That left us as the only other cool chamber provider in the Island. The second biggest railroad supplier. We had all the same problems that every other freight company had. So massive reduction in freight volumes. Couldn't carry any staff. We operate in 3 locations, one of which is Guernsey. Guernsey would not support us because we are a Jersey-based business. I note that Channel Seaways had support even though they are a Guernsey business, so not quite sure what happened there. Anyway, we are the second biggest business, suffered the same reductions as everybody else, put our submission in for some aid and some funding and all the rest of it but because the ultimate beneficial owner of that freight company was a farming business it was denied any support.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Did you try to appeal on this?

**Woodside Farms:**

We only applied 5 or 6 times. We got the message after that. We also applied for the support of the Environment Department and Jersey Business, so nobody could really give me an answer why we would not get any support but we did not. So I would be interested to see if this panel could give us some clues on that.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Would you please just let us know with whom you have been ... you can give it in a public hearing or you can supply us later on.

**Woodside Farms:**

Sorry, what do you mean?



**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

The communication. So you applied to Jersey Business and you applied ...

**Woodside Farms:**

There were well-documented routes to apply for aid and support. We did all that. Got rejected. Did it again. Got rejected. Went to Jersey Business and said: "Can you help us because we must be filling these forms in wrong?" So they helped us and we got that rejected. As I say, I think it was 5 or 6 times we tried in different ways with different levels of support and it just ... ultimately it was: "Sorry, agriculture is an exempt industry sector therefore you are not getting any aid." Despite the fact that, let us call it £100,000 because of the daffodils - I think florists were probably on there, flower wholesalers were probably on there - the fact it was owned by a farm, no support. We dumped hundreds of tonnes of chipping potatoes and other produce that we grow for the hospitality sector' no support there. Food wholesalers I think were supported. Pretty tough, pretty challenging. We have got parts of our business that are still affected. So we do a lot of prepared vegetables; so peeled potatoes, peeled onions, chips, that sort of thing. Our 2020 and 2021 results are less than our 2019 turnover.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Together?

**Woodside Farms:**

We carried all the staff, we have worked every day. We delivered vegetables into retail outlets 6 days a week since March 2020. We have not missed a beat. We have paid a fortune in P.P.E. (personal protective equipment) distancing staff, all the staff that Mike and Peter have talked about. We paid a fortune on that. We have dumped hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of product. No support.

**The Connétable of St. John:**

You have just mentioned that the wholesalers did receive Government support. How was the decision communicated to you by Government that they were not satisfied with your reasoning?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

If I can just pick up where Charlie left off on the impact of our sales before that. Our sales turnover with the U.K. (United Kingdom) is between £22 million and £24 million. Just as we were starting to supply the retail markets in the U.K. COVID hit. Obviously people ended up having to queue outside supermarkets and go in a few at a time. Jersey Royals are a bit of an impulse buy when they come online because they are not there all year. So people have to see them on the shelves before they

start picking them up. So people were then down to working on shopping lists, buying their essentials that they needed for that week because they did not really want to queue up outside in the rain. Just went to the shelves where they knew they needed their stuff and get out of there as quickly as possible. People also went to bigger packs because that would last them longer, and Jersey Royals are mainly in much smaller packs. 10 per cent or 15 per cent of our product is still sold as loose product and the loose product died a death. Nobody picked loose product up because they did not want to go in a tray that somebody else might have been handling the produce in. So we had a major impact on our sales. We lost 2,600 tonnes worth of sales over the 2 years, which was just short of £3.5 million. Again we applied through the same routes as Charlie for Government aid, and I think the last conversation I had with the Environment Department who were helping us out was: "If Charlie cannot get it for local production then you are definitely not going to get it." So over the last 2 years we have made a loss as a result of it on a £24 million turnover.

**The Connétable of St. John:**

Have you met with any Ministers during the pandemic to explain the challenges of your industry?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

We have met with several Ministers, not just about COVID but about the overall challenges that we are seeing with our industry; Brexit and requiring all the work permits and visas, lots of additional costs that are being brought to the industry by Government. For instance, rather than running a full tractor fleet we have downsized our tractor fleet and we bring hire tractors in for the main season because it is a short 12, 16-week period. We get charged V.D. (vehicle duty) on every vehicle and have to re-register. Now if I want to bring a car in from the U.K. I have 6 months to do that. Those tractors would be in and out. But, no, we have to ... the only industry that has to pay stealth taxes like that. Of course we are talking to Ministers as much as we can but I have to say it is not just on COVID we do not get support. It is on a number of items.

**Woodside Farms:**

We have also spoken to Ministers. Nothing they could do apparently. Lyndon said no.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

When you speak to Ministers they basically ...

**Woodside Farms:**

Senator Farnham. I spoke to him at one point and he said no.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

What was the reasoning?

**Woodside Farms:**

Agriculture did not fit. To be fair, he was being helpful, I think, but I do not know who is in charge: the civil service or the Government.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Agriculture does not fit but the freight.

**Woodside Farms:**

The freight, we would have an email rejection somewhere so we can find out but no, we asked for help, it was not forthcoming. I do not know if that was the Government or civil service decision but it was ultimately our business code was wrong. Whatever it was, whatever type of business it was, the U.B.O. (ultimate beneficial owner) was a farming business with a farming business code and that was what I was told was our issue, is we had the wrong business code.

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

It was not just us going as individuals. We got the backing of the Farmers' Union, that is why we are members of the Farmers' Union.

**Woodside Farms:**

What could be done better? Personally, I do not see, just related to agriculture, I do not understand why support was issued by sector. Surely any business that has suffered a downturn of business from a pandemic should have been eligible. So why was the support sectorised; that is one of the things: "How do we do it better?" Actually just look at individual business. Peter, Mike and myself have 3 farming businesses, we are all farmers, so we were all lumped into the same camp. Our 3 businesses are very different. How it was possible to say: "No, agriculture is exempt" just ... it is mind-boggling.

**The Connétable of St. John:**

You mention you worked with the Jersey Farmers' Union, did you work with any other bodies, any other sectors to try and find a solution?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

We tried direct with Government, mainly through our contacts at Environment. Obviously through the Jersey Farmers' Union. But if anyone really had a case it would have been Charlie supplying the local market.

**Woodside Farms:**

Well not supplying the local market because there was not one.

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

We were clearly told if Charlie cannot get any financial support then do not even try. And we did. We tried. We tried the COVID support schemes for ... almost being instructed by the COVID team to go and make sure that we isolate our staff in hotels because they did not want them running all over the Island spreading COVID. Down to the fact we were told: "Look, please do not let your staff go and shop in supermarkets in big groups." So we ended up doing their shopping for them.

**Woodside Farms:**

As did we.

**President, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

I think all growers were doing the shopping for their staff for the first 4 weeks of lockdown.

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

It was very clear, keep your staff isolated from the general public.

**Woodside Farms:**

On a personal level for the staff ... it is easy now, I think generally speaking people are a bit more used to living with COVID and the prospect of living with COVID into the future. If you go back to March 2020 or in April 2020 everybody was very scared. Actually we were asking our people to put themselves in harm's way on a daily basis, which they did. We had to look after them. Splitting them all up, shopping for them and all the rest of it, we wanted to keep people working to try and keep delivering. As I say, we delivered food 6 days a week all through this. You do forget but at the time it was a ... the world was a scary place back then. Actually we are asking people to turn up every day and working outside is one thing but we were having to pack produce inside a packhouse. It was not easy. Our staff have done and continue to do a fabulous job in difficult situations. It has just cost us a hell of a lot more than it should have done to achieve that.

**The Connétable of St. John:**

In terms of the isolation, do you know what the cost is to the industry?

**Woodside Farms:**

Everybody has got slightly different situations, I think. But most farms have had experience of isolating either people away, which Jane has helped with. So we paid for isolation hotels before staff have entered the Island or the U.K. Most of us have isolated staff on farm. Some of us have isolated staff in rented accommodation, as Mike has sort of alluded to. Everybody has tackled it

slightly differently. But everybody has borne a cost of isolation. Of course while they are isolating it does not seem fair ... you know, we have not charged the staff for any of that. Normally they contribute a weekly amount to their rental and we have not asked the staff to contribute anything because it is just not right.

[14:30]

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

They have not been able to earn money because they are isolating and you cannot then charge them for their accommodation. You have to give them some money to live on. I can tell you from our business, over the 2 years it has cost us £468,000 just in isolation costs. That is not P.P.E., that is not loss of sales, that is just in isolation costs. Nearly half a million pounds.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Did staff receive support from the Government for isolation time?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

No, we applied for that and we were told no. That is not available to us.

**Woodside Farms:**

Agriculture.

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

We applied every single person we put through that and applied for it and had no funding at all.

**Woodside Farms:**

We applied and did not get anywhere and stopped applying. We gave up applying.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

When the staff arrived to the Island and they need to isolate they did not receive ...

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

No.

**Woodside Farms:**

No.

**Secretary, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

No, they got no money whatsoever.

**President, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

We asked.

**Woodside Farms:**

Anything to do with farming did not get any support. We literally had no financial support.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Okay, we need to double check it because it might be something ... okay, I am not sure.

**Secretary, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

On behalf of the Farmers' Union, I did contact Social Security but a lot of the incoming staff were people who had arrived in the Island first time so they had not paid any contribution. So that immediately exempted themselves. They need to be here for 6 months before they would get short-term sickness benefit, for example. So even when we have had staff who have arrived, even in 2021, and have developed COVID, if they have not been here for 6 months they could not claim any benefits at all. They would just have to sit in their rooms, isolate, not get paid, all the growers, all the farmers are very good, did not charge them for accommodation. But they did not get any Government money.

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

That is despite the fact since Brexit has come about and we can only bring staff in for 9-month periods now they still pay their social security and they get no Government support at all. They leave after their 9 months and they have to be away for 3 months. Come back again to do another 9-month period and they start all over again.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Without social security.

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

Yes.

**Woodside Farms:**

Having Brexit overlaid with COVID, the timing was a perfect storm. We do accept that. That is part of the reason why we are short of staff because we were struggling to get people into the Island in January, February because of Brexit.

**The Connétable of St. John:**

You mentioned earlier about the Honorary Police, the police, and everybody else worried about groups of people working and you mentioned the communication was no one's fault. What did you do as a body to try and get the message out? Did you have opportunity to do that?

**President, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

Sorry, do you mean from the industry out to the Honorary Police?

**The Connétable of St. John:**

To the public really to try and allay their fears.

**President, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

I think we did a couple of articles in the local press talking about this and explaining what we were doing. But that was about all you could do really at the time.

**Woodside Farms:**

I do not think any of us particularly are ... I am not saying the communication could not have been improved both ways probably. But we were in a bit of a pandemic situation in unprecedented times. I do not think anybody has really blamed the Government for lack of communication or lack of guidance. I think an unwillingness to support us financially is a bigger issue. It was difficult. Everyone was trying to find their way through this and we realised we had to keep working and we found ways to do that.

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

But at a cost.

**Woodside Farms:**

But it was at a cost. What can be done better from a communication point of view, I do not know. It was unprecedented. We all knew what we were trying to achieve and it was down to us to try and achieve it. Actually it is not for the civil service to work out how we can plant potatoes while social distancing, is it? But we did that, and we achieved it. So the actual day-to-day communications and everything, nobody is really arguing about that.

**The Connétable of St. John:**

I guess I know the answer to this question but I need to ask it anyway. Was the agriculture sector provided with any P.P.E. or other COVID-related supplies and equipment by the Government of Jersey free of charge?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

No.

**Woodside Farms:**

No.

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

No, we had to go and hunt it down and pay.

**Woodside Farms:**

Our bagful of masks went up in cost virtually every week.

**The Connétable of St. John:**

So any idea what you would have spent on P.P.E. and additional cleaning products?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

I can tell you that our company spent £122,000 on P.P.E., sanitisers, screens. These are not small figures.

**President, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

Just to put it in perspective for the panel; Jersey Royal Company in the potato business but as overall in agriculture would be just under half of the total agriculture in the Island. So if Mike's business spent £122,000 it would be double; £250,000 would be the figure for the whole industry.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Is it during 2020?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

Both years.

**The Connétable of St. John:**

Were you given any assistance or guidance on how to dispose of the items following their use?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

None at all.

**The Connétable of St. John:**



How do you believe the Government of Jersey could have improved the communication around the need for and provision of P.P.E. to the agriculture sector?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

It was difficult times, is it not? I mean the whole Island, the health service was not getting enough P.P.E. so it was just about going round and finding what you could and paying extortionate amounts of money for it. I remember our first order for masks went into some firm from China that we had never heard of and we were just hoping and praying that it would turn up. You got what you got. We waited weeks for it and we were almost at the point where we were running out of our existing stocks that we had bought up in the U.K. Bearing in mind we have got a parent company and a sister company equally as big that were trying to buy stocks on our behalf.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Were you aware about the local suppliers, local companies could provide P.P.E.?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

If there was any stock on the Island that was available to us we had already bought it. You have got 340 people on our farm. Paper masks do not go very far, especially when you are in a dusty environment. They were replacing their masks at least twice a day at the onset. Then we have additional screening in the packhouse. You could not have people working on the tables within half a metre of each other so you had to put plastic screens up. On the harvesters we had to put plastic screens up. In the vans it was one had to sit in each corner. It was difficult.

**Mr. P. van Bodegom:**

You talk about being visited by the authorities on several occasions while the people were working in the fields. Would it have helped if the Government had announced publicly that you were essential? If there was an Island-wide publicity drive.

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

It might have done but the concern of the public at that time was this is a big scary disease and everybody was concerned. Like Charlie says or Peter said, you know, you have got 20, 30 people in a field, even though they were isolating and we had marshals there making sure that they were doing that, you see 30 people in a group and you have been told you have to stay in your house. That is a very difficult and challenging situation for the general public. I have to say the authorities were fine with us. They did what they had to do. They came out, checked what we were doing and I do not think we had any issues at all. They all said: "You are doing a good job. Well done."

**Mr. P. van Bodegom:**

And that fell to yourselves to organise that to ...

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

Absolutely.

**Mr. P. van Bodegom:**

Was there any advice provided?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

No, it was make it up as you go along pretty much.

**Woodside Farms:**

Our industry is quite unique. I would not be able to tell a builder how to isolate their staff when presumably each industry had to find a way to work, did they not, so we did.

**Mr. P. van Bodegom:**

You mentioned in your submission that you needed another 350 workers or so that are not part of the permanent year-round agricultural workforce for seasonal harvesting and packaging. Other than financial, because we have touched on that already, was there any other support provided by the Government to help you procure to house these people?

**President, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

No, nothing at all. I think even the ... as I say, there was a small amount of movement of staff from hospitality, in particular, to agriculture. Perhaps there were a few other sectors. But that was all really done by private individuals. I mean Jersey Royal was talking to one of the biggest hotel groups. We have a landlady who has got interests in hotels. But that was all done by industry itself.

**Mr. P. van Bodegom:**

So it is a private initiative industry to industry?

**President, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

Yes.

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

Yes. But it was not helped by Brexit but getting enough people into the Island was almost impossible. We were all short of people. So we all worked incredibly long hours to achieve what we needed to achieve. Which again probably cuts across where we should have been because you

are working people hard. That is not pleasant for them either. It all has to be optional but there is a lot of tired people around. You have to make sure you are taking care of them as well.

**Mr. P. van Bodegom:**

Specifically you talked about the shortage of tractor drivers, and you mentioned that previously. Can you expand a little bit more on how you found yourself in that position and how you managed to overcome that?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

It is probably more as a result of Brexit. None of our people are classed as skilled people so, under the rules of Brexit, they cannot spend any longer than 9 months in the Island. Now a tractor driver to me is a skilled person. You are letting him loose with 60 grand's worth of tractor, all electronic components, and if you have a harvester on the back that is - I think we had some priced up by our supplier last week at £180,000 - you have £250,000 worth of tractor and harvester there. We have 30 of those.

**President, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

And very small roads. It is a skilled job.

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

These are skilled people. In our factory, everything is touch screen now. I go in there and there is no way I am going to operate those. It is very challenging. When you get people in who are only allowed into the Island for 9 months you have to have twice those amount of people because we have a 12-month business, and it is the machine operators that work outside the general season still doing other work. They still have to tend the land, cut the hedges, so it is very challenging. We were lucky that we have got a supply of quite long-serving people that are now mainly machinery operators but they have pretty much all done their time now and we are starting to see them all leave to go back home. They have made their money, they want to go back home and kind of semi retire and buy their houses and settle down with their families. Getting key operators over here is massively challenging. Now, I do not really see why ... I was at a Scrutiny hearing this morning where we spoke about why can people not come for 5-year licences, as we call them skilled, even though they are not classed as skilled by the Government; why can they not be here for 5 years because actually we house them all. So they are all in our agricultural housing. We can only use that accommodation for agricultural workers. They are not going to be a burden on the States by going out in the general housing market. They are not here to, say, in 5 years' time: "I want residency." Because they are all here to earn money to go back home and look after their families back home. That is a major issue in us having skilled operators. We spend a fortune training people. I have been working in agriculture for close on 30 years. When I first started out that was my goal,

was driving big machinery in the U.K. When I came back to Jersey, if you had let me loose on one of those bits of implements now it would take me a couple of days to get back into it and learn how to do it again.

**Mr. P. van Bodegom:**

I understand there are several courses that you have to put them on; you are legally obliged to put them on, and they have a cost..

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

Yes, even if we have somebody who is legally qualified to drive a tractor, we would never let them loose on the Island roads without putting them through our own specific training session because everything is so different over here. Even trying to get them to find their way around the Island. There are 1,600 fields spread across the Island, you cannot just point and say: "Go that way." So we use lots of technology and so on, so G.P.S. (global positioning satellite) tracking vehicles, G.P.S. co-ordinates, print them out map books; it is a massive output of information.

**Mr. P. van Bodegom:**

How did you overcome the current shortage? Were you able to attract people?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

Yes, working longer hours, but also the last 2 seasons the weather has impacted the crops. We have had some of the coldest springs and the wettest springs. So our yields have not much expectations as well, purely because of the weather now.

[14:45]

You might almost think that is fortunate because if we had heavier crops we would have been in an even worse position and we would have probably ended up wasting more crops than we did. But, given a normal season, it would have been dreadful. But the weather impact on our crops was another financial impact, so it was almost a double whammy. It was just fortunate that - well it was not, it was unfortunate - that the yields were not there so we almost managed to keep up. But working the long, long hours.

**Mr. P. van Bodegom:**

Just going on from that one, was anyone in your organisations having to work remotely?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

Yes, so we have about 20 office staff, so health and safety, payroll, technical, land managers, all based in the office and all of them had to work remotely. We have one I.T. (information technology) guy who is superhuman and he managed to just about get everybody set up to work from home. Even then, a lot of us still can work from home, which is basically if you have got a long day on, it means you can go home, have your tea, and carry on at night.

**Mr. P. van Bodegom:**

Was there any Government guidance, Government assistance, in getting people to work remotely?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

Only the general rules, work from home where you can, and isolate where you can.

**Woodside Farms:**

We did the same. Obviously smaller team, but those type of roles were all operating from home, so we had to tech up for that.

**Mr. P. van Bodegom:**

How involved were you with the contact tracing team to prevent and minimise transmission of COVID-19?

**Secretary, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

I was on behalf of the Farmers' Union and we did a Teams meeting and we basically sort of acted as the liaison person for a lot of the growers, really apart from Jersey Royal because they are so large they did their own thing. But we had good contact and we had people who we could go and ask for advice.

**Mr. P. van Bodegom:**

So that line of communication worked well for people?

**Secretary, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

Yes, it did.

**Mr. P. van Bodegom:**

We have already gone through my next questions, which was the significant additional costs of isolating incoming staff into hotels. Again, you have touched on there was no financial support, this is a cost that you burdened yourselves. Was there any help in locating those hotel rooms or, again, a central bank of information for you to go to, or is this something you did yourselves through your connections in the 2 industries?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

Again, for us, it was down to us to sort that out. We were fortunate we worked with 2 reasonably-sized hotels who helped us out. But with the downturn in visitors I guess it was made easier as well.

**President, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

From the union's point of view, we really only got involved in isolating outside the Island directly particular people coming in. The first lots that we had to isolate in the U.K. in hotels was costing somewhere around £1,800 per person for the fortnight, or 11 nights. In the end, believe it or not, we were isolating people in Armenia because it was cheaper.

**Secretary, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

Armenia had turned amber by that point, whereas the Philippines was still red, so it meant that once they were in Armenia for 11 or 12 nights, they could then fly straight into the U.K. and then on to Jersey without any more isolation apart from just a P.C.R. (polymerase chain reaction) test on arrival and getting a negative result then.

**President, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

It is true to say that things like COVID make our jobs very interesting, that you are sort of dealing with the whole world and trying to find ways to solve problems. But it takes a lot of time.

**Mr. P. van Bodegom:**

Was that something that you resolved yourselves or did somebody say: "By the way, you might want to think of this"?

**President, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

No, with that arrangement in the Philippines, we arranged that all ourselves.

**Secretary, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

We had communicated directly with the Government last April. We were hoping to join up with the hospitality industry and fly a large group of workers into a hub into Europe, I think it was in Germany. They were going to do the same with hospitality workers and we were hoping to charter a plane to bring them all to Jersey. What we had proposed to the Government that we would do is put them up in a hotel, which was at that time closed, and let them do their 10 days' isolation here in the hotel in Jersey. It would have been good because the hotel themselves here in Jersey would have had money to save those workers having to go via the U.K. and pay a U.K. hotel. But we were not allowed to do that. They were very strict. Anyone that was coming in from a red country had to do their isolation in the U.K. first and then come to Jersey after 10 days.

**Mr. P. van Bodegom:**

Did they give you an extensive reasoning behind that?

**Secretary, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

No, those were the rules and they felt it was not going to be safe to do that in Jersey, which was a shame really because it would have helped hospitality upstream as well as ourselves and our workers so they did not have to go to the U.K.

**The Connétable of St. John:**

Did you speak to the Minister for Infrastructure about that?

**Secretary, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

No, I was just dealing with the Jersey Hospitality Association; it was the 2 of us together.

**The Connétable of St. John:**

When France was red, we were still seeing people flying in from France.

**Mr. P. van Bodegom:**

You mention that structure. Did you at any point make isolation exception applications? Was there any time you felt you could make those applications for any of your staff?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

The only time that we made some applications was if we had some essential engineering people coming over, if one of our machines very specific to the industry ... so if one of those broke down and we could not fix it, we had somebody come over but they were in and out in a few hours.

**Mr. P. van Bodegom:**

Were they supportive of that?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

Yes. There were maybe 2 or 3 occasions.

**Mr. P. van Bodegom:**

Was it an extensive process or was it quite a quick conversation with somebody to say: "Look, these are unique and exceptional circumstances. They are coming in to repair a piece of kit and they are leaving again"?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

I think if we did it, we would get the answer.

**Woodside Farms:**

We had exactly the same for exactly the same reason and it went very well.

**Mr. P. van Bodegom:**

Final question: how could the Government of Jersey have improved its services in regard to contact tracing and exemptions for your industry?

**President, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

I think Mike had some problems, well not just Mike, but we had problems with some of the European phones do not seem to work at the beginning with the contact tracing and we were having to do it either through individual growers or we had some through the union for individual growers. So that was a problem early on. Other than that, it was pretty good really.

**Woodside Farms:**

There was a curious situation, and we had a lady who worked very closely with Jane on this, but the staff phones would not work. We said we will do the contact, we will fill in the things, and we were told: "No, no, it has to be the people." We said: "Well the people's phones do not work." So we ended up giving them our mobiles so they could do it themselves, when we had offered to do it anyway. So that seemed to be a bit strange.

**Mr. P. van Bodegom:**

Was this another cost to yourselves?

**Woodside Farms:**

It was only temporary I think while they were in isolation, but we still had to buy the phones and supply them.

**Secretary, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

I did take this up with the contact tracing people when we had our Teams meeting and I said: "We have to be pragmatic about this. I know G.D.P.R. (General Data Protection Regulation) is in force but if we can give the grower's details as the link for the worker they will get the information, which they will pass on to the worker, and surely that is better than you having the workers' phones, the phones do not work here, and information not getting through. Imagine if someone had contracted COVID and the message did not get through to them. That would not be very good." So I think they saw the light eventually and that is the way it had to be really.



**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

We had several meetings with Julie Settle, the head of contact tracing, to exchange information. It was through her and myself and Graham, who is our H.R. (human resources) manager, just to get things moving.

**Mr. G. Phipps:**

Just to follow up on that, there is an example where they - although it may be a little bit of a challenge - worked pragmatically with you to solve this specific concern, even though there were guidelines and rules, but they worked with you. What were the other areas in retrospect that the Government could have worked with your pragmatically and found solutions versus going by the letter of the law? What are the main ones that you would hope in future there is a relationship or an ability to do exactly what you did there and solve a problem in a win/win way?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

I guess the big thing was financial support. Who can we talk to about supporting the industry?

**Woodside Farms:**

The other thing, it is fair to say, is that the Government's response or, more accurately, lack of response for this pandemic is going to have a significant impact on the shape of the industry going forward and will significantly damage the Island's ability to feed itself and its whole food security. So what will happen next time, not sure if we will all be here.

**Mr. G. Phipps:**

I am looking for learnings, things we can do differently as we go forward so that does not happen. I understand the financial thing, but I was wondering if there were other things.

**Secretary, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

Certainly we had an instance where we had some workers in, I think it was from the Philippines, and the grower themselves was trying to work out how long they needed to isolate for. This was in 2021, so the whole vaccine programme had kicked in and these particular people had had one vaccine and not 2. He was getting one answer, I was also trying to tackle the same question, and I was getting a different answer. There was one point where the poor grower was getting very annoyed because the 2 answers were not meeting. So there was a lack of communication within Government at that point about isolation requirements and vaccines and that sort of thing. So that could have perhaps been done a little bit better. But we resolved it in the end and it all worked out okay.

**Woodside Farms:**

I guess it is just better internal communications from the Government to work out what the message is. We have phoned for business reasons and personal, we have phoned the COVID help lines, and received completely different responses to the same questions. So one story coming from Government would be a good start.

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

From our point of view, that is why we have ended up taking up so much time with Julie Settle herself, because we were getting different answers from the team below her. So it is much easier to get to the head and just discuss things there and get a clear answer.

**Dr. H. Miles:**

Just some closing questions now. How did you highlight concerns regarding the impact of the pandemic on local produce?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

How did I highlight it, sorry?

**Dr. H. Miles:**

Yes, I am just thinking about, was any support considered or discussed with the Government to understand how we could encourage Islanders to buy local, particularly during the Spend Local campaign?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

We did have an initial meeting with Deputy Steve Luce. Our local food security, it was all about: "Can you go out and grow some extra crops?" So between our 2 businesses, Charlie was prepared to go and grow some, we were prepared to help out with land and equipment and staffing to do that. But why were we going to go and do that? The Government wanted some more local food security yet they were not prepared to support that. So we could have gone and grown double the amount of produce for the local supermarkets in year one, and made sure that the Island was a bit more secure in its food source. But that was all going to be at our risk.

**Woodside Farms:**

Certainly the whole country nationally was lucky that the pandemic hit at the time of year when it did because it was the spring. I do not know so much about global, I suspect global, but certainly the European supply chain network was on its knees. It nearly collapsed. It was lucky that it was the spring where local and British supplies were coming online to feed the country. If the pandemic had started in September or October 2020 when it started, I think the outcome would have been very, very different. Because everything had stopped, Europe was in a mess, the whole thing was in a

mess. Through the winter, the whole country brings most of its food in. It is only that it was the spring and the British season was coming online that we all enjoyed the food that we did, in my view.

**President, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

Just to expand on that, the difficulty locally was not retail, it was the fact that local businesses obviously, especially when you get to April, suddenly the hospitality season is going to start and I know one smaller grower who supplies the local market, he basically lost his business because it was nearly all hospitality. It just evaporated overnight and when you close restaurants, you close hotels, you have no sales.

[15:00]

**Dr. H. Miles:**

Because certainly we saw with the fish that Jersey Alternative Fish Market got together and they were pushing very heavily for people to buy the local fish that could not be exported. Did the Government make any moves to support the agricultural industry to do that above the Spend Local campaign?

**President, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

No, but I think, and Charlie would know better than me, to be fair to the local retailers, the big ones like Waitrose, they were all very supportive during that time.

**Woodside Farms:**

Yes. So I cannot think of any Government initiatives, but supermarkets were the only shops that were open and the supermarkets would continue to stock local.

**Dr. H. Miles:**

They were focusing on local.

**Woodside Farms:**

Yes, as much as they do, yes.

**Dr. H. Miles:**

Have any alternative plans been proposed to you by Government to reduce your losses incurred from COVID-19?

**Woodside Farms:**

No, because if you ask Government agriculture is unaffected by COVID, so why would they propose anything?

**Dr. H. Miles:**

It is interesting what you were saying before, particularly about your technical needs and the kind of drivers. Has there been any discussion with Skills Jersey about the people locally? Has there been any discussion about using, for example, this fund to build skills in that area?

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

We do our very best to try to introduce local people. We have had some success through Project Trident with a couple of young lads, 16 year-olds started to come to work in our engineering department at the weekend. One of them is now full-time with us and doing a Highlands College course. But trying to get anybody into agriculture locally is difficult.

**Woodside Farms:**

We had an opening offer to that work scheme and all the rest of it: "If you have anybody bring them up and we will give them a try." I can say we have taken on 100 per cent of the people that have been presented to us.

**Dr. H. Miles:**

Have you communicated with Government regarding preparations for any future pandemics?

**Woodside Farms:**

I do not think we have recovered from this one yet, have we?

**Dr. H. Miles:**

Just a final question for me: what are the key lessons that you believe the Government of Jersey really need to learn from their response to COVID-19 in the agricultural industry?

**President, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

Charlie summed it up that it has certainly impacted the whole industry a lot more than we thought it would at the beginning. There were certainly some businesses who were struggling because of the pandemic and are struggling to go forward. But more importantly, if we did find ourselves in another pandemic, say in the near future, some agricultural businesses would go to the Government and say: "Count me out. I do not want to be an essential employee. I prefer to take the money like everyone else and pay for my staff and just not do anything." Because you cannot really afford to be essentially employed work and then be doing it at a loss. Mike mentioned quite a bit about the Royals and the effect. But as a grower one of the biggest effects is that the price of Royals starts

high and comes down. One of the reasons it starts high is because at the very beginning of the season the small sales are made generally on the wholesale market where the very high-end chefs will spend £4 a kilo or whatever it is on Jersey Royals and charge you about £4 a potato to have it on your plate. Because they like to see Jersey Royals on the plate. Well that disappeared overnight and our own figures for our own farm, that early season we were down year-on-year 33 per cent. So it has a huge impact. Things in the ground we would have harvested, but whether one would think about carrying on planting other crops to lose money, that is the lesson that we have learned. It was a great shame that ... as Mike says, we had quite a lot of discussions over a month with Government in April 2020 when we told them that ... I know people have lost touch with agriculture, but if you want crops for the winter you basically need to be sowing them in April. We said if the Island is going to be short of winter veg, and we asked for support, it was about £150,000 to guarantee the supply of basic winter veg for the whole Island, and even that in the end was decided it was too expensive and we will just take the gamble. So we were very disappointed with that and it basically set the tone for lack of support in the industry as it went forward.

**Dr. H. Miles:**

Charlie, did you have anything specific to add?

**Woodside Farms:**

No, I do not think so.

**Mr. A. Lane:**

Can I just ask for confirmation, I do not want to bait the bear too much, but the co-funded payroll scheme, it sounds like that was not available for your office workers either.

**Woodside Farms:**

It was not available to any of our employees in any of our various businesses, even the ones that were not directly involved in agriculture.

**Mr. A. Lane:**

Did you have any conversations about your contingent workers who were here for months at a time, did they have any access to the vaccine programmes?

**Secretary, Jersey Farmers' Union:**

Yes. I liaised with the vaccine people. That was probably one of the best things, I would say, about the Government response. We managed to get all the workers who wanted the vaccine organised into groups and they all went out on a Saturday afternoon, got not only their first vaccine, but their

second vaccine as well. That worked extremely well. The vaccine people were really helpful to deal with.

**Mr. A. Lane:**

The last is: we recognise you did not get the outcome you wanted from the conversations you had about financial support, but do you feel that officers listened to you or indeed explained their position from a policy perspective?

**Woodside Farms:**

The people who were trying to help us and put the claims in were very good. The Environment Department was excellent. Jersey Business, I have worked with them a lot, they are excellent generally. I still do not know why agriculture was exempt. So presumably that means I have not had a clear message about why I have not been helped. I still do not know why we were excluded. I do not get it.

**Business Unit Director, Jersey Royal Company:**

Probably the only industry in the Island that was not helped.

**Woodside Farms:**

It is okay, it is only food, you only need it to survive.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Any other questions from the committee members? Anything that you would like to add that we did not ask? We are really grateful that you came and you shared with us. I think that the huge impact that your industry had during the pandemic suffered, it is clear to the committee. Personally, out of touch with the agriculture, this disconnection that the agriculture that you brought to the table is concerning because we do need food security for the Island and financial support. So if you want veg for security, how the Government works together with the industry to make it happen. So we are grateful for your time and for your evidence.

**Woodside Farms:**

Could I just ask what happens next? Because I have been to a number of meetings and then we never hear anything back. So what happens next? Is there any feedback for us from this meeting or how will the panel feed back to what happens? Who is going to ask questions? We have been to productivity plan meetings and these meetings and other meetings and we never hear anything back.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Thank you for asking. As the Public Accounts Committee, we are gathering evidence for our COVID response, the Government response for COVID. Before we publish our report, we will share with you parts of the report that will be connected to the agriculture, so you make sure that your evidence is put into the report correctly. As a panel, we put some recommendations, which we find if it is around the financial support, if it is about engagement with the Government about communication. The moment the report is finished and it is published publicly, it is going to the Government and then in 5 weeks Government needs to respond to us saying do they accept the recommendations or they reject the recommendations. If they accept recommendations, when will the recommendations will be put in place. This is the process that we are following with the Public Accounts Committee.

**Woodside Farms:**

Will those recommendations be relating to the future or will they be retrospective to take retrospective action?

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

It varies. It depends on what the committee decides. It can go back for retrospective. We just published a report and we said: "Please do this going back." We also publish something that should be done in the next quarters.

**Woodside Farms:**

So, if the panel felt minded to, it could recommend to the Government that our claims for help and support might be looked at again, or not?

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

It can be an option that we can say to Government to consider. We cannot order the Government because the panel cannot order about it, but we can definitely ask them to consider to review it. But again I cannot promise you because it depends what it is.

**Woodside Farms:**

No, it is good to hear. As I say, we engaged with Government regularly on various levels and we seem to not hear back. In a commercial environment you have meetings with people and you all agree what you are going to do and you go away and do it and you come back and say: "This is what we have done." There does not seem to be that 2-way street with Government. We say things and then no response.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

One of the things, just really quickly, that you do not understand why your industry did not get any support, so you replied that you did not get any explanations. We need to start from there. What

was the calculation? What were the barriers why it did not happen? So the moment that we have clarity what were the reasons, from there it will be easier to traverse in any direction. I hope it helps.

**Mr. G. Phipps:**

Just to remind you, this is a public hearing, so what you have said, the dialogue we have had, is in the public domain.

**Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Thank you for coming. The public hearing is closed.

[15:12]