

PRESS RELEASE

Thanet Earth & Unite

27th April 2011



In the time since the construction and start of production at Thanet Earth, this landmark greenhouse complex has grown to become a very significant employer and a key part of the economy in Thanet. We have built an enviable reputation as a producer of consistently top quality tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers and have attracted a high media profile.

In March 2010 the Unite union contacted Thanet Earth with allegations of impropriety in relation to people employed at the site by our contracted labour providers. There followed two meetings between Thanet Earth management and Unite representatives which resulted in a full internal investigation of all allegations made. The results of this were handed to Unite with, in our opinion, satisfactory conclusion and no further action required.

The allegations made by Unite have related wholly to cases of people employed by agencies, and there are no instances of allegations relating to employees of Thanet Earth Marketing Ltd. All of the agencies used by Thanet Earth are fully licensed and audited by the Gangmasters Licensing Authority. All legal safeguards are in place and up to date with best practice followed throughout.

We strive to make Thanet Earth an attractive, welcoming place to work and we care about the treatment of all workers on site – be they employed by an agency or by one of the Thanet Earth businesses directly. The site is very modern, offering excellent working conditions and a subsidised canteen that's available to all. Both agencies used by Thanet Earth Marketing have a full-time coordinator on site, there to manage worker queries and help ensure compliance with regulations. A consultative committee system provides a forum for employees and agency workers to have effective discussions about workplace issues and provides representation to management.

Unite appear to have retained a fundamental opposition to the use of agency workers and in March 2011 they repeated their original allegations in a press release to local and trade media. Thanet Earth Marketing immediately invited the Gangmasters Licensing Authority to provide an independent investigation of all allegations made with a view to providing an impartial response and to allow Thanet Earth to rectify any breaches of regulation found. This investigation is active and ongoing with results expected during May 2011.

It is important to note that agency staff continue to be a fundamental part of life at Thanet Earth and that we hold a good reputation as a workplace in the community. We are anxious to protect this good reputation – as are the agency contractors we use. Thanet Earth Marketing has a strong relationship with those agencies and will stand by the wide range of safeguards that we have collectively put in place to protect agency workers from any denial of their rights or abuse.

It is perhaps notable that Thanet Earth has recruited more than 40 permanent members of staff in the last two years with the majority of those people transferring to us from one of our agencies. We do offer, where possible career progression and more stable employment. Since the site opened for business in 2008, we have put £9 million in salaries and wages back into the local community – a place that suffers from extremely high unemployment. Recent discussions with Thanet District Council have confirmed that they are extremely supportive of Thanet Earth and our continuing employment of staff from within the more challenging communities in their district.

We await the outcome of the ongoing GLA investigation with interest and make a commitment to all interested parties that issues raised will be discussed and remedied where appropriate, with any further action recommended acted upon with the greatest of urgency.

PRESS RELEASE

Thanet Earth & Unite

27th April 2011



Information for editors:

Thanet Earth is a state-of-the-art greenhouse development in Kent. When completed the site will feature seven enormous greenhouses, producing tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers. So far, three of the greenhouses have been constructed and are fully operational alongside an on-site packhouse. The crops are sold to the UK's supermarkets.

For information about the business, its background and operations, see www.thanetearth.com

Judy Whittaker, Communications Manager on –
07918 194998 or press@thanetearth.com