



**SUNTORY**  
BEVERAGE & FOOD GB&I

# THE SUNTORY BEVERAGE & FOOD GB&I **FARM STEWARDSHIP PROGRAMME**

The Six Point Plan



# Introduction

At Suntory Beverage and Food GB&I (SBF GB&I) we believe in Growing for Good. This is a positive vision about doing the right thing by people and the planet, as we produce, market and sell our drinks.

Since 2004 we have been supporting our Ribena blackcurrant growers in the conservation of habitats on their farms. To do this we developed a Six Point Plan (6PP) to boost biodiversity. This consists of simple but effective environmental principles implemented alongside production, and is now fully embedded in and around every Ribena blackcurrant field in the country. Since then there have been developments in best practice and research around the value of natural capital in our farmed environment have required the plan to be updated. These updates reflect how soils, water quality and provision of key resources for pollinators have risen up the environmental agenda.

Five years ago, our 6PP took a major step forward thanks to a partnership with The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), a conservation charity specialising in providing trusted, independent environmental advice to the farming community.

The partnership has seen specialist conservation advisors from FWAG visit each of our 34 farms\* to validate that the 6PP is fully adopted and provide tailored advice on how to optimise habitats for the benefit of wildlife and the planet. In addition to a detailed report and a biodiversity action plan, technical specialists gave specific advice to growers to support local species and habitats.



## WHAT IS NATURAL CAPITAL?

**Natural capital** can be defined as the environment's stocks of **natural assets** which include geology, soil, air, water and all living things.

The developments made to the Farm Stewardship Scheme and 6PP over the past 5 years have ensured that it remains **current, practical** and able to **deliver real environmental benefits** on the ground that are in line with national policy and are rooted in recognised research and development.

Rebecca Mills, SW Conservation advisor and FWAG project lead





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We view the community of growers that cultivate the juicy blackcurrants that go into Ribena as an **extension of the Suntory family**, and therefore meet with them regularly to discuss new challenges. Climate change and weather fluctuations have the potential to threaten the future of blackcurrants in the UK, so by acting now to boost the sustainability and efficiency of farms **we can protect this vital crop for future generations.**”

Liz Nieboer, Head of Sustainability & External Affairs, SBF GB&I



## GROWING FOR GOOD

Growing for Good is our company vision, and it's all about doing the right thing by people, planet and society. Its meaning is simple: by driving positive environmental and social change through the decisions we make, we will grow a successful business for the long term. This growth then sets off a virtuous cycle, allowing us to make more change at pace and create more good.



# Summary of the Six Point Plan

The SBF GB&I Farm Stewardship Scheme covers 34 growers delivering environmental improvements to farms across Great Britain. Each follows the Six Point Plan (6PP) to enhance the management of key farmland habitats and species.

## It aims to:

Promote and demonstrate environmental measures across all (SBF GB&I) blackcurrant farms in order to support the sustainability of blackcurrant production through the protection of our natural capital.

Covering management and maintenance of:

- **Hedgerows:** managed to create a rich network of boundaries abundant with blossom and fruit.
- **Rough grass buffers:** to protect adjoining features and provide a habitat for insects, birds and small mammals.
- **Green headlands:** to protect soils and provide pollen and nectar.
- **Farmland birds:** at least one nest box installed per hectare of blackcurrants grown, minimum of 10% monitored annually.
- **Pollen and nectar:** maintain an area equivalent to 5% of the blackcurrant area, providing pollen and nectar sources for insects.
- **Mature trees:** buffered from field operations and root damage.

The 6PP, together with bespoke on-farm advice on its delivery, helps to ensure the protection and enhancement of natural capitals, such as soil, water and priority habitats. Natural capitals are the key stones that form the basis of a healthy living environment and underpin national policy including the Government's 25-year Environment Plan.



There are so many ways in which our growers are putting the plan into practice and leading the way in terms of **cutting-edge** sustainable blackcurrant production. It makes my job easy! I learn so much from our growers and I can **share their best practice** to the wider grower group to everyone's benefit.

Harriet Prosser, SBF GB&I agronomist





# The Six Point Plan

Our core Farm Stewardship principals that are in place around every Ribena blackcurrant field in the UK. Designed to support biodiversity, the habitats associated and the wider environment.

Optimising  
**hedgerows**

Preserving ancient  
and **mature trees**

3

Permanent  
**green headlands**  
around all fields

1

6

4

2

5

Increased **pollen**  
and **nectar** supplies

Installing **nest boxes**  
for every hectare

Undisturbed **rough grass**  
**buffers** along boundaries

## 34 blackcurrant farms

All 34 growers have been visited by FWAG conservation advisors to validate that they are following the SBF GB&I Six Point Plan, designed to provide enhanced management of key farmland habitats and species.

### Scottish region:

4 farms north west of Dundee, in Angus (1) and Perthshire (3)

### East Anglian region:

7 farms located in Norfolk (5), Suffolk (1) and Essex (1)

### Western region:

8 farms located in Herefordshire (6), Monmouthshire (1) and Gloucestershire (1)

### South West region:

2 farms in Somerset

### South East region:

13 farms located in Kent (11) and East Sussex (2)



# Hedgerow management

## Hedgerows

Native hedges are a key habitat within our farmed landscapes, providing wildlife corridors, shelter and food. They also act as natural windbreaks to shelter crops, slow the flow of run-off and store carbon. The UK has lost around half of its hedgerows since World War II, and much of the remaining million miles are in poor condition.<sup>1</sup>

### Six Point Plan requirements:

- Trim all internal hedgerows in alternate years to encourage blossom and fruit.
- Trim hedgerows outside the bird nesting season.
- The majority of hedgerows should be more than 2m high and 1.5m wide.
- Hedgerow habitats to be extended with tussocky margins and green headlands.

### Above and Beyond

- Increase the time between trimmings to 3-4 yearly to increase volume.
- Look for sections that may be ready to lay to increase density.
- Plant up gaps, permanent fence lines, and windbreaks with native hedgerow species and consider creating mixed species windbreaks where gaps are present or where windbreaks are being replanted.

Maximising the value of hedges for birds is a key part of the 6PP. The RSPB estimates that at least 30 species of birds nest in hedgerows and many more use them for food and shelter. Research has shown that the two most important factors associated with species richness and abundance of breeding birds in hedgerows are hedge size and the presence of trees.<sup>2</sup>

The value of hedgerows to birds is increased when combined with other features such as headlands, margins, pollen and nectar plots, wild-bird cover and well-vegetated banks and ditches.

Unfortunately single species windbreaks are more common than native hedgerows on several of our Kent farms for historic reasons. To boost their future value to wildlife, we have been planting gaps with native GB hedgerow species or replanting mature windbreaks with mixed species hedges. At Newlands Farm in Kent, more than 400m of mixed species windbreaks were established in spring 2019 in place of traditional single species stands.







# HOW MANY MILES OF HEDGEROW?

SBF GB&I growers sensitively manage over 185 miles of native mixed species hedgerows. That's almost as long as the M4 motorway!<sup>3</sup>

## CARBON CAPTURE

UK hedgerows help capture carbon dioxide from our atmosphere, with every hectare of hedging storing between 15 and 40 tonnes of carbon per hectare (Tc/ha) in above ground biomass, and a similar amount again underground.<sup>4</sup>

The 6PP encourages blackcurrant growers to increase the volume of the hedgerows, which also creates better habitats for wildlife. At Bradfields Farm, Somerset, Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority species such as dormice have been found using nest boxes in their hedgerows. By helping connect native woodlands and areas of scrub, hedges are helping this species spread into new areas.





## Rough grass buffers

Rough grass margins offer multiple benefits for the farmland environment. They provide an ideal habitat for insects, small mammals, ground nesting birds and hunting grounds for kestrels and barn owls.

### Six Point Plan guidelines:

- Maintain 2m wide rough grass buffers against all boundary features, including hedges, windbreaks and dry-stone walls adjacent to blackcurrants.
- Aim to trim every 3-5 years in rotation.
- Do not trim more frequently than once every two years to encourage a tussocky sward (expanse of short grass) to develop.

### Above and Beyond

- Develop network of structured, connected tussocky grass margins.
- Only trim to keep woody growth in check.
- Encourage development of nectar sources.
- Do not trim all margins in any one year.



## WHY ARE GRASSLANDS IMPORTANT?



When managed carefully, species rich grasslands lock in carbon and boost biodiversity.<sup>5</sup> They also provide ideal places for field voles to thrive which are an essential food source for birds including kestrels and owls.



Barn owls need 14 to 21 hectares of rough grass within 2 km of a suitable nest site. This equates to 35 km of rough grass field margin, 4 to 6 metres wide.<sup>6</sup>





## HOW MANY MILES OF ROUGH GRASSLAND?

There are over 700 hectares of rough grassland habitats across our blackcurrant farms; from hedge bases and grass buffers along water courses to unimproved grasslands – enough to support over 30 pairs of nesting barn owls.

## BARN OWL BREEDING PROGRAMMES

Thanks to the 6PP, barn owls are now successfully breeding on seven blackcurrant farms and regularly seen hunting over the rough grass margins of 17 more.

In 2021 the breeding pair of barn owls at Whitehouse Farm in Monmouthshire successfully hatched seven chicks! The grower Andy Tabb and his team worked with Project Nestbox, a local conservation charity in South Wales, to monitor the brood and ring the owlets so they could be tracked once fledged.





## Green headlands

The headlands found around fruit fields provide access for fieldwork during harvest, and with some changes to management, they can also provide an opportunity for improved soil management and insect habitats.

Soils are one of our most valuable natural resources and a healthy soil supports vigorous crops, reduces the need for artificial inputs, is more resilient to weather events and locks away carbon. Our 6PP encourages blackcurrant growers to protect their soils from damage, especially in areas that suffer heavy traffic.

Each field has at least a six metre strip of permanent grass at the end of the blackcurrant rows where machinery can turn. All but one of our farms grass out alleyways between currant bushes to protect the underlying soils from erosion, build organic matter and encourage natural processes.

Blackcurrant growers are also encouraged to support pollinating insects by including flowering plants such as clover within the seed mix for grassed areas and staggering grass cutting to prolong the flowering season.

### Six Point Plan guidelines:

- Green headlands to be maintained around all blackcurrant fields for the life of the plantation.
- Aim to achieve a minimum of 6m width and green cover throughout the year.
- Be vigilant for compaction, especially after harvest and move if necessary.

### Above and Beyond

- Leave untrimmed after harvest to maintain cover over the winter period.
- Include nectar sources, such as clover, within the mix when sowing new headlands.

# WHY ARE HEADLANDS IMPORTANT?

There are over 165 hectares of green headlands around the blackcurrant crops, the equivalent of more than 214 football pitches. Seven SBF GB&I growers have included nectar species within the headlands or alleyways to increase their value for pollinators.

Gorgate Farm, Coggeshall Hall Farm, Gushmere Court and others are supporting pollinating insects by sowing the alleyways of their fields with species rich flowering plants. This in turn attracts more predatory insects to help manage crop pests.





## Nest boxes and farmland birds

Bird populations are a real indicator of ecosystem health. The most recent Breeding Bird Survey carried out by the British trust for Ornithology, shows that of the 118 bird species in the UK, 43 species are showing statistically significant long-term declines.

According to the RSPB, birds thrive according to three key factors – three key factors: a safe place to nest; food in spring and summer for their growing chicks; and lastly food and shelter over the winter. As such we tried to ensure our farms were addressing these factors;

### Six Point Plan guidelines:

- Install one nest box per hectare of blackcurrants. This can include boxes for birds, bats, bees or other small mammals.
- The location of the boxes should be mapped and maintained annually.
- The boxes should be checked, cleaned and occupancy of at least 10% recorded each year.

### Above and Beyond

- Repair or replace damaged boxes. When putting up new boxes, ensure that they can be opened for cleaning and checking.
- Consider putting up some bat boxes, bug and/or hedgehog hotels.
- Look for opportunities to increase winter food provision.

Not all birds use nest boxes however and so our 6PP also helps endangered ground nesting birds such as yellow hammers and grey partridge through the well managed rough grass buffers and green headlands around the blackcurrant fields. Our farmers are also making space for birds in old buildings and improving hedgerow structure to provide a wider range of natural nest sites.

In addition to the nest boxes, our farmers are helping to provide food for birds by sowing wild flower and winter bird seed plots. Wild flowers to increase insect numbers in the spring and summer for chicks and winter mixes to provide oil rich seeds in the 'hungry gap'. SBF GB&I has supported this by subsidising the purchase of seed mixes. This has seen over 25 hectares of additional plots sown across 21 of our farms.



Many species such as yellowhammers, grey partridge and skylarks are in long-term decline, but are often seen on or near to our **blackcurrant farms**.

Together with our farmers we are making sure the habitats in and around our fields are **optimised** for their benefit.

Harriet Prosser, SBF GB&I agronomist







## 2000 NEST BOXES!

SBF GB&I growers maintain over 2000 (2,024 at the last count) nest boxes on their farms for birds, bats and bees. These are monitored annually and through this process we know we have around a 58% nest box occupancy rate. That's approximately 1173 pairs of nesting birds being sheltered each year.

## THE BIG FARMLAND BIRD COUNT

The Big Farmland Bird Count is a national survey carried out by farmers annually. It's collated to provide a snapshot of the status of farmland birds nationally to better understand if conservation activities are working.

Our growers have taken part for the past 5 years and have recorded 13 red list and 15 amber list Birds of Conservation Concern on or near to the blackcurrant fields.





## Pollen and nectar

There are at least 1,500 species of insect pollinators in the UK that help plants to reproduce by carrying pollen from flower to flower as they feed.<sup>7</sup> The provision of food, shelter and nesting sites are also key to the recovery of insect pollinator species.

### Six Point Plan guidelines:

- Floristically enhance non-cropped areas around the blackcurrants.
- Aim to achieve a minimum of 5% of the blackcurrant area given over to rich pollen and nectar sources. This can include headlands, field corners, alleyways or hedgerows where pollen and nectar sources are present.
- Identify suitable locations in and around the non-cropped areas of the farms to plant or sow more flowering plants.

### Above and Beyond

- Sow a plot of the Ribena pollen and nectar seed mix.
- Stagger topping of margins and grass banks to extend the flowering period.
- Encourage development of flowering plants within the margins and alleyways.

All elements of the 6PP support delivery of the government's National Pollinator Strategy which encourages landowners to provide what bees need. In addition to supplies of food this includes sites for insects to nest and shelter, so at Lower Lulham Farm an earth mound has been created for solitary bees to nest in, while at other farms rotting trees, wood piles, bug hotels and shallow water are provided.

To boost supplies of food, we have developed special Ribena seed mixes in partnership with brand 'Kings Seeds' to benefit the blackcurrant crop as well as wildlife more generally. These include a proportion of flowering plants suitable for those that pollinate blackcurrants - such as solitary bees with short tongues as well as plant species which encourage predatory insects to help naturally keep pest levels under control.

## WHY IS THERE A DECLINE IN POLLINATOR NUMBERS?

Various factors have led to a decline in pollinator numbers, including insecticides and fungicides, loss of habitat and climate change, as well as the impact of disease and predators.





# 10 YEAR PLAN

The UK National Pollinator Strategy set out a 10 year plan to help pollinating insects survive and thrive. Our pollinators are vital for food production and biodiversity and they face a range of pressures from habitat loss to pests and diseases.

# 116 RUGBY PITCHES

SBF GB&I blackcurrant growers provide an area equivalent to over 13% of their fruit growing area to encourage pollinators. That's 260 hectares of nectar rich headlands, field corners, alleyways or hedgerows where pollen and nectar sources are present. In addition, across our 34 farms our growers have also sown an area the size of 116 rugby pitches with specific pollen and nectar mixes over the last five years.





## Mature trees

Mature trees are valuable links to ancient landscapes and an incredible resource for wildlife. Britain is thought to have the greatest number of ancient trees in northern Europe.<sup>8</sup>

Many of the ancient trees on our blackcurrant farms are oaks; and over 2000 species are known to be associated with mature oak trees including birds and mammals, invertebrates, lichens and fungi. Over the years, they have come under pressure from disease, demand for timber and changes in land management.

### Six Point Plan guidelines:

- Establish grass buffers below the canopy - ideally extending 2 metres beyond the radius of the canopy where fertilisers and plant protection products are not applied and any machinery operations are avoided.

### Above and Beyond

- Retain standing deadwood where safe, or stack on site.
- Continue to look for opportunities to increase tree numbers, such as tagging hedgerow saplings or new plantings.

Across several of our farms large scale tree planting has gone on over the past five years. At Marshall Farms up in Perthshire, 250 saplings were planted alongside new blackcurrant plantations. At Overy's farm in East Sussex, 1450 new trees went in and at Lower Lulham one hectare of mixed deciduous woodland is being established.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF DEADWOOD

Wherever possible, retaining standing deadwood - if safe - or standing up on site, will encourage a diversity of insect life and fungal activity.

The deadwood habitats at White House Farm in Monmouthshire are essential for the stag beetles which have been recorded there. Stag beetles are nationally scarce, legally protected and categorised as a priority species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

The beetles spend a significant proportion of their life cycle, usually between 3 and 7 years, underground in their larval stage feeding on decaying wood. They only emerge for a few weeks over the summer to find a mate and reproduce.<sup>9</sup>

The protection and sensitive management of key habitats such as ancient woodlands, mature native hedgerows and traditional orchards is essential to their survival.





# Other natural capital – water

As part of Suntory Group, SBF GB&I recognises the importance of water as a valuable resource, and achieving water sustainability is one of the key environmental priorities of the global business.

Our 6PP was updated in 2017 to ensure our farm stewardship approach reflects the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan for "clean and plentiful water". Agricultural practices are responsible for around 40% of waterbodies failing to achieve the government's target for being in "a near natural state". With the main sources of agricultural pollution coming from nitrates, sediment, plant protection products and phosphorus.

Many aspects of our 6PP support water conservation; with green headlands, buffers and hedgerows providing critical protection to water courses at the boundaries of the farmed environment.

Bruce Farms Balmyle site adjoins the River Isla and Dean Water, which are part of the River Tay special area of conservation (SAC). The designation is linked to the importance of the catchment for Atlantic salmon, but also for lamprey and otter.

The farm actively works to minimise the risk of pollution from its blackcurrant fields and wider farming enterprises. Watercourses are buffered by woodland, low input grassland or grass margins.

The whole farm is nutrient mapped with samples taken every six years in rotation to ensure inputs are targeted where they are most needed, and the farm recently invested in a biobed to facilitate safe disposal of plant protection product washing.



Winsford Hall in East Norfolk adjoins the Norfolk Broads which are the UK's largest protected wetland and of international importance with a mosaic of rare habitats. Reducing the impact of adjoining land use and maintaining water quality are therefore essential.

In response to historic soil erosion issues on the farm, steps have been taken to reduce the risks including grassing down the alleyways to stabilise the soils, using wide tussocky margins to slow run off, taking particularly steep areas out of production, and removing compaction from farm machinery where necessary.

As a result, the soil erosion problems, and any potential impact of the adjoining wetlands have significantly reduced, and the famous booming calls of the bittern can be heard in these blackcurrant fields.



# Impact on species conservation

Collectively the work with our blackcurrant growers and FWAG on our 6PP has helped to make a real difference in protecting many species of birds, animals and insects.

## Birds of conservation concern

'Birds of Conservation Concern' is a list compiled by a coalition of the UK's leading bird conservation and monitoring organisations and it reviews the status of all regularly occurring birds in the UK, Channel Islands and Isle of Man. According to the change in breeding populations when compared to historic records the birds will appear on the red, amber or green list.

Our blackcurrant farms support at least 22 red list bird species that are showing significant decline in UK breeding populations:

**SBF GB&I blackcurrant farms support at least 22 red list bird species that are showing significant decline in UK breeding populations:**

Cuckoo  
Curlew  
Corn bunting  
Fieldfare  
Grey partridge  
Grey wagtail  
Herring gull  
House sparrow

Lapwing  
Lesser spotted woodpecker  
Linnet  
Mistle thrush  
Nightingale  
Tree sparrow  
Skylark

Song thrush  
Spotted flycatcher  
Starling  
Turtle dove  
Whimbrel  
Woodcock  
Yellowhammer

# HELPING BIRDS THROUGH WINTER

11 blackcurrant farms grow areas of seed rich plants for birds and leave overwinter stubbles to help birds through the hungry gap in late winter when food supplies are at their lowest. Bradenham Hall has 12 such plots totalling over 19 hectares which are reseeded in alternate years to maintain the supply of seed.

Hamrow Farm supports three red list bird species that rely on hedgerows. Each species requires a different part of the hedge to nest in—tall hedges for turtle doves; mature hedgerow trees for hole nesting tree sparrows; and tussocky hedge bases for yellowhammers who nest close to the ground. They also have a fourth red list species, the grey partridge, which seems to really love blackcurrant fields, preferring to forage between blackcurrant rows and along the green headlands.





## Priority mammals, reptiles and amphibians

UK Biodiversity Action Plan Species are those that are identified as being the most threatened and requiring conservation action under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.<sup>10</sup>



**SBF GB&I blackcurrant farms support at least 19 species of mammals, reptiles and amphibians that are recognised of priorities for conservation in the UK:**

Brown Hare  
Hedgehogs  
Otter  
Dormouse  
Red Squirrel  
Water Vole

Newt species  
Great crested newt  
Grass snake  
Slow worm  
Common lizard  
Adder  
Common toad

Bats – Daubenton's  
Pipistrelle  
Natterer's  
Brown Long-eared  
Serotine  
Noctule  
Barbastelle





# SPECIES OF CONSERVATION

Several of our Scottish farms lie within key areas for red squirrel. They have been seen in woodlands at Balmyle and Bankhead of Kinloch. Both farms have woodland suitable to support the red squirrels, including new plantings. It has been recommended that these farms join the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels partnership project to ensure that red squirrels continue to be part of Scotland's special native wildlife.

At least seven of the 17 UK bat species have been recorded on farms in the blackcurrant grower group. 22 bat boxes have been installed at Hallwood Farm, in Kent in partnership with the Bat Conservation Trust. Both Pipistrelle and Daubenton's bats have been recorded on or close to the farm.

Bats rely on insect-rich hunting grounds well connected by linear features such as hedgerows and woodland edges, together with suitable roosting sites, which are all key features of the 6PP.





# Looking ahead

We are passionate about our blackcurrant heritage at SBF GB&I, and with over 90 percent of all British grown blackcurrants being used to make Ribena, ensuring the long-term viability of the environments they grow in is a priority.

That is why we've gone to extra lengths with our network of growers to protect the crop by promoting biodiversity and sustainability across their farms.

The shift in focus over the past five years has crystallised the importance our business is placing on Growing For Good in the minds of the community of growers that cultivate the blackcurrants that go into our drinks. We are committed to working with responsible suppliers doing what's right as we all try to navigate our futures in a changing climate.

We're incredibly proud of the progress that has been made over the last five years with the help of FWAG, but we also recognise that our work doesn't end here. We will continue to evolve our Farm Stewardship Programme and the 6PP to ensure it remains fit for purpose and follows the latest science.

We are also developing some local project hubs, these will bring together our growers managing similar habitats to target specific local challenges around habitat restoration or re-establishment of vulnerable species or wider topics such as water quality in specific catchments.

Working with relevant charities, researchers, and scientists we plan to track and monitor our progress in order to be sure we are making a positive difference.

We'll also continue to work with the James Hutton Institute – a leading crop and environmental research institute in which over the last 20 years, we've invested over £2 million into the research and breeding of world leading blackcurrant varieties bred for juice quality and flavour but also crucially resilience to changing climates and pest pressure.

In line with our Growing for Good vision, we believe that by increasing the environmental sustainability of blackcurrant production in the UK we can not only improve the ways our blackcurrant farms interact with the nature which surrounds them, but also boost the prosperity of our local farming communities and continue to produce our delicious drinks for many years to come.



The SBF GB&I blackcurrant growers have each delivered on the 6PP to bring about **positive environmental changes** on their farms. The key elements of the 6PP support many **national strategies** for farmland birds, water quality, soils and pollinators and the results of the work undertaken is clear in the range of species recorded on the farms and the quality of the habitats observed by FWAG conservation advisors. Many growers have gone above and beyond the recommendations of the plan. This positive attitude has resulted in both **environmental and agronomic gains**. They are a credit to the scheme and the scheme is a credit to the business.



Rebecca Mills, FWAG SW Conservation advisor and FWAG project lead



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\*disclaimer when referencing 'our farms' this refers to the network of growers that supply SBF GB&I with blackcurrants for Ribena, not farms legally owned by SBF GB&I