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93 East Main Street (Rte. 135),
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Dear Mr. Clark,

Maggie Oldfield at Thayer Nursery has asked me to send you information regarding the distinction between a nursery business and a landscape operation, both considered elements of the nursery industry. Our family nursery was established in 1923, we're now in our 4th generation, and over the years we have been involved with both of these segments of the nursery business. It is critical to differentiate between these two aspects because their approaches to customers, staffing needs, hours of operation, equipment types and uses, and seasonality needs differ considerably in how they contribute to running a successful business.

Nursery/garden center businesses are among the most seasonal of any industry, with the majority of sales typically concentrated in a few heavily-compressed weeks: spring (mid-April to mid-June) and fall (mid-September to Christmas). Weather is the primary factor that determines whether a year is successful or not, for both sales and profitability. Retail customers tend to stay away and postpone shopping at nurseries when the weather is inclement. And most importantly, it has been clearly documented that a sale "lost" in early spring is never "made-up" later in the year. Nurseries must take advantage of every opportunity to satisfy their customers' demands when those customers want to be served, so it's critical that extended hours are offered during those times.

Nurseries sell mostly to walk-in retail clients. They generally offer all types of plants, trees, shrubs, annuals, vegetables, etc., plus a wide range of horticultural accessories like soil, compost, mulch in all its forms either bagged or in bulk form for pick-up or delivery from the nursery site. Many also sell pottery, trellises, fire pits, lawn and patio furniture, tools, giftware, bird and pet supplies like houses and food, Christmas trees and wreaths. In attempts to appeal to a larger market and spread-out their seasonality, many nurseries are diversifying their offerings to include agri-tourism activities, corn maze, farmers markets, talks, scarecrow making contest, Easter egg hunt and many other innovative undertakings.

Landscape operations are also relatively seasonal, but landscape maintenance, design and installation businesses are not so weather-dependent. Landscaping activities can be successfully accomplished during any time of year the ground is not frozen; customers want their landscaping to be done at times convenient for them, not necessarily limited to spring or fall. Also, a lot more equipment/machinery is typically employed by landscape operations to achieve customer-desired results. Landscaping-employee skills are less demanding than a nursery serving retail walk-in customers who expect higher horticultural expertise from nursery staff.

There is a clear distinction between these two types of businesses. A "one-size-fits-all" business definition for Thayer will be onerous and seriously detrimental to their operation of a successful retail nursery.

R. Wayne Mezitt, Chairman, Weston Nurseries