

REPORT on MEETING between the JOINT
LIAISON COMMITTEE and the DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE held at CHESSER HOUSE,
EDINBURGH, at 2.30 p.m. on Thursday,
2nd September, 1971.

PRESENT:

N.A.S.P.M. Messrs. E. S. Sherriff, D. H. Smith, M.S. Strickland and R. J. Beeson.
S.P.T.A. Messrs. A. D. Williamson, J. Fordyce, G. Luke, I. Barr and T. McClung
along with Mr. R. D. Hunter, the S.P.T.A. Secretary.
Department Messrs. Brook, Lyle, Frayne and I. McKenzie.

Mr. Brook was in the Chair.

Mr. Brook commenced the meeting by introducing Mr. I. McKenzie who had succeeded Mr. Struthers' as the Department's chief Potato Inspection Officer.

Mr. Sherriff stated that it was the opinion south of the border that the annual visit of the Department's officials to England was of considerable value and hoped that it would be continued.

In reply to Mr. Sherriff, Mr. Lyle stated that the bag trials carried out by the Department of Agriculture during the previous loading season had not been very successful for the reason that when it was known that a particular consignment was part of a trial the consignment tended to be given "kid glove treatment". He added, however, that the final results of the trials were not yet available. He hoped that they would be available in the near future when they would be issued. He stated that polypropylene had come out of the trials quite well but that the Department were experiencing difficulty in arriving at a meaningful specification for polypropylene. It is the Department's intention to obtain further information during the coming loading season regarding the qualities of polypropylene as a container for conveyance of seed potatoes. Mr. Hunter stated that British Railways had indicated that until they had carried out their own tests with polypropylene they would not be willing to accept consignments in polypropylene containers other than at "owners' risk." In reply to Mr. Hunter the Department indicated that they would not during the coming loading season be willing to accept any share of liability for the loss of potatoes being despatched on an experimental basis in polypropylene. The Department considered that this was a matter for negotiation between the Potato Trade and the suppliers of polypropylene. Mr. Sherriff indicated that in his experience polypropylene containers were generally acceptable in England. Mr. Smith and Mr. Beeson were rather more in favour of paper than polypropylene.

LABELLING SCHEME /

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Mr. Sherriff complimented the Department on the first year of their official labelling scheme for seed potatoes. He stated that he believed that there had been an improvement in the standard of consignments as a result of the new scheme. He added that there had been some complaints regarding the quality of the labels. Mr. Lyle stated that it was proposed to introduce a better label during the coming loading season. He added, however, that they had a large number of the old labels still in stock which would require to be used up.

Mr. Lyle stated that in 1970/71 the Department had inspected 135,000 tons (48.4%) of seed potatoes of which 3,250 tons (2.4%) were subject to stop notices and 2,000 (1.5%) were voluntarily redressed.

Mr. Sherriff referred to the statistics issue by the Potato Marketing Board of their own seed inspection service during the 1970/71 season. He commented on the high incidence of mechanical damage. Mr. Frayne referred to the information which he had received from the N.A.S.P.M. regarding consignments examined by the N.A.S.P.M. Inspectors. Of these cases the Department had ascertained that two consignments were from stocks from which other faulty consignments had been derived. Mr. Sherriff on referring to the P.M.B. statistics drew attention to the considerable number of consignments examined outwith the ten day period. He explained that S.P.T.A. and N.A.S.P.M. were proposing to contact the P.M.B. to ascertain the reason for so many late inspections. Mr. Sherriff added that N.A.S.P.M. inspections were carried out on an average of three and a half days after delivery. Mr. Fordyce stated that S.P.T.A. were delighted to see the considerable increase in the percentage of consignments examined by the Department.

MECHANICAL DAMAGE

There was some discussion regarding a definition for mechanical damage. Mr. Lyle stated that the Department's inspectors applied subjective judgment. He believed that it was not possible to arrive at an acceptable precise definition of mechanical damage.

FROST DAMAGE

Mr. Lyle stated that at the request of S.P.T.A., when the Examination of Seed Potatoes Order was being redrafted it was proposed to reduce the tolerance for frost damage from 3% to 1%. This, however, would not come into effect for a year/

year or so. In the meantime, however, the Department's Inspectors had been instructed to comment on consignments disclosing in excess of 1% of frost damage.

COMMON MARKET

Mr. Brook informed the meeting that the Department of Agriculture is working with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Northern Ireland regarding the United Kingdom's possible entry into the Common Market. Mr. Lyle indicated that the English Ministry would be contacting the N.A.S.P.M. and National Farmers' Union of England and Wales probably during October of this year to discuss the Common Market. In reply to Mr. Williamson, Mr. Lyle confirmed that the Common Market countries were in course of compiling a catalogue of potato varieties. All existing commercial varieties in the Common Market countries will be listed and during a period of ten years will be tested to ensure that they are useful varieties. Any varieties considered not to be useful will be deleted from the catalogue. Similarly all the United Kingdom commercial varieties will be listed in the United Kingdom catalogue on our entering the Common Market. For the United Kingdom the period of ten years for the tests may be reduced to say six years. In the case of new varieties introduced after the catalogue has been compiled they will not be allowed to be added to the list unless they are shown to be better than existing varieties. Mr. Lyle stated that whether existing United Kingdom varieties were immune or non-immune to wart disease was not of particular significance at this time for the reason that many of our existing immune varieties are not immune to the strains of wart disease most common in European countries.

Mr. Lyle stated on entry into the Common Market we would expect to be compelled to introduce a complete ban on the sale of uncertified seed potatoes both in respect of internal transactions and inter country trade. In general the virus health of seed produced in the Common Market was not as high as in Scotland. However, their tuber health was superior to Scotland. He considered that Scotland must continue to strive to improve the tuber health. If we enter the Common Market it was his opinion that some Dutch seed would have to be accepted into the United Kingdom. He believed, however, Scots seed would prove more competitive than Dutch seed.

STEM CUTTING

Mr. Brook reported that the introduction of stem cutting material into commercial stocks/

stocks was proceeding well. Stocks of all existing commercial varieties derived from stem cutting material were now in the hands of V.T. Raisers. Some of the old V.T. stocks will be produced for a further year but by 1973 all stocks in the hands of V.T. Raisers will be derived from stem cutting.

Mr. Brook confirmed that there were instances of stem cutting material being reinfected. This was being investigated closely by the Department of Agriculture and was not considered to be too serious. They are proposing to carry out a campaign to draw to the attention of growers the need for careful handling and hygiene to prevent reinfection.

Mr. Brook stated that the fumigation treatment patented by the Department of Agriculture would be commercially available in approximately two years' time. He stated, however, that the treatment must be applied fairly shortly after lifting. He also stated that the Department had not yet received safety clearance in respect of the use of the treatment for potatoes for consumption. Accordingly, to begin with at least, only seed stocks after the tops have been removed could be treated. It is likely, therefore, to begin with, that the treatment will be utilised on seed being retained by the producer for his own use. Mr. Beeson stated that what Mr. Brook had stated was disappointing. The English trade is looking for a treatment which can be applied to potatoes in chitting trays in England.

GROWING CROPS INSPECTION

The statistics of the 1971 growing crop inspections were not available for issue to the meeting. The Department stated that Blackleg had been bad at the beginning of the inspections but that the overall incidence was about average. The Department stated that they were endeavouring to get on top of Veinal Necrosis. They had been carrying out a survey in 1971 to enable them to decide in the best approach. Particularly with the view to our likely entry into the Common Market it was essential to keep Veinal Necrosis to an absolute minimum.

In conclusion Mr. Sherriff for the N.A.S.P.M. and Mr. Williamson for S.P.T.A. thanked the Department for meeting the Trade and expressed their hope that there would be a continued increase in the quality of Scottish seed potatoes in future years.