

REPORT on a MEETING between
Representatives of the SCOTTISH POTATO
TRADE ASSOCIATION and the VIRUS TESTED
STEM CUTTING GROWERS ASSOCIATION held at
the P.M.B. Offices, 53, York Place,
PERTH, at 3.45pm. on THURSDAY, 2nd
DECEMBER, 1976.

PRESENT: S.P.T.A. - Messrs. J. H. Barr, D. H. Lindsay, J. G. H. Fenton and J. George, with D. I. Blackmore (vice R. David Hunter, Secretary) in attendance.

V.T.S.C. GROWERS ASSN. - Messrs. W. Gill, J. Marshall and H. A. C. Davie (Secretary).

Called at the instance of the S.P.T.A. (following the joint meeting of representatives of their Association, NASPM and NISPB with representatives of the National Seed Development Organisation in London on Tuesday, 16th November, 1976) today's proceedings opened with a report on that meeting.

The following discussions covered the changes in N.S.D.O. policy for the exploitation of new, state-bred varieties of potatoes which are giving rise to much concern throughout the various growing/trading interests. Initially centred on the exclusivity of arrangements of "Bard" variety and indications that these arrangements would also be made for "Croft", additional worries now stemmed from N.S.D.O. making similarly exclusive arrangements in respect of importation of its protected varieties into particular countries abroad (e.g. "Squire" into Spain).

Earlier discussions of export matters with N.S.D.O. having been markedly unfruitful, Mr. Barr expressed anxiety over the term of the "Squire" contract into Spain. In reply Mr. Gill pointed out that as part of the Act (and interpretation thereof) N.S.D.O. were legally required to contract for a 15 - year period from National Listing. No doubt this term formed part of the "Squire" agreement and that the Spanish signatory would be responsible for collection of levies on Spanish growers of the variety. Mr. Barr pointed out that once Spanish production had built up U.K. prospects could be at risk, by which course N.S.D.O. could be shown to have sacrificed long-term U.K. interests for its own short-term advantage.

Mr. George/

Mr. George pointed out that previous methods had successfully launched the successful varieties in the past but Mr. Lindsay explained that the N.S.D.O. object to those methods as not providing them with maximum exploitation. Mr. George felt that the latest N.S.D.O. arrangements re "Croft" would fool nobody and pressed strongly in favour of public auction of "Croft" Stocks, supported by Mr. Lindsay proposing to counter N.S.D.O. objections by requiring them to pre-publish their Conditions of Sale by auction.

It was noted that public auctions had been held in the past but that policy changes are at the hands of the Chief Executive of N.S.D.O. His exploitation experience is primarily grains-based, in which multiplication rates are so very much faster than in potatoes. He remains un-moved by pressure on this point and clearly has tremendous power within N.S.D.O. The Original terms of appointment of the N.S.D.O. Board were vague and appear to have engendered a situation in which the Board seems to act in an advisory capacity only and remain largely in the dark, with only the Chairman and the Chief Executive aware of any governmental instructions (e.g. maximisation of returns).

Discussion of this situation proceeded to possible remedies, from which it was felt that only application of political pressure on N.S.D.O. could expect to succeed. Information was exchanged on possible sympathetic avenues to this end and consideration of the present composition of the N.S.D.O. Board. It was noted that only one Board member is Scottish and had any practical experience and potato interests, possibly supported by one other farmer-interest member (who now displayed more a "senior-statesman" type of attitude).

Mr. Gill explained that the V.T.S.C. Growers primary objection to emerging N.S.D.O. exploitation policy is that it will ^{create} a four-year gap between National Listing and general availability of seed of any new variety. Even for "Croft" variety (in which some pre-listing clone production had taken place before the introduction of policy changes) it will be two years yet before seed will be generally available. Their independant attempts to avoid just these situations by obtaining agreement with N.S.D.O. to continue production from clones prior to National/

National Listing had been unsuccessful.

Mr. Fenton felt the S.P.T.A.'s main criticism was that N.S.D.O. are allowing a monopoly situation to build up (and, as Mr. Lindsay added, behind closed doors). NSDO policy also means making money out of varieties raised at National establishments, at taxpayers expense, for the public (i.e. the taxpayer /consumer) good. The Association must stress that NSDO must act, and be seen to act, in a democratic, non-favouristic, non-monopolistic manner.