

REPORT on MEETING of the
SEED POTATO WORKING PARTY
held at Chessor House, EDINBURGH
at 10.30a.m. on WEDNESDAY, 15th
DECEMBER, 1976.

PRESENT:

Department of Agriculture: Messrs. L. V. McEwan, D. C. Todd, E. R. Macdonald, Miss M. G. Wilson, A. McKenzie, Dr. J. Hardie, Dr. Howell and Dr. Graham.

National Farmers Union of Scotland: Messrs. B. Forrest, W. Smith, R. Sandilands and J. Tait.

Potato Marketing Board: Messrs. A. Arbuckle and J. McFarlane.

Scottish Potato Trade Association: Messrs. J. O. Robertson, J. H. Barr, D. H. Lindsay and J. G. H. Fenton with D. Blackmore (Vice R. D. Hunter, Secretary) in attendance.

V.T.S.C. Growers Association: Mr. W. Gill.

Mr. L. V. McEwan (successor to Mr. John Cormack, (Assistant Secretary) occupied the Chair.

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were intimated from Messrs. D.D.S. Craib(P.M.B.) and R. D. Hunter (S.P.T.A.)

The Chairman welcomed the representatives to the meeting and made a few self introductory remarks before calling on Mr. Todd to introduce the first item on today's Agenda.

E.E.C. and SEED
POTATOES:

In turn, and in respect that Directives on Seed Potatoes and on Plant Health were about to become operative, Mr. Todd explained that the Certification Scheme will become mandatory and the sale of uncertified Seed will be prohibited. After some delay the Plant Health Directive was about to be finalised reasonably satisfactorily to U.K. interests. It was hoped that Drafts will be available for circulation within two months and a further meeting for discussion thereafter will be arranged. He further explained that a new Directive to protect the U.K. from Ring Rot would be introduced during the implementation period of the Plant Health Directive and that, so far as introductions into the High Grade Seed Area were concerned, it seemed probable that the A.A. 1. level would apply throughout the E.E.C. Subsequent discussion covered the possible time scale for the introduction of prohibition of uncertified seed sales, Dutch objections to delay beyond 1978, the impossibility of negotiating exclusion of AA1 (which cannot be planted in Scotland) and lack of protection for/

for the High Grade Seed Area. Mr. Todd's view was that Scots seed interests should define its own aims and programme. He envisaged introductions to the High Grade area being small lots for multiplication for certification the following year and he foresaw this leading to quicker introduction of new varieties. In replies, Dr. Hardie was satisfied with the present National Listing system (given the difficulties of interpretation of "clear improvement" and "special use" criteria) and wanted to maintain Scottish Standards as well as an end to uncertificated acreage. He also pointed out that Veinal Necrosis is not identified in continental certification schemes. In replies ^{to} Mr. Sandilands, Mr. Todd was unable to form a view on the effect of these Directives on seed growing in Scotland, particularly in that filling the gap created by the ban on sales of uncertified seed was pure guesswork. He also agreed with Mr. McFarlane that policing the ban would be very difficult and thought 100% control would be impossible to achieve. In reply to Mr. Forrest he also foresaw difficulty in implementing any strategy that might be agreed within the Scotch Seed industry.

DISEASE
STATISTICS:

The Meeting next considered a Department paper on disease statistics revealed in the 1976 Certification Scheme inspections. In summary Dr. Hardie pointed out that areas entered and areas rejected had both increased, providing a roughly similar end-result as the previous year. In F. S. Stocks VTSC achieved 76% certification but FS4 grade only 29%. Rejections provided no surprises - though reduced, ground keepers were still a problem but, with a doubled area in 1976, Leaf Roll was the major difficulty. Veinal necrosis levels were almost unchanged and Blackleg was reduced, probably as a result of the dry season. In reply to Mr. McFarlane, Dr. Hardie felt that the prospects for the 1977 crop could be bad again. High inoculum content in stocks would facilitate even small aphid populations finding infected plants. Careful and continuous roguing, coupled with chemical treatments, would be the best lines of attack on the problem but Dr. Graham cautioned in respect of the latter course on four points - many first sprays had been applied too late, spraying programmes must be/

be continuous, they must not be stopped too early and non-acid burning off often allowed re-growth and reinfection.

In reply to Mr. McFarlane, Mr. McKenzie saw no need to increase present roguing tolerances. He regarded these as adequate if fully used.

There had been no failures for over-roguing and many crops had failed when more roguing could have saved them. The discussions then turned to specific varieties and their susceptibility to Leaf Roll particularly in ware-only crops and also to Eel-worm resistant varieties. Mr. Arbuckle felt that not only should resistant varieties only be planted but that only certified seed of such varieties should be planted. In reply to Mr. Barr, Mr. Todd obtained information that, at this date, a total of 7828 acres of land were scheduled under P.C.E. Regulations. Mr. Gill pointed out that "resistant" varieties were not "immune" varieties, Dr. Hardie and Mr. Todd adding that resistant varieties break the eelworm reproductive cycle only and the Department do not recommend specific varieties.

Returning to aphid problems the Meeting considered burning off and its relevance to Dutch imports to U.K. Mr. McFarlane felt that it was almost impossible to defend our system of July inspections and end-September burning off and thought the inspection period should be extended up to burning off dates. Dr. Hardie pointed out late infection does not express itself until the following crop while Mr. Todd^{felt} the trade could help by introducing a premium for early burning down. Mr. Arbuckle explained that the English market was expressing strong criticism of the lack of a Scottish burning down programme and, supported by Mr. Gill, felt that an answer must be found to continental burning off programme claims. The Chairman stated that, despite their burning off programme, Dutch seed was still not as good as Scotch, Dr. Hardie adding that while fundamental biological differences were against the Scots, climatic changes are currently undermining the Dutch situation. He stated that of all possible locations for potato production Holland was one of the least desirable - a burning off programme there was essential and the Dutch were therefore/

therefore making a virtue out of a vice.

Supported by Mr. Forrest, Mr. Fenton felt the Dutch problem should be fully publicised. The Chairman, recalling Mr. Arbuckle's remarks, called upon the Meeting to refute claims for early Scottish burning off stating reasons and, either separately or jointly, to state where the Scottish Seed Trade stands on this issue. Mr. Barr supported Mr. Forrest's call for a Joint Statement by the Seed Potato Working Party and Mr. Arbuckle called upon the Department to draft a Statement for submission to the P.M.B., N.F.U.S. and S.P.T.A. prior to joint issue, preferably by mid January. Dr. Hardie cautioned against encouraging Scots growers not to bother and Mr. Lindsay called for a detailed comparison of the Scottish and Dutch systems to point up the possibilities.

CERTIFICATION
SCHEME 1977:

Mr. Todd first stated that the Department had no intention of introducing compulsory burning off or compulsory use of insecticide or of changing any of the standards for the 1977 Scheme. So far as inspection staff was concerned there had been a very marked increase in applications for the training course (from 84 in 1975 to 227 in 1976) which had permitted more rigorous selection of 56 applicants. The members returning for second and third seasons had also continued to increase and he was hopeful that these trends would further improve staff quality in 1977.

He further stated that, guided by better trade this year and the requirement to recoup any deficits in the following year, inspection fees may have to be increased in 1977 and in view of the substantial 1976 crop withdrawals, the Department may have to consider less than full refund of fees in 1977 and subsequent years.

ANY OTHER
COMPETENT
BUSINESS:

(a) Mild Mosaic - Mr. Todd sought the meeting's views on a reduction of the tolerance for mild mosaic disease from 2% to 1% for the 1978 crop. He explained this would provide uniformity with English and N. Irish standards. He stated that if continental tolerances had been in operation, Scottish crop losses in this respect would have been 226, 75 and 49 hectares in 1973, 1974 and 1975 respectively.

In reply Mr. Barr suggested a decision be made at the Working Party meeting in December 1977. Mr. Todd agreed, but hoped that reactions would/

would feed back meantime and the matter could be taken up again during the proposed "strategy" meeting of the Working Party.

(b) Export Licences - Mr. Barr explained difficulty was arising in connection with Export Licences from the Department of Trade and Industry in respect of split shipments. Mr. Todd undertook to take this up with the Customs authorities. In reply to Mr. Barr's suggestion that licences be issued at the port of exit he stated that centralisation of issue had been instrumental in maintaining exports of seed at a time when the export of ware has been prohibited. Mr. McFarlane asked why problems arise in the issue of Licences to Export scabby seed which a foreign importer has agreed to accept and Mr. Macdonald explained that, although the importer may accept, the importing authority will not.

Mr. Forrest proposed a vote of thanks to the Chair and to the Department for its hospitality, whereupon the Meeting formally closed.