

REPORT on MEETING between the DEPARTMENT
of AGRICULTURE and FISHERIES for SCOTLAND
and the SCOTTISH POTATO TRADE ASSOCIATION
held at Chesser House, EDINBURGH at
11 a.m. on TUESDAY 26th JULY, 1977.

PRESENT: D.A.F.S. Mr. D.C. Todd (Chairman), Dr. J. Hardie, Mr. I. McKenzie
and Mrs. ?
S.P.T.A. Messrs. I. Barr, D.H. Lindsay, J. Henderson Senr., and
J.R. McArthur, with D. Blackmore in attendance.

Mr. Barr opened the proceedings by thanking Mr. Todd for agreeing to meet the Association representatives at short notice to discuss their extreme concern at current evidence indicating that the whole Certification Scheme appeared to be collapsing about our ears from the top. The Association had formally objected to both the fact and the manner of the Department's ending of the transitional re-inspection facility and sought to have this restored on a concessionary basis immediately. He accepted that this would at least save only some crops but the commercial implications of the present scale of down grading (when even some V.T.S.C. crops were failing any grade at all) raised doubts as to where Specialist Scottish seed growers were going to be able to acquire sufficient good seed for next year.

Mr. Todd's view was that the Association's appraisal was over-pessimistic. A special call for the current season's inspections statistics to date had revealed a 10% increase in crops entered and a reduction in the failure rate. He pointed out that late infection of V.T.S.C. last year would not show until this year and, referring to English complaints and prospective Dutch competition, the Scots were in an unfortunate position. Nevertheless the current aphid problem extends throughout the northern hemisphere - when visiting Friesland last month he had learned they were experiencing a 25% failure rate. He repeated the Department's view that the re-inspection concession had to be ended anyway and experience had shown it had been little used, almost always under-rogued and seemed to encourage insufficient roguing. Mr. McKenzie added that the introduction of concessionary re-inspections was not only designed to help achieve lower tolerance level but also to take account of the aphid problem.

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In reply, Mr. Barr strongly refuted the under-roguing charges, especially in respect of specialist seed growers. He felt the Department's too rosy view conflicted with Association members' statistics over the last two weeks. Mr. Henderson provided acreage figures for inspections failures in excess of 30% in both Dumfries-shire and the Lothians, adding that the best remedy would seem to be a progressive West to East County by County scheme to eradicate all planting of uncertified seed. In his 52 years in the trade he had seen yields improved from $4\frac{1}{2}$ to $13\frac{1}{2}$ tons per acre. He stoutly supported the certification scheme against any reduction of plant health standards and called upon the Department to obtain such powers as are necessary to introduce an eradication scheme.

Mr. McKenzie next explained that better health standards were apparent in English crops he had seen the preceding week and Mr. Todd referred to the recommended spraying and burning down anti-aphid counter measures already undertaken which, hopefully, would lead to reduction of the problem, especially if particular attention is paid to early burning down in this year of lessening aphid movement. Dr. Hardie also explained the improved results of Scots seed in trials in Brussels this year compared with last year.

Mr. Barr next enquired whether higher grades of seed are, in fact, reliable enough when old stocks of A.A. seed are giving better results than first year V.T.S.C. seed. In Mr. Lindsay's view, in addition to a complete loss of English customers' confidence in Scotch seed, the Scots growers themselves have reached almost total loss of confidence in the Certification Scheme itself. He cited his own visit to a V.T.S.C. crop in Aberdeenshire which, even after destruction of some clones before planting, would be quite impossible to rogue out to achieve even the lowest grade certificate.

In reply, Dr. Hardie pointed out the differences between infection conditions last year and this year and the pattern of aphid spread. He explained that the present situation is due to infection in Spring 1976 only now expressing itself. However, V.T.S.C. stocks are not more susceptible to infection - aphids infect all crops, irrespective of grade. He also stressed that/

that it should be kept in mind that the Certification Scheme was originally designed to counter gangrene, skinspot and blackleg in which respect it had been very successful, but nonetheless accepted the very serious nature of the present problem. His own experience, after extreme safeguards had been taken, had left him very disappointed indeed and he doesn't expect to have saleable V.T.S.C. stocks for next year.

Both Mr. Lindsay and Mr. McArthur regarded this as the most serious statement so far and Mr. Henderson repeated his call to the Department to take powers to forbid any planting of uncertified seed. Mr. Todd stated this was administratively not acceptable. Mr. Henderson next drew attention to the fact that the Dutch have a certified grade below the standard of much uncertified Scotch seed and Mr. Barr added such uncertified seed included anything from 0.3% up to 20% leaf roll. This was patently unfair and a certificated "catch grade" for the best of this uncertified seed for planting outwith Scotland only must be allowed, if the present market for uncertified Scotch seed is not to be surrendered to the Dutch when the sale of uncertified seed is forbidden. Mr. McArthur added that many English farmers found that up to 5% leaf-roll infected seed did not markedly reduce their crop yields and was therefore acceptable to them: in this situation, strict adherence to a maximum tolerance of $\frac{1}{4}$ % for leaf roll in all Scotch seed was a nonsense.

Mr. Todd restated that introduction of a lower certified grade would allow entry of equivalent foreign grades into Scotland and destroy our high grade seed area status but the Association representatives unanimously rejected this argument, since planting of "catch grade" seed in Scotland would be prohibited in the same way as already applied to A.A. grade. Mr. Todd insisted it is essential to maintain standards but, while agreeing in principle, Mr. Barr pointed out that the Department was not telling the trade how this was to be done and insisted that some means must be found to categorise presently uncertified seed.

Mr. McKenzie again referred to the Department's statistics and quoted comparisons/

comparisons with last year on which their present optimistic conclusions were based. In reply to Mr. McArthur, Mr. McKenzie agreed that he was comparing results of the first three weeks of the current season's inspections with the results for the whole of last year. The Association unanimously rejected this comparison, and the resulting conclusions, as invalid.

During the following general discussion Dr. Hardie felt that ware crops must be brought in to the Certification Scheme if only to provide control over own seed retained; Mr. McArthur pressed for removal of roguing tolerances and, in reply to Mr. Barr, Mr. Todd confirmed that Dutch A and B grade seed will be permitted into England from 1st January next. Mr. Henderson stated it is essential that something be done now to survive, keeping the longer term in mind. He felt that if Scots growers were to be denied the opportunity to compete on equal terms with Dutch in the English market then the matter would be taken right up to Parliamentary level.

Mr. Todd pointed out that the matter was proper to be resolved by the Seed Potato Working Party and it may be that the Scottish N.F.U. and the Association views might not be co-incidental. It also impinged on framing of regulations to implement E.E.C. grading rules, which would also be after formal consultation with the Trade in the Working Party.

In a final plea, Mr. Barr pointed out that, as Mr. McKenzie's statistics revealed only very few crops would be eligible for re-inspection, the concession should be restored for those few cases, as a gesture to maintain present standards. Mr. McKenzie very firmly rejected this request on administrative, manpower and delay grounds and was supported by Dr. Hardie who pointed out the physical impossibility of roguing at this late stage in the season.

The meeting concluded with Mr. Barr thanking the Department for their hearing, expressing disappointment in the matter of concessionary re-inspections and hoping the Association's representatives had left a clear message that they wanted Departmental help in the uncertified seed situation.

