

REPORT ON MEETING between the NATIONAL FARMERS UNION OF SCOTLAND and the SCOTTISH POTATO TRADE ASSOCIATION held at 17, Grosvenor Crescent, EDINBURGH at 3p.m. on MONDAY, 8th AUGUST, 1977

PRESENT:

N.F.U.S.-Messrs. J. Barclay Forrest (Chairman) W. Y. Smith and R. I. Sandilands.

S.P.T.A.-Messrs. I. Barr, J. G. H. Fenton and J. Henderson, Senr., with D. Blackmore in attendance.

Mr. Forrest welcomed those present at the meeting, arranged at the instance of the S.P.T.A. for informal discussion of Certification Scheme matters, prior to an expected early meeting of the Seed Potato Working Party in September.

On behalf of the Association Mr. Barr explained the meeting had been sought with a view to obviating possible differences before the Working Party meeting. He recounted the Association's emergency meeting with the Department on 26th July and the view that the Department's provisional inspection statistics and conclusions were suspect and would not be truly indicative of the final outcome. The Trade was very concerned at the high percentage of no-grade results (which included even V.T.S.C. crops) and Mr. Barr wondered where Scots growers were to obtain good seed for their own 1978 plantings. He referred to the fact that, in reality, Scottish seed is either basic or uncertified whereas Dutch production consists of basic seed and three or four other certified grades. In the event that a ban on the sale of uncertified seed is to be introduced, the Dutch will enjoy an unfair advantage in the English Market which, in turn, must adversely affect costs factors within the Scottish seed industry. He pointed out that in the present aphid situation it is virtually impossible to produce any truly reliable certified seed in Scotland and in his view the whole certification scheme is now a shambles.

Mr. Barr explained that the Association is against any relaxation of standards down to AA1 level - indeed they are anxiously seeking means to improve the quality of V.T.S.C. and FS1 grades. At the same time the Association is calling for provision of an outlet for the best of what is presently uncertified seed, much of which is already better than lower grade certified Dutch Seed. The Trade view is that this can be achieved either by introducing say a B and a C grade (for planting outwith Scotland only), or by relaxation of the tolerances for AA grade (which is already banned from planting in Scotland) and he called for Union support for these views.

In reply Mr. Forrest felt the Union was not against what had been said but would insist on maintaining standards. The Union would not like/

like any relaxation of AA grade tolerances but fully understood the reasons and would not speak against the matter in the Working Party. He felt the recently disclosed statement that 50-55 thousand tonnes of uncertified Scotch seed went to England last year was most revealing and he also explained that the "Farmers weekly" had telephoned him today to discuss a case where Ministry inspectors had confirmed 65% leaf roll infection in an English crop being grown from Certified Scotch Seed.

Mr. Sandilands suggested the meeting might consider how a press release of its aims would be received against simultaneous release of the English case mentioned. So far as those aims were concerned he felt any approach to the Department must come after answers to the following points can be provided:

(i) re 65% leaf roll - are the Dutch to regard this as a gift and if so, what proposals can be made to counter it; (ii) in respect that the P.M.B.'s position is changing, what degree of decline in the English ware growing industry is to be expected and (iii) how to avoid creating an elitist, but much diminished Scotch seed producing industry.

Mr. Barr regretted that today's 65% leaf roll case will probably receive the usual disproportionate publicity that attends such isolated instances, while the many cases of good ware crops grown from uncertified seed pass unpublicised. Mr. Henderson also pointed out that while a farmer is free to market his sub-standard cattle it is patently unfair he should be forbidden to sell sub-standard seed potatoes. Mr. Forrest took this point and inquired how much more seed would have been certified last year had the leaf roll tolerance been, say 1%. Mr. Barr replied that only the Department's own statistics could provide an answer and these were now to be regarded as none too reliable. He also explained the Association's views on the withdrawal of concessionary re-inspections which Mr. Smith recalled had been indicated at the last Working Party meeting, but which Mr. Barr further explained had not been so, since subsequent correspondence from Mr. Todd had stated that statistical support for a decision had not been available at that time.

Mr. Forrest next asked for the Association's proposals to improve the highest grades under the Inspection Scheme. Mr. Barr did not know but sought the meeting's thoughts in the matter adding that, although not scientifically founded, he wondered whether natural immunity to diseases was perhaps being bred out of the highest stocks. He cited reports that severe mosaic was minimal where some mild mosaic was present and his own and others experience this year with own-retained seed crops achieving certification while bought-in V.T.S.C. and PS1 seed crops have been non-certified. Mr. Henderson also pointed/

pointed out that certain varieties, notably "Record" and "Piper", are more susceptible to leaf-roll.

Mr. Forrest also sought the Association's views on a burning down programme. Mr. Barr replied that climatic and geographic considerations are felt to preclude a successful scheme, Mr. Henderson adding that today's varieties generally mature later than those of many years ago, so that predetermined burning down dates could seriously affect crop yields. He also pointed out that the lower incidence of downgrading in Aberdeenshire and the north was probably due to the crops there being less mature when inspected than those in southern counties of Scotland.

Mr. Fenton returned to the question of the lower grades to ask where Scottish ware growers would get their seed until lower-grade standards can be re-maintained. This led on to discussion of improvement of higher grades when a suggestion that a third inspection of V.T.S.C. and FS1 immediately prior to burning down, to provide a starred certificate for crops still within tolerance (but without withdrawal of certificate for any failing third inspection) met with unanimous agreement.

Mr. Sandilands next suggested that the potato industry should provide itself with a paid investigator to look into the worst complaints (i.e. 65% leaf-roll) and Mr. Forrest agreed, the other representatives concurring that the suggestion should be considered.

The Meeting then closed with a vote of thanks to the Chair.

Note:

During the following informal conversation Mr. Forrest explained that now the draft Plant Royalty Bureau agreement was now available, a further meeting of the N.S.D.O. working party on exports was now being arranged. He also stated that the Seed promotion paper was almost ready and a further meeting of that working party is provisionally fixed for Monday, 19th September. Finally it was agreed that the Association would ask the Department for a breakdown of Inspection Statistics to show 0.1% gradations of all downgradings for leaf roll between 0.25% and 1% (i.e. 0.3%, 0.4% etc. up to 0.9%).