

MINUTE of MEETING of COUNCIL of the
SCOTTISH POTATO TRADE ASSOCIATION
held at the Station Hotel, Perth, at
12.30p.m. on THURSDAY, 27th JULY, 1978

PRESENT: Messrs. J. H. Barr, J. G. H. Fenton, G. Brass, J. Cook, J. George, J. Henderson, J. R. McArthur, J. M. Waddell and A. D. Williamson, with R. David Hunter (Secretary) and D. Blackmore (Assistant) in attendance.

The President, Mr. J. H. Barr, occupied the Chair.

APOLOGIES: The Secretary intimated apologies on behalf of Messrs. A. J. Allan, J. P. Deuchar, R. Doig, J. Fordyce, B. Fulton, W. Gordon, D. H. Lindsay, T. McClung, D. Maxwell, J. O. Robertson and J. Wardlaw.

MINUTES: The Minute of Meeting of Council held at Perth on 30th June, 1978 (copies of which had been pre-circulated to each Member of Council) was taken as read and, being formally approved, was duly signed to this effect by the Chairman.

MATTERS
ARISING:

(a) Association Investments: Mr. Blackmore reported that a review of the Stockbrokers' proposals at 17th July, 1978 (the interest payment date) had indicated only marginal advantage in adopting the proposed scheme and it had accordingly not been implemented. Council agreed the matter should be kept under continuing review.

(b) Autumn Meeting:

(i) British Rail: It was agreed this matter be deferred until the next Meeting of Council.

(ii) Scottish Plant Breeding Station: It was agreed to suggest that this meeting be held on 14th or 15th November, 1978 and the Secretariat was instructed accordingly.

(iii) 1978 Seed Potato Conference: Mr. Blackmore tabled detailed information received earlier in the day by telephone. During Council's discussion thereof it was felt that the programme was very ambitious and the invitation list very extensive. In reply to the specific points of enquiry it was felt the press should not be invited (although a press release should be prepared) and that, for accommodation reasons, attendance should be by invitation only. It was also felt that plant breeders' interests would be adequately catered for without their "trade organisation" being separately represented.

(c) Correspondance with the Department: Mr. Blackmore reported having written to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland on 7th July, 1978 regarding safeguarding of potato interests during the inter-governmental review of plant breeders' rights in Geneva in the forthcoming autumn. A reply was still awaited.

(d) Correspondence with the Ministry: The Chairman next explained that, in reply to the invitation from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food dated 3rd July, 1978 the Association had given its views at length on 1978 crop Management and Marketing. No reply had so far come to hand. The Association had also written to the Ministry regarding alleged "dumping" of French and Belgian early potatoes onto the English Market. The Secretary read the Ministry's reply, which Council felt was sympathetic.

PRESS AND
PUBLICITY:

Before the foregoing matters had been dealt with the Chairman had explained that, in the light of the financial summary pre-circulated to Council members and subsequent additions now known, it was clear that sufficient membership support existed to permit the engagement of Agripress Publicity Ltd. on the proposed six-months, trial-period, basis. Council formally resolved so to proceed, with effect from 1st August, 1978. The Chairman then asked Mr. David Watson of that firm (in attendance by invitation) to outline his proposals, views and needs.

Proceeding from his pre-circulated proposals, Mr. Watson stressed that his basic approach was essentially to pre-empt adverse criticism by providing a continuous stream of positive information. He agreed his efforts should aim specifically at the English agricultural press (citing examples), the national press being much more public / consumer oriented. He also clarified the difference between a Press Release and a Feature article and also explained that, while he would convert the information supplied by the Association into a press format, nothing will be published without prior Association approval. In reply he also explained that material would be supplied to the press by Agripres on behalf of the Association, thus disclosing its source, and would also give names of contacts (Office Bearers, Press sub-Committee members, etc., as appropriate) to enable the press to make direct contact to clarify any queries speedily.

During subsequent discussion it was agreed that Mr. Watson be provided with these names, addresses and telephone numbers. He also stressed that material provided to the press should be clear, factual and simple. He was also hopeful that a further step in the "press educational" process could entail direct journalist/Press sub-Committee meetings and visits, but that costs could limit this aspect. He himself would look to meet the Press sub-Committee at about monthly intervals to prepare each next step in a planned and co-ordinated programme.

Turning to discussion of the first publication (which it was agreed should be aimed at "saturation" level as soon as possible) Mr. Watson felt this should project the Association's aims and objectives. Among subjects of immediate impact, Council members referred to the much improved plant health and inspection experience in the currently growing Scottish crop (reflecting the success of the measures adopted to overcome the problems of immediately recent years); the generally poorer standard seen in English crops currently being grown from "once grown" seed; Scottish "burning-off" practice (to control seed size, not disease as in Holland) and the extent to which this is much in advance of the statutory "burning-off" dates in England for the current Season. For subsequent issues it was agreed to be very important to stress the difference between "basic" and "certified" seed; to stress the Scottish-pioneered VTSC programme; to publicise the extremely low disease-tolerance levels in Scotch seed (using "plants-per acre" and /or "tubers-per-tonne" measures, not percentages) and a strong effort to counter both the mis-nomer element of the English tuber-indexing scheme and its irrelevance to the testing of Scotch seed. Council members replied at length and in some depth to Mr. Watson's many questions on all these points.

Mr. Watson undertook to prepare a first issue in press format from this information and to submit it to the Press sub-Committee (via the Secretariat) as soon as possible for approval. In preparation for the second issue, he asked to be provided with information on the background history of the trade and on the difference between "basic" and "certified" seed. The Press sub-Committee members agreed that each would prepare a brief paper on these topics for collation at their next meeting, which it was agreed would be held in Mr. Fenton's office at 4p.m. on Thursday, 10th August, 1978. It was also agreed that Mr. Blackmore approach Dr. James Hardie to obtain any material and / or personal Papers available on the latter (and related) subject (s), which could be used with appropriate acknowledgements. It was further arranged that the Secretariat would prepare a brief history of our Association in time for the same Press sub-Committee meeting, the collated outcome from which be forwarded to Mr. Watson.

In turn, he would convert this material into press format in time for a further Press sub-Committee meeting which he will attend in Edinburgh at 11a.m. on Thursday, 24th August, 1978 possibly (or perhaps later) accompanied by one or two agricultural journalists. He expects that this meeting will also fill in the framework of the remainder of the trial period programme and set in train the preparation of the third issue.

In conclusion Council briefly discussed possible subject matter for the whole programme. It was felt this should include suitably-timed publications on ware topics; handling and storage after delivery; possible explanation/

explanation of chemical treatments (especially when applied on customers' instructions) and, perhaps, certain aspects of contracts. At this point, Mr. Watson departed from the meeting.

CONDITIONS
OF SALE AND
PURCHASE:

The Chairman next explained that inclusion of this Item on today's Agenda derived from investigations by a sub-Committee of N.A.S.P.M. into the effects of recent case judgements and new legislation on the current, mutually agreed, Conditions. That Association had undertaken to consult with our Association in due course, it being understood that their sub-Committee's views would be made, available for consideration. These were not yet to hand and current opinions were that our Association should set up its own sub-Committee to consider these same matters either now in readiness for N.A.S.P.M. views or after those views had been received.

Council discussed the matter at length during which, in reply, the Secretary's view was that the currently recommended Conditions were quite adequate and well understood. Nevertheless, they had been threatened with overturn on the basis of fundamental breach of contract and, although (in his view) a recent case had provided a questionable judgement founded upon a somewhat indirect angle, he knew of no case law which had succeeded in nullifying the Conditions. At the same time, however, this was not grounds for complacency (witness the N.A.S.P.M. investigations) and he cited the recent (and as yet untried) legislation on unfair contracts.

After some further discussion Council decided to appoint a sub-Committee to consider the whole matter and, with their agreement, Messrs. J. George, A. D. Williamson, J. Henderson and G. Brass were formally appointed to serve, along with the Secretary in respect of his special legal knowledge.

ANY OTHER
COMPETENT
BUSINESS:

(a) Proposed Association Visit to Holland in 1979: Mr. Blackmore tabled copies of a provisional Itinerary received from Stita Farm Tours. After consideration Council felt these proposals might not elicit adequate support from the membership at large, particularly in view of the time of year, the exclusion of Dutch Inspections interest and the inappropriate emphasis on grading activities. It was agreed these points should be re-considered with Stita before the proposals were circulated to all members.

(b) Association Dinner/Dance 1978/79: The Secretary intimated that a booking had been made with the Saluation Hotel, Perth, for Friday, 9th February, 1979. Discussions on detailed arrangements were continuing and further information will be announced in due course.

(c) Scotch Seed Potato Producers/Promotion Association: Mr. Fenton explained that, following authorisation of a Grant of £10,000 by the C.C.H.A.C., Mr. Gordon Lyallis to look into recruitment and preparation of a draft Constitution and to report his views on the viability of the initiative in six months time. This was taken to indicate an attempt to re-vamp the initiative after divorcing it from immediate N.F.U. and/or S.P.T.A. involvement. Indications were that Mr. Doig and Mr. Fenton would continue to be consulted on merchant matters. Council agreed to continue to hold a watching brief under these conditions.

(d) Date of next meeting: It was provisionally agreed that Council would meet again in the Station Hotel, Perth on Thursday, 14th September, 1978 and the Secretariat was instructed to make the necessary arrangements to this end.

A vote of thanks to the Chair thereupon concluded the Meeting.

