

REPORT on a JOINT INFORMAL MEETING
between the SCOTTISH POTATO TRADE
ASSOCIATION and the NATIONAL FARMERS UNION
of SCOTLAND held at 17, Grosvenor Crescent
EDINBURGH at 11 a.m on MONDAY, 27th
AUGUST, 1979.

PRESENT: N.F.U.S. Messrs. J.B. Forrest and J. Hay, with P.J. Tait (Secretary) in attendance
S.P.T.A. Messrs. J.H. Barr, R. Doig J.G.H. Fenton and D.H. Lindsay, with
R.D. Hunter (Secretary) and D. Blackmore (Assistant) in attendance

Mr. J.B. Forrest occupied the Chair.

The Chairman welcomed the representatives to informal discussion of topics of mutual interest to both organisations and explained that a combination of factors had prevented an earlier meeting.

In reply Mr. Barr explained the S.P.T.A would welcome an exchange of views on D.A.F.S' replacement of the former Seed Potato Working Party with a differently constituted Seed Potato Consultative Panel. His Association's view was that the Panel is too cumbersome and diversely representative to deal effectively with a day to day administration of the now statutory regulation of the Seed Potato industry, especially at a once a year only meeting.

When communicating these views to the Department the Association had proposed formation of a small informal Seed Trade Committee. Envisaged as a useful supplement to the Panel, the Committee would be composed of two or three representatives each from the Association and the Union with a further representative from the V.T.S.C. Raisers. It would meet direct with the Department on essentially practical matters as and when required and hopefully lead to much closer co-operation between all concerned.

The Department's initial reaction had been rather autocratic and disappointing but, following further Association pressure, an informal meeting with D.A.F.S' had taken place two weeks ago when the proposal had been discussed. The Association had also voiced its anxiety to introduce an appeals procedure in respect of growing crop and tuber inspections. Mr. Barr stressed it was intended this should be used in extreme cases only, probably requiring a substantial deposit to deter frivolous complaints.

Mr. Forrest explained that the Union's Potatoes Committee is in favour of the Consultative Panel, on the basis that it already exists, and would go along with the Seed Trade Committee proposal. After obtaining the views of Branches it was felt an appeals procedure would be impracticable and no improvement of the present situation had been devised. He felt the Department was sensitive to its vulnerability without an appeals mechanism and the Union would certainly agree to consider any viable proposals.

Stressing the informality of the proposed Seed Trade Committee Mr. Barr felt sure that if it received Union support the Department could be won round. He agreed an appeals procedure posed great difficulty and suggested the Union support the formation of a Seed Trade Committee specifically to investigate the formulation of an Appeals Procedure. Mr Forrest agreed to this suggestion and that it could form a useful check on D.A.F.S activities.

Mr. Lindsay/

Mr. Lindsay also proposed that the Department should be limited to two or three representatives on the Seed Trade Committee as required and Mr. Hunter undertook that the Association would take the matter further by consulting with the V.T.S.C. Raisers and then with the Department, reporting each step in turn to the Union.

Discussion then moved to D.A.F.S.' Consultative Panel proposals, Mr. Forrest stating that no clear-cut overall policy changes had emerged from the Union's consultation of all its Branches. Discontinuation of FS4 grade had not found favour overall and there had been fair support for a time limit of, say, 10 years on AA1 grade multiplication. An improvement in the tolerance from Mild Mosaic had been agreed to be desirable and though various ideas on V.T.S.C matters had come forward none were definitive enough to form proposals.

The Association was against numbering of AA1 Stocks, (a view fully supported by the Union), time limit planting eligibility to be controlled via certificates only. Mr. Barr pointed out that great care would be needed to avoid being left without stocks of minor specialised varieties. Mr. Lindsay stated that final-year AA1 would require to be precluded from planting for seed in Scotland, Mr. Hay adding that the Scottish grower will require this information.

Mr. Fenton stated that FS4 was an ideal grade for export purposes. Mr. Tait explained the Union Branches favoured its retention but the Potatoes Committee was of the opposite view, Mr Hay adding that the Department's proposal to discontinue the grade, though based upon its higher failure rate, no doubt took account of tidy-minded administrative considerations. Mr. Lindsay agreed the grade was in demand for export and felt commercial, not administrative, considerations must carry the greater weight. Mr Forrest felt the degree of agreement reached justified awaiting the Department proposed solutions.

There was a short discussion of row-separation and headlands, following which views were exchanged on Blackleg tolerance. The Association felt that until there is sufficient evidence (which is not yet available) that a reduction in the tolerance would ensure a reduction in the incidence of this disease, a reduced tolerance is unacceptable. The Union agreed with this view, Mr Tait adding that whereas D.A.F.S is aiming at nil tolerances in certain circumstances, the Union is unanimous in not wanting nil tolerances in any circumstances.

Mr. Forrest next pointed out that Serum Tests for Mild Mosaic are presently confined to FS grades. He felt these should be extended to non-FS grades and, if not allowed, to find out why not and to press for this change. The Association supported this View, Mr. Barr explaining the Department claims that serum test kits are not available, but Mr Lindsay stated Dutch Kits are available.

In reply to Mr. Forrest, Mr. Barr stated the Association had become less attracted to renaming of grades but would support the Union for the purpose of distinct separation from Dutch grades. In further reply he explained that, for E.E.C reasons, the Department does not want to alter the tolerance for Tobacco Veinal Necrosis but the Trade would prefer this to be included in general (grouped) tolerances. Supported by Mr. Doig, Mr. Fenton pointed out that this is the quickest spreading disease and reminded the meeting that about 15 years ago if Tobacco Veinal Necrosis was found adjacent to an FS crop, that FS crop was automatically downgraded to AA1. The meeting confirmed its unanimous agreement to retain the ban on planting seed containing this disease in Scotland, at the same time being unanimously opposed to any and all "nil" tolerances.

Discussion/

Discussion turned to the continuing demand for 57 mm. Seed. Mr Forrest stated the Union Branches still favour this size but, following correspondence, the Department adhered to its position that it could not issue 57 mm. labels. Mr. Barr confirmed similar Association experience, culminating in further discussion of the matter during the recent informal meeting with the Department and receiving the same reply. Mr. Barr's view was that 57 mm. trade will continue for many years to come and having to consign this size under an official 60 mm. label with an unofficial packer's 57mm. label lessens the authority of the labelling Scheme. Mr Hay's view was that the Department will not change its stance. Mr. Barr also explained the need for closer Standardisation of Scottish and English Tuber Inspections. Following recent problems in this respect, the Department now say they will carry out a second inspection if so requested.

In reply to Mr. Forrest the Association welcomed the formation of the Plant Royalties Working Party. Mr. Forrest stated the first meeting was being arranged for Wednesday, 17th October, 1979. Mr. Fenton explained that during a recent Association Visit to Pentlandfield, the Scottish Plant Breeding Station staff had regretted that N.S.D.O had been too precipitate in promoting the varieties "Croft" and "Drayton". The Association endorsed Mr. Forrest's opinion that both varieties had been launched too soon, especially by a public body.

Mr. Hunter next explained that the National Association of Seed Potato Merchants were now well advanced with a revision of the Conditions of Sale, agreed jointly with the Association many years ago. Following consultation with the English N.F.U, N.A.S.P.M had arranged a joint meeting in Manchester on 1st August to consult with the Association and Irish interests. Several points had been taken back and a revised draft was expected very shortly.

He explained N.A.S.P.M intended to operate their revised Conditions of Sale from 1st July next year. This placed a considerable time pressure on the Association to produce a Scottish version of the Conditions of Sale, in turn a pre-requisite to revision of the existing (and essentially very similar) Conditions of Purchase jointly agreed between the Association and the Union in the past. He offered to provide the Union with a copy of the present N.A.S.P.M draft, or the revised draft as soon as it is received, for urgent consideration to try to overcome the timescale problem.

In reply for the Union Mr. Forrest explained they would be happier to await the Association's "Scottish form" draft Conditions of sale. Mr. Hunter added that, subject to N.A.S.P.M forwarding their revised draft quickly, he was hopeful he would be able to submit a Scottish form draft to the Union within about a month from today's meeting.

Drawing the Meeting to a close and thanking the representatives for attending Mr. Forrest expressed the opinion that such meetings should be repeated much more often. The Association shared this view. The meeting then concluded with a vote of thanks to the Chair.