

REPORT on a MEETING between representatives of the SCOTTISH POTATO TRADE ASSOCIATION and the DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES for SCOTLAND held at Chesser House, EDINBURGH at 3 p.m. on Thursday, 7th FEBRUARY, 1980.

PRESENT: D.A.F.S.- Messrs. D.C. Todd, G.R. Proudfoot and A. Edwards.

S.P.T.A.- Messrs. D.H. Lindsay and J.R. McArthur with R. Doig and G. Smiklie, with R. David Hunter (Secretary) and D. Blackmore (Assistant) in attendance.

Mr. D.C. Todd occupied the Chair.

APOLOGIES: Mr. Lindsay intimated apologies on behalf of Messrs. J.G.H. Fenton and (his substitute) J.M. Waddell, explaining that at very short notice Mr. Doig had agreed to attend to fill this vacancy. (It was later stressed that commercial-interest grouping was purely co-incidental).

EXPORTS: Mr. Lindsay thanked the Department for agreeing to meet the Association to discuss seed export problems (particularly from Montrose to Algeria). Urging informality, he stressed that the Association's purpose was not to "shoot down" the Department but to seek possible joint action to try to solve the present problems and to try to avoid their future recurrence.

In respect of the Association's second indicated discussion topic (what standards are operating and how they are agreed with overseas countries, particularly Algeria?), Mr. Todd first explained the Department has a dual role - (a) as the inspecting classifying and labelling authority and (b) as the Plant Health authority. In the export field the Department's principal function lies within (b) above involving the issue of Phytosanitary Certificates declaring that particular stocks are substantially free from diseases and comply with the importing country's requirements. DAFS instructions to its Inspectors had the application of standards to facilitate the issue of such declarations principally in mind.

He also explained that, since all inspections involved an element of personal judgement, the Department's standards were deliberately stricter than Algerian (or any other) requirements. DAFS inspections had always been done "inland" (Mr. Edwards adding that it would be a physical impossibility for such inspections to be done "at the dockside") and, heretofore, Algerian requirements had always been satisfied.

However, in the current season (and without any reason having been given) Algerian Inspectors' presence at "inland" inspections (as in earlier years) had been initially discontinued in favour of a "dockside only" presence. A DAFS' presence at the dockside (originally at the request of single individual merchant exporter, the request only subsequently having been reinforced by pressure from the Scottish Seed Potato Association), on a "liaison only" basis, had been arranged. Mr. Edwards added that close liaison contact at the dockside between Algerian and DAFS' inspectors had been achieved at the outset but that, with the Algerian inspectors tending to revert increasingly towards a presence at "inland" inspections, a DAFS "liaison" presence at the dockside had become less necessary and DAFS Inspectors had been able substantially to revert to their other (normal) duties.

Mr. Lindsay next invited DAFS comment on the application of common DAFS/Algerian Standards. Repeating his earlier "personal judgement" observations, Mr. Todd stated that so far as known the standards set out in the (Algerian) 1973 Decree are unchanged to date and that DAFS was still working well within those standards. Mr. Edwards felt that most of the current difficulties arose because the standards specified in the commercial contract were more stringent than inter-governmentally agreed standards. Mr. Todd stated that the Department would have been prepared to have provided Phytosanitary Certificates, on the basis of earlier DAFS' standards inland inspections if requested in respect of lots subsequently rejected at the dockside by the Algerian inspectors on a commercial contract standards basis. He proposed that DAFS should be made privy beforehand to any future commercial contracts which imposed standards at variance with those already inter-governmentally agreed.

Mr. Hunter stated that his understanding was that a Phytosanitary Certificate in respect of the above lots had been applied for, but that its issue had been either refused or declined by DAFS in its knowledge that the said lots had been rejected by the Algerian Inspectors at their dockside inspection. In reply to his request for confirmation, Mr. Todd stated that the request for issue of Certificate had been received outwith a period of 14 days from the original (inland) inspection, in which event the subsequent (dockside) inspection (at which the DAFS Inspector had also been present) was regarded as the necessary DAFS re-inspection and it was on this basis that the issue of the Phytosanitary Certificate had been refused.

From his own experience Mr. Doig pointed out that, to date, all exporters had proceeded on the basis of the international acceptability of DAFS standards and Certificates. Mr. McArthur felt that the Algerian authorities should have notified the tolerance standards changes that were to be applied, but Mr. Todd pointed out that the changes were buyer (commercial- contract) motivated only and, as such, not the concern of the Algerian or the Scottish Plant Health authorities. He added that it was known that, following their participation in 1979 field inspections in Holland, the Algerians were extremely worried about the incidence of Blackleg and in effect were attempting to apply a (commercial) nil- tolerance for this disease in all imports. Mr. Lindsay, supported by Mr. Smillie, suggested the Algerians were reducing their tolerances as a direct result of their regrettable experience of the poor quality of Scottish consignments in past years, but Mr. Todd felt this view was unsupported in the light of the dearth of complaints about earlier consignments of which the Department had become aware. In Mr. McArthur's view, however, foreign buyers have now lost confidence in DAFS' standards and labels, Mr. Edwards' feeling was that present circumstances had placed the inspectorate very much (and undeservedly) in a "pig-in-the-middle" position, more so than merchants, but the Association representatives unanimously pointed out that only the merchants found themselves financially in that position. Mr. Todd also pointed out that the Algerian inspectors had behaved very inconsistently. Mr. McArthur's past "merchanting" experience was that DAFS ruled in every situation but Mr. Edwards reminded the meeting that the ultimate veto is always in the buyer's hands.

Mr. Lindsay next sought DAFS' views on the third indicated discussion topic (when 1980 crop standards will be agreed with the Algerians). Mr. Todd explained it had taken since early in the current season, including pressure of Embassy level, before even confirmation had been obtained from the Algerian authorities that no change in their import standards requirements had occurred. Mr. Hunter's opinion was that much recent confusion stemmed from the widespread belief that DAFS had changed its standards when, in fact, (as now made clear) DAFS was simply advising exporters of changes being applied by the Algerian inspectors. Mr. Todd's view was that either the Algerian Inspectors must be present at inland inspections or should inspect only at the overseas port of arrival. In a situation of whim judgements the only commercial remedy was to sue the buying foreign government, a course that could not possibly succeed. Mr. McArthur stated that the ultimate severity of standards must be applied at the first, not the last, point of inspection and the meeting unanimously agreed.

Mr. Smillie stated that he would not export seed unless of his Company's own grading, Mr. Hunter adding that recent experience is bound to encourage increased centralisation of grading. Mr. Smillie also pointed out payment for export labels could include the cost of additional inspection coverage. Mr. Todd explained it was not a question of money, but rather that imposed staffing levels preclude increased coverage. Mr. McArthur drew attention to the reduced work load currently being carried by the PMB Inspectors. Mr. Smillie also felt that DAFS inspectors at the dockside should have power to turn back any loads in which malpractice is discovered to have slipped in, in which latter respect Mr. Lindsay stated that DAFS should take a much stronger line. Mr. Doig also took the view that farmers would be much wavier if DAFS Inspectors were liable to visit at any time without an appointment and stated that diversion of loads rejected for Algeria to Portugal, Morocco etc., in many instances with now out-of-date labels and Phytosanitary Certificates, must inevitably lead to those countries also adopting an "Algerian-type" presence in Scotland next year.

He believed that a shipment of 1288 tonnes to Algeria had been rejected and was being returned. He explained this shipment had taken three weeks to load which meant that the bottom (i.e. first-loaded) lots were out of date by the time the vessel sailed, although they had passed the Algerian dockside inspection at Montrose. The whole shipment had been rejected, however, because the top (last-loaded) 57 tonnes exceeded tolerance for Scab (which in any case is non-progressive). Mr. Lindsay asked if Mr. Edwards saw any reason for a permanent DAFS inspectorate presence on the dockside at Montrose, but Mr. Todd felt it would be better for such presence to be non-permanent and no heed should be paid to "whose toes were trodden on."

Mr. Doig felt the "14 day before re-inspection" rule should not preclude random second checks within that period, but Mr. Edwards stated that present manpower limitations would not permit such random second checks and, in any event, he was strongly of the opinion that rule should hold. Mr. Todd also felt the exporter should take some responsibility for accepting or rejecting loads himself and not rely entirely on DAFS, but Mr. McArthur pointed out that, as the proper authority, DAFS must accept and enforce its statutory responsibility.

At this point Mr. Todd provided the following comparative tonnage figures for Scottish seed exports during the current 1979/80 Season to date.

(1978/79)

(24,000)	Algeria (including 1288 being returned) plus more still to go.	21,400
(500)	Balearics _____	1,400
(4,000)	Egypt _____	8,000
(180)	Israel _____	1,500
(2,700)	Morocco _____	7,500
(3,800)	Portugal _____	6,600
	plus more to go.	
(3,000)	Canaries _____	* ?
(1,200)	Spain	850
(550)	Yugoslavia	299
	(Channel Islands - Guernsey 90)	
(3,675)	- Jersey 130)	220
	(Others _____	* 4,730
<u>(43,605)</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>52,500</u>

and Mr. Proudfoot estimated that the ultimate total will be between 55,000 and 57,500 tonnes. Mr. Doig suggested such much-increased export tonnage warranted increased DAFS Inspectorate staffing levels and/or seconded assistance from FMB Inspectors. Mr. Edwards felt these suggestion were worth looking into, without necessarily providing Departmental authority to FMB Inspectors, but possibly to arrange for them to help with the home trade (e.g. for non-technical "leg work"), during discussion of which Mr. Edwards also gave brief details of tuber inspection experience and soil sampling progress to date. Mr. Lindsay enquired whether, given FMB agreement to the suggestions, this would help the Department's dockside checking arrangements. Messrs. Todd and Edwards agreed that it would but Mr. Edwards wanted first to discuss with his own "on-the-spot" Inspectorate staff. In this connection it was agreed that rejection on a 5-bags sample from 20 tonnes would apply to the sampled load only, not to the whole consignment and Mr. Todd also undertook to obtain official confirmation from the Algerian authorities that there will be no change in their standards requirements for their purchases from the 1980 Scottish Crop. In reply to Mr. Edwards it was stated that SPTA members' dockside presence was on their own account only.

Mr. Smillie stated his own experience in the export of 1000 tonnes involving only 15 Certificate numbers, compared with other exporters believed involving 132 Certificate numbers for a like tonnage. Mr. Proudfoot disagreed with the possibility of the latter example and there was some inconclusive discussion of allocating more than one Certificate number to larger crops, to lessen the risk of Algerian inspectors inspecting and rejecting loads on the strength of recognised Certificate numbers. Mr. Doig pointed out that with AA1 Inspection Fees of £16 per hectare, a 40 hectare crop (requiring about 3 hours inspection work) costs £640. He would support representation to limit the number of hectares that could be covered by a single Certificate Number.

A.O.C.B.

There was short discussion of a Department letter advising discovery of live P.C.E. cysts in soil in bags of Scottish Seed exported to the Channel Islands. Mr. Todd explained DAFS had no data to determine either whether a problem exists or not or, if it does, its extent and significance. To remedy this DAFS would like to gather and analyse about 50 samples of "below-grader" soil. He stressed this would be on an anonymous, scientific evidence only basis and in no circumstances would lead to Certificate withdrawal or the like. Mr. Todd enquired whether the Association would take exception to such sampling. In reply to Mr. Lindsay, Mr. Todd stated that if a problem is found to exist it can be traced to source to assess what counteractive changes, if any, are necessary. He also agreed that samples should be marked with the variety graded. It was agreed that present would collect their own samples and submit them to the colleges* for testing, conveying the results to the Department thereafter.

Mr. Todd also explained the U.K. has invited the E.C.E. (United Nation's Economic Commission for Europe), which is instrumental in fixing various E.E.C. Directives, to meet in Edinburgh from 29th September to 1st October, 1980 inclusive, consisting of some 40 people. It is hoped their programme and excursions will benefit from business (as well government) hospitality, possibly with the PMB as a central focus. Further details will be circularised, when known, to representative organisations.

In conclusion Mr. Blackmore explained the Association's Council is to meet on 22nd February. It was hoped that details of the effects on proposed disease tolerance reductions on certification results (both in total and by principal varieties) in years prior to 1979, as promised during the last Consultative Panel meeting, would be available in time for Council's Meeting. Mr. Todd agreed to ensure this.

Mr. Lindsay then thanked the Department for what in his view had been a very useful meeting, with good discussions. The meeting then closed with a vote of thanks to the Chair.

* in fact agreed DAFS would analyse and test the samples.