

REPORT on a MEETING of Representatives of
THE NATIONAL FARMERS' UNION OF SCOTLAND
and THE SCOTTISH POTATO TRADE ASSOCIATION

with the

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES
FOR SCOTLAND at Chesser House, EDINBURGH
at 12 noon on Thursday, 3rd JULY, 1980.

PRESENT: D.A.F.S. Messrs L.V. McEwan, D.C. Todd and A. Edwards
N.F.U.S. Messrs J. Hay and J. McLaren, with P. Tait in attendance
S.P.T.A. Messrs. D.H. Lindsay and J.R. McArthur, with D. Blackmore in attendance.
Mr. L.V. McEwan occupied the Chair.

PURPOSE: The Chairman recorded that the meeting had been arranged at the instance of the NFUS and SPTA to discuss DAFS decision to require a second inspection of AAl Crops showing more than 0.25% of Blackleg at first inspection. He pointed out that DAFS gave due notice of this in March, 1980 and further short notice by telephone late on 25th June, 1980.

DISCUSSION: Mr. Todd reminded the representatives that the point at issue had been discussed during the Consultative Panel Meeting in December, 1979. On past experience the Department suspected that many crops entered for FS Grade inspections were really intended to receive only AAl Grade. The Department's letter in March was intended as a warning. Bearing in mind the incidence of (and the complaints regarding) Blackleg in the 1979 Crop, coupled with the climatic conditions experienced in the current season to date, the Department had decided to require second AAl inspections. The first priority of advising every grower of this decision had to take precedence over the need for prior consultation with interested organisations.

For the SPTA Mr. Lindsay expressed grave concern at the lack of prior consultation. He did not accept Mr. Todd's version of the facts of the matter. His own notes of the Consultative Panel Meeting in December, 1980 recorded that apart from a then unquantified increase in inspection fees, the Department intended no other change in the inspections arrangements for the 1980 Crop. The SPTA looked to today's meeting to implement this position.

In reply, both the Chairman and Mr. Todd insisted that the Department was not changing either the Scheme itself or its tolerances, but was simply re-acting to developments, whether climatic or otherwise, as they occur.

Mr. McArthur pointed out that coupling of the forwardness of the current crop and the change in former accepted implementational practice - the producer is being simultaneously penalised from two directions at once. Mr. Edwards did not accept that the overall Season is two to three weeks forward of normal.

Returning to the Department's letter of March, 1980 Mr. Lindsay said the SPTA could not possibly agree that the then stated "appreciable" level of Blackleg infection in AAl crops should be determined as 0.25%. The SPTA insisted that this level in AAl crops is NOT "appreciable", when the statutorily permitted tolerance for this disease at second inspection of FS crops is also 0.25%. Furthermore there is a similarly vast difference between the phrase "may be subjected to a second inspection" used in the March, 1980 letter and the phrase "will be inspected again" used in the Notice of 27th June, 1980.

Mr./

Mr. Edwards insisted that 0.25% in AAl crops is "appreciable". He quoted that in last year's inspections 750 ha. of AAl Crops had evidenced between 0.25% and (the permitted tolerance of) 1% for Blackleg. From his notes of the December 79 meeting of the Consultative Panel Mr. Lindsay took issue with the figure of 750 ha. Mr. Edwards clarified this point by explaining that his figure was in respect of AAl Crops only, Mr. Lindsay's figures being in respect of all crops.

For the NFUS Mr. Hay complained forcibly on the total lack of consultation and pointed out the gross inequity, arising from the Department's unilateral decision, as between one producer and another. He made a very strong plea, on the grounds of equity and justice, for the Department to raise its 0.25% requirement to 0.5%. In reply, Mr. Edwards stated that any level could not avoid being arbitrary, the former involving no more than normal chance, but Mr. Hay insisted that selection of 0.25% had greatly increased that "normal" chance.

Mr. Todd held that the discussions were not concerned with a potentially serious loss of crop. Second inspections of a minor proportion of AAl Crops was not a serious penalty to growers but it does ensure that roguing of such crops will continue beyond (formerly only one) inspection.

Mr. McLaren agreed that continuation of roguing beyond inspections is important, particularly in respect of the export trade. However, Blackleg susceptible varieties are not part of this trade. Furthermore, such varieties are currently much more advanced than normal and it is especially to growers of these varieties that the Department's decision is an immense aggravation with very severe commercial implications indeed.

The SPTA representatives gave their total support to this view, Mr. Lindsay adding that had the Department's decision been announced at the proper time (in December, 1979) grower's plantings of these varieties would have been very considerably reduced to minimise the now inescapable financial penalties to be borne. Mr. Blackmore pointed out that the continued roguing objective argument was untenable and self-defeating, since, say, 0.24% Blackleg would receive a one inspection only certificate anyway and could be safely grown on, without continued roguing or further inspection, to contain much increased Blackleg infection at the end of the day. Mr. Todd accepted that whatever level was determined was bound to be arbitrary and Mr. McArthur voiced the view that too many aspects of the scheme were arbitrary but none more so than the 0.25% decision, which was the worst possible level that could have been chosen.

Mr. McLaren explained that due to the forwardness of this year's crop many had already reached 60 mm size and would become totally unworkable before a second inspection could take place. In reply, Mr. Todd stated there was no intention to delay burning down. If this had to occur before a second inspection could take place, classification could not be with-held.

Mr. McArthur postulated a case of a crop entered for FS Grade and, being found to contain, say 0.3% Blackleg at second inspection, was downgraded to AAl. Under the Department's ruling this would now require a further inspection before an AAl Grading could be confirmed. In the event that, by dint of vigorous further roguing (being the avowed aim of the Department's decision), this crop showed less than 0.25% Blackleg at this further inspection, would it achieve the originally intended FS Grade? Mr. Todd declared such a crop would not be granted FS Grade. Mr. McArthur stressed this illustrated the absurdity of the Department's new ruling and demanded that the 0.25% level must be vacated.

Strongly supporting this view, Mr. Hay felt it confirmed that the/

the decision introduced altogether too much chance into the matter. Mr. Todd felt the decision did not introduce the element of chance, but it was the unanimous view of the NFUS and the SPTA representatives that the Department's ruling multiplied that chance element very considerably indeed.

Mr. McEwan maintained that DAFS had an obligation to respond to ongoing developments, climatic or otherwise, as they occurred. It was in discharge of this responsibility that a second inspection of some AAl crops was now required. For the SPTA Mr. McArthur stated this was a "sledgehammer to crack a nut" situation which had aroused a tremendous degree of militancy among growers, the extent of which the Department was clearly completely unaware. Unless the position was changed in response to today's representations other methods would require to be adopted to achieve this objective. For the NFUS Mr. McLaren gave unqualified support to this position and urged that the three bodies represented should strive to work together, Mr. Hay adding that it was in the interests of all concerned that DAFS should be seen to be working fairly. Mr. McEwan insisted that the arbitrary elements are inescapable.

Mr. Tait asked the Department to state the basis on which a level of 0.25% has been founded but no reply was given. Mr. Hay asked for the number of inspectors to be employed this year. Mr. Todd stated this was not yet known. Mr. Hay asked what number the Department would prefer, what number were employed last year and what increase was intended to cope with second inspection of AAl crops. The Department declined to provide this information. Mr. Todd also stated that some late inspection applications were still being received. He warned that these may now have to be refused. He also explained the Department must be seen to be doing something to counter foreign criticism that Scotland is the only country granting Basic seed classification on a single inspection.

Mr. Hay again asked why a level of 0.25% had been chosen. Mr. Todd replied that this is an appreciable level in terms of what the Department's inspections arrangements can achieve. He believed this to be a correct assessment but he could be wrong. Mr. Hay pointed out that if it was wrong it was too late to correct and the inspections would become completely unmanageable. With total conviction Mr. Todd insisted this would not be so.

Mr. McArthur pointed out that the Department's calculations appeared to be based on 750 vulnerable hectares last season, when conditions had not been conducive to the development and spread of Blackleg disease. He pointed out that this area could not be used as a guide to the current season in which conditions are ideal for an explosion of Blackleg. His view was that perhaps 3000 hectares of AAl crops could require a second inspection and he sought assurance that the Department had taken this possibility into account in its assessment.

With apparent misgiving Mr. Todd rejected this possibility and declined to give the assurance sought. He confidently repeated that the inspections will not break down since if necessary, for example, an instant decision could be taken to withdraw certain varieties from the AAl second inspection requirement. The NFUS and SPTA representatives reacted with unanimous astonishment to this incredible possibility.

In reply to Mr. Blackmore, Mr. Todd could give no indication of the anticipated time lapse between first and second AAl inspections. With the absolute support of all visiting representatives Mr. McLaren urged the Department most strongly to revise the level from 0.25% to 0.5% if only for the sake of good will. Mr. Lindsay repeated his telephoned warning to Mr. Todd that the Department's decision had "lit the fuse of a bomb". He now expected the explosion to occur within the next ten days/

days or so and he felt the Department had no idea of the trouble in store.

Mr. McArthur also queried standardisation of plant population per hectare. Inspection application forms contained all the necessary information for the precise population to be calculated and provided to inspections staff before they arrived on site. In reply, Mr. Todd stated that experience had not provided populations greater than the 50,000 plants per hectare standard in use, any in excess of this required to be demonstrated on site to the inspectors concerned.

In summary the Chairman highlighted the three salient points of the NFUS/SPTA representations as (1) a demand that something must be done (2) to intimate severe displeasure at the Department's complete lack of prior consultation and (3) to ask that the 0.25% limit to be increased to 0.5%. Mr. McLaren felt this whole matter was the most important for many years and Mr. Lindsay insisted the last point be implemented immediately. Reminding the Department of the several matters in the recent past which had enjoyed the co-operation of the trade, he explained this could not be continued in the event that the Department proceeded with this decision unchanged. Mr. Hay pointed out that the matter is not a virility contest - it is simple straightforward common-sense.

The Chairman undertook to convey the result of the Department's re-consideration to the NFUS and SPTA representatives by telephone (during their afternoon meeting) where upon the Meeting then terminated.

NOTE: (The telephoned reply confirmed the apology for lack of prior consultation, stated that steps would be taken to avoid a recurrence whenever possible and advised that there would be no change in the Department's decision.)