

BRITISH POTATO TRADES CONSORTIUM
308 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2BN.

A REPORT OF A MEETING ON 12TH JANUARY 1981 AT GREAT WESTMINSTER HOUSE,
HORSEFERRY ROAD, LONDON SW1 BETWEEN REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CONSORTIUM
AND OFFICERS OF THE POTATO DEPARTMENT OF THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE,
FISHERIES AND FOOD.

B.P.T.C.

Mr.H. Aves (N.Ireland Pot.Marketing Assc.)
Mr.A.W. Beeson (Nat.Fed.Fruit & Potato Trades)
Mr.R. Scorer (Nat.Joint Council of British
Potato & Veg.Merchants)
Mr.G. Sawyer (Produce Packaging & Marketing Assc).
Mr. D.H. Smith (Nat.Assoc. of Seed Merchants)
Mr.J.E. Rackley, Secretary.

M.A.F.F.

Miss F. Thompson
Mr.B. Rose
Mr.E. Clegg

Miss Francis Thompson welcomed the Consortium representatives and expressed pleasure in this opportunity to hear and discuss in general the views and problems of the Potato Trade.

DRAFT PROPOSAL FOR EEC GRADING & QUALITY STANDARDS

The Consortium members welcomed the improvements in the current draft and in particular the proposal of a single standard for ware potatoes. They expressed the wish that the Trade should be free to select as required their own size bands between 25 mm and 90 mm. Miss Thompson thought there would be no problems here.

There was considerable discussion on the proposed tolerance and Miss Thompson noted the Consortium opinions and suggested improvement.

It was noted that the current draft has re-introduced standards for long and round varieties. It was considered that this was not practical and as agreed previously should not have been included.

Miss Thompson was asked what was the Ministry's view on whether the difference between P.M.B. prescribed standards and the proposed E.E.C. Standards could be overcome. She was not too sure about this. It would all depend on the outcome of the E.E.C. Potato Regime, if and when it came into force. Although it was generally believed that because of differences between the Member States the Regime was a long way off, there was a possibility that the Quality Standards might be introduced earlier. It would then have to be considered if the P.M.B. Standards could continue to operate.

Miss Thompson asked the Consortium members their opinion of;

- (a) New Potatoes being classed with Fruit and Vegetables
- or
- (b) separately from Ware Potatoes.

They replied that they had always disagreed with (a), but even separating New and Ware Potato (because of the difficulty of always defining what was a new potato) they could see problems with (b). They would and always have done, prefer that New and Ware Potatoes be classed under one heading.

Miss Thompson asked the members to discuss these proposed standards, (also with the Scottish Association which was not represented at the meeting) and report back in due course.

She promised to send to the Consortium a copy of the A.D.A.S. report on their check on tolerances.

P.M.B. GRADING STANDARDS FOR THE 1981 CROP

These proposals were briefly discussed. It was noted that the alternative riddle sizes of 45 mm x 85 mm were proposed. The Consortium Associations were still discussing these proposals and would give their report to the P.M.B. by the required date of 23rd March 1981.

IMPORT INSPECTION STANDARDS

The Consortium members again expressed their dissatisfaction at the difference between the importing standards and those of the P.M.B. Miss Thompson accepted that the difference was undesirable. It would require that primary legislation through Parliament would be necessary to bring about a change. The Minister had been consulted but it had been agreed at ministerial level that such action could not be justified. If and when the regime came into being it would be more difficult. Would the Trade like to consider devising a regime, in advance, which would harmonise the standards? She again asked if it was possible for the Importer to police the imports. It was explained to her that this was not practical. She said that the P.M.B. had offered to adjudicate in any disputes over imports.

She informed the meeting that she had visited Spain and Egypt and had discussed with the authorities their future Potato exports. She was told of the Egyptian losses last year but they had assured her of their desire to improve on their quality in future and their relations with the U.K.

They had appointed Mr. El Baz to the U.K. who would be available to be on hand during the season to monitor the situation. She asked for information of certain agents in this country as she was anxious to meet and discuss their role in the importation of Egyptian potatoes. Both Greek and Spanish Authorities had assured her that they hoped to maintain the tonnage of exports to the U.K. but had no intention of swamping our market or to reduce prices by subsidies. The Ministry would keep a watch over this. The Egyptian tonnage might be reduced to 80,000 tonnes.

P.M.B. MERCHANT POTATO LICENCE

Miss Thompson was asked her opinion as to whether licences would be necessary or required under a Regime. As far as the Ministry was concerned, Merchants were only licenced in order to collect from them Statistics and trading returns. She would visualize a marketing body being formed to regulate the marketing and to supply a registered Code No. (for identification on packages). But this would be up to the Trade to decide. A full discussion on this matter could be held with all Trade interested parties at a later date.

PROCESS INDUSTRY

Miss Thompson was asked if the Ministry was doing anything to alleviating the plight of the processors, especially the powdered potato manufacturers. She said there was nothing that the Ministry could do. The Canadian exporters had been accused of dumping and the anti dumping case was now proceeding. The Ministry supported the claim although there was no knowing whether it will succeed.

The processing industry was going through difficult times as were other industries and because of their major part in the Potato Trade the Ministry trusted that in due course they would return to prosperity.

CROP REPORT AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Consortium members reported that the market was at the moment very depressed. It had hoped for an improvement after Christmas, but this had not materialized. It was considered that there would be a larger surplus at the end of the season than stated by the P.M.B.

Keeping quality was good but if there was no movement over the next few weeks there might be problems over storage.

It had been stated that there was a 46% drop in the movement of seed potatoes. If producers were delaying their buying this could mean later sowing and consequently Earlies would be late.

The Meeting then closed, Miss Thompson thanking the Consortium members for a frank and informative meeting.