

REPORT of the JOINT CONSULTATIVE
COMMITTEE of the POTATO MARKETING
BOARD held at 50 Hans Crescent,
KNIGHTSBRIDGE on Monday 8 June,
1981

Organisations Represented

National Association of Seed Potato Merchants, National Joint Council, Scottish Potato Trade Association, National Fruit Trades Federation and a Retailers' Committee ie: Fish Friers Association etc.

Agenda Item 1,2 and 3 were formalities

Agenda Item 4: The Potato Trade, Supply Position and Prospects

The Committee Aide Memoire dated 5 June 1981 which was laid on the table is attached to this report. The average price per tonne for potatoes excluding sacks to 22 May was £43.47 against the guaranteed price of £43.94 per tonne. Any deficiency payment due by government to the Potato Marketing Board will be relatively small. Variations on contracts made under the second Potato Marketing Board Buying Programme are approximately 3000 tonnes per day. In many parts of the eastern countries the 1981 crop is suffering from excessive rain-fall - 500 hectares have been replanted. Many main crops appear to be showing gaps. Clearance of the acreage of earlies is behind schedule due to bad weather. Ruling price on the farm on the morning of our meeting was at an average of £160 per tonne giving the producer a return of approximately £2000 per hectare. Early potato plantings in Europe show a reduction of approximately 12% from last year. The Potato Marketing Board believe that the supply of early potatoes from Italy to Germany will finish mid-June and that Germany will then be buyers of earlies grown in Brittany and taking into account the tremendous rain experienced in Brittany (five times the normal ten year average) it is hoped that Brittany potatoes will not clash on the United Kingdom market with our home-grown earlies. Growers in Pembroke are having difficult lifting conditions due to rain and many of the samples have excessive soil in the bag. This subject led on to Agenda Item 5.

Agenda Item 5: Report on Standard of Dressing Inspections up to 29 May 1981

The retailers' were very bitter about the excessive soil in Pembroke samples and a discussion/argument which lasted for thirty minutes took place between the Potato Marketing Board personnel and the Retailers'. The results of the discussion were inconclusive.

Agenda Item 6: Publicity Topics

Mr Meredith of the Potato Marketing Board spoke about the publicity campaign on British New Potatoes, the 'New Potato Post' etc.

Agenda Item 7: Reports on Developments in Processing and Marketing

We were advised by Mr Markham of the Potato Marketing Board of the closure of the Union Cold Storage Company Limited in Fife and how the processing equipment has been moved to Leeds where French Fries are being produced by Pinnacle Foods Limited. We were advised of McCain Foods marketing drive in oven chips. We were advised of details of the closure of Lockwood Foods Limited. We were also advised of the marginal drop in the consumption of pre-packed potatoes last year even although the total human consumption had increased in the United Kingdom. The Chairman addressed the meeting about the roll that Mr Robin Pooley will play in the Potato Marketing Board with his experience in other fields of commercial marketing. Mr Pooley's remit is to assess the market potential for all types of outlets of potatoes and where necessary to exploit markets. The Chairman hoped that Mr Pooley and the Board would work parallel with the trade and made clear that Mr Pooley's remit was not to cut across established and recognised marketing channels. The Potato Marketing Board are extending their Experimental Station at Long-Sutton and are installing a new grading line and where as previously they have handled 10000 tonnes of potatoes per annum at Long-Sutton they intend to have double that capacity. It was interesting to note that the figure given by the Potato Marketing Board for driving potatoes in bulk from a store house to a central grading line, handling them into the grading line, sizing and grading, packing and despatching the graded potatoes costs £27 per tonne.

The meeting closed and the date for the next meeting was decided for 7 September 1981.

D H Lindsay

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