

REPORT on a MEETING with the DEPARTMENT  
OF AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES FOR SCOTLAND  
in Chesser House, EDINBURGH at 11.30 a.m.  
on Monday, 10th MARCH, 1986

PRESENT:

- D.A.F.S. - Messrs. G.G. Lyall, I. McEwan and W. Boyd  
N.F.U.S. - J. McLaren, with Mrs. J. Armstrong in attendance  
S.P.T.A. - G.S. Brass, with D. Blackmore in attendance  
S.S.P.D.C. - J. Bethel

Mr. Lyall took the Chair and welcomed those present at the meeting, arranged as a follow-up to the meeting of the Seed Potato Consultative Panel on 20th February.

As arranged during that meeting, the Department had given further consideration to further reduction of the tolerance for soil in seed destined for export overseas. While accepting pressure for the status quo, the Department intended to continue urging maximum removal of soil and he tabled copies of a Note (appended hereto) intended for inclusion in DAFS' Notes to Growers. Discussions of the Note, based on current season experience, indicated general agreement with its terms. Mrs. Armstrong asked if a list of nil-tolerance countries would be given. Mr. Lyall explained the drawbacks to doing so and that an intended updating letter to all exporters would be copied to each organisation. Mr. McLaren sought assurance that inspectorate interpretation and application would be uniform and proposed circularisation of photographs of an ideal export sample. In a reply to Mr. Bethel, Mr. McEwan reported that 95% of exporters had accepted last year's remedial "initiative" and the remaining 5% are being vigorously pressed to do so. He added that although arrangements now gave DAFS better support in issuing phytosanitary certificates, they still did not provide full protection and DAFS still intends to press very hard for a lower soil tolerance next year. Mr. Lyall stated Mr. Mabbot had reported that in tests of consignments to Morrocco, 95% of bags sampled had contained less than 50 grammes of soil (i.e. less than 0.1%)

Mr. Lyall also explained efforts are in hand to ensure that the onus of meeting the phytosanitary requirements of the importing country is placed firmly on the exporter. In firm support, Mr. Bethel explained that in bidding for contracts, the better exporters generally withdraw earlier than those with lower standards who thus secure the contracts. They, in turn, pass their responsibilities back to the growers (for dressing) and DAFS (for phytosanitary matters). In his own view this had been the crux of the recent judgement against DAFS in the "Bennett" case in which the exporter, having already signed a contract which set out the importer's requirements to be met (but which was not produced in evidence), declared under oath that he had no knowledge of DAFS standards (and thus whether they met the importer's requirements).

Mr. Lyall then read a first rough draft of a letter to exporters setting out DAFS requirements. These included notification of contracts, importing destinations, and phytosanitary requirements, shipping dates and (possibly) exporter applications for labels and tuber inspections. He stressed that the legalities and practicalities of these ideas have still to be carefully considered. During ensuing discussion Mr. Bethel strongly supported initiatives that will require proper forward planning by exporters (the cost of the lack of which has been borne by growers, not exporters), but Mr. McLaren felt that the prospect of applications for labels and inspections by exporters who cannot organise their own bags supplies properly, raised doubts in his mind. Mr. Lyall noted the meeting's general agreement in principle and suggested that following DAFS' further consideration, a Paper be circularised to each organisation two weeks before another meeting.

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In respect of generation control of 'Elite' class Mr. Lyall stated DAFS is to defer this proposal meantime, but wish to give notice that they will press hard for its early adoption (he indicated serious concern to minimise the spread of blackleg disease). On the Veinal Necrosis proposal he hoped to receive MAFF agreement by 14th March, to allow its inclusion in the Notes to Growers the following week. In reply he also stated that deferral of year numbering of Elite would not prevent amendment of the Regulations for VN and minor terminology alone.

Turning to non-Consultative Panel matters, Mr. Lyall announced that Mr. Guy McLauchlan, his "opposite number" (but for Ware) in MAFF, is to visit Scotland during the week commencing 7th April, 1986. Mr. Lyall suggested this would provide a good opportunity for the organisations present to convey the Scottish industry's financial and economic problems to Mr. McLauchlan during his visit.

Mr. Brass reported his Association's serious concern over the proposed privatisation of NSDO and part of PBI and enquired whether DAFS could provide any updating information. In reply, Mr. Lyall explained the history of the proposal and (in confidence) gave some background information and his personal views. He also agreed the subject to be relevant to the meeting on Industry Funding of Research & Development in London tomorrow, at which more information might become available.

Mr. Bethel explained two specific points on which he is particularly concerned. It was his understanding that when NSDO was originally set up, the point at which breeders' rights in state-bred varieties passed to NSDO had not been clearly defined. He was anxious that this should not be hastily remedied now, (possibly at the cost of anything useful in the pipeline at SCRI) in order to enhance NSDO's value. In the same way and for the same reason he urged that renewal of contracts by NSDO with Solanex, (which he believed to be renewable about now), should not be hurriedly "rubber-stamped" through for privatisation purposes. He agreed to write to Mr. Lyall setting out SSPDC's policy position on these points and Mr. Lyall undertook to look into them.

The meeting then concluded with a vote of thanks to the Chair.

Appendix referred to:

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"0.5% is a maximum tolerance. Consignments would be expected to come well within this. For certain countries a tighter standard will be absolutely necessary; tubers must be clean and dry with no lumps or clods and minimum soil in the eyes; bags must contain a minimum of loose soil."