

REPORT on a MEETING of the JOINT  
(NASPM/SPTA) LIAISON COMMITTEE in  
8 Manor Place, EDINBURGH at 10.30 a.m.  
on Wednesday, 15th OCTOBER, 1986

PRESENT: N.A.S.P.M. - Messrs. H.N. Aves, C.J. Baker, E.F. Sherriff and P.E. Smith  
S.P.T.A. - Messrs. G.S. Brass, J.R. McArthur (vice J.E. Cook),  
T. McClung and K.A. McKenzie, with R. David Hunter  
(Secretary) and D. Blackmore (Assistant) in attendance.

Mr. K.A. McKenzie (President S.P.T.A.) took the Chair and welcomed those present to the meeting.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence were recorded on behalf of Messrs. J.G. Burhouse (NASPM), J.H. Barr, J.E. Cook and D.H. Lindsay (all SPTA).

RETAIL  
SEED: Introducing discussion of the subject of the standard of seed for the retail trade (which NASPM had asked be placed on the Agenda), Mr. Smith explained this referred principally to garden centre type outlets in which visual presentation has a central role. Some experience in this respect had not been satisfactory and improvement is being sought. The meeting agreed that as in any other specialised seed trading in a normal merchant to merchant controlled situation, it is up to the buyer intending to supply such outlets to specify any special higher (than minimum) standard he requires and for an appropriate special premium price to be agreed.

SEED  
POTATOES  
REGULATIONS: Mr. Baker spoke to the second Item placed on the Agenda at NASPM request, the proposed alterations to the Health Standards defined in the current Seed Potatoes Regulations 1984. He explained the proposals had been announced at the turn of the year and discussion with MAFF had been suspended while NASPM and NFU carried out their own internal consultations. Following MAFF's announcement of developments, NASPM met NFU and sought early meeting with MAFF, which took place on 8th October.

It was believed the proposals followed pressure in Scotland for a tolerance for Veinal Necrosis. The consultative process had revealed opposition in England on an unprecedented scale for a single issue. Three large co-operatives and two processors had voiced strong objections to NASPM matched by the NFU representing the English High Grade Seed Area interests. Recent scientific research has shown that whereas resistance to Virus Y increases as plants mature as the season advances, susceptibility to the VN strain does not change. Freedom from VN is a strong selling point against Dutch competition which Scotland should retain. Mr. Baker also stated there is no objection to the proposed three-generation control of Elite, beyond its introduction in 1988 rather than 1987 (but this latter point is not to be pursued).

For SPTA, Mr. McKenzie felt opposition to the proposed VN change was being over-exaggerated. The present overall severe diseases tolerance of 0.1% will not increase, but will encompass three diseases, instead of two as at present. Mr. McArthur also pointed out that the arguments had no relevance to the ware grower and the effect of the changes will be marginal for the seed grower. Mr. Baker guesstimated a high percentage (of Record?) grown for CC grade and "own-saved seed", being the English point of view precisely and Mr. Smith postulated the changes could encourage EEC investigation of the U.K.'s High Grade Seed Area. In reply to the Chair, Mr. Aves confirmed that Scotland and Northern Ireland are the only countries presently identifying VN separately and with a Nil Tolerance.

Messrs. Brass and McArthur pointed out that English Growers are most unlikely to be able to identify VN in any case (positive identification requiring a laboratory leaf test being the principal difficulty and one of the reasons DAFS had proposed the change). The unanimous view of the SPTA representatives was that the subject was being blown up out of all proportion/



proportion and the fear that the change will create a reservoir of VN disease in Scotland is a complete red herring.

During further prolonged discussion Mr. Brass stated that DAFS did not receive indication in the Spring of strong NFU opposition to the VN change. Mr. Baker disagreed and it was arranged to obtain DAFS clarification on this point during this afternoon's meeting. It was also arranged to ask DAFS to state how much of the area classified as Elite grade in Scotland in 1986 would have been classified as super Elite grade if the proposed change had been in operation. Mr. Smith urged retention of the status quo and until more is known but Mr. McArthur argued that the proposals had been made by DAFS, with all its scientific and statistical support. In the unlikely event that a wrong decision is made DAFS would promptly rescind it.

Turning to other points, Mr. Baker explained NASPM's review had found field inspections provisions satisfactory, within the proviso that there is no room for any relaxation. In reviewing tuber inspections provisions NASPM was aware of reported powdery scab in VTSC stocks at which same level it was felt the roguing tolerance of 75 plants per hectare was too high and should be reduced. It had also been noted that a tolerance of 0.2% for Leaf Roll at first inspection for VTSC is double the tolerance for inspection for Elite. NASPM had also reiterated its objection to the introduction by MAFF two Seasons ago of arrangements whereby crops planted with Dutch A grade seed can be entered into the Field Inspection Scheme in England.

ILLEGAL  
SEED:

Mr. Baker explained NASPM had asked for this item to be placed on today's Agenda to seek SPTA views and suggestions for countering this trade. There is no doubt that it is increasing, with significant loss to the rights holders which likewise increase through time. Mr. Baker felt it to be having an adverse undermining effect on the national image. The Chairman agreed with these views although the source of this trade is not confined to Scotland, since much of it occurs from Yorkshire (Mr. Baker agreed) and asked if NASPM had any ideas to put forward. Mr. Smith pointed out that it is not in the best long-term interest of any sector of the potato industry but the present extent of it reflects the extreme difficulty of stopping it.

The Chairman felt the principle motivation was the seed and ware price differential and he reported it had been discussed with DAFS without effect. Mr. Sherriff explained the same thing happens in the cereals sector and in his view, farmer to farmer ware trading is virtually impossible to stop. The meeting agreed the matter is very serious and pressure to remedy it must be maintained. Mr. Aves reported similar concern in Northern Ireland where the approach was hardly positive.

PRODUCT  
LIABILITY  
INSURANCE:

Mr. Smith sought SPTA's experience with its Scheme. Mr. Hunter reported there had been a poor take up by Members (no doubt reflecting difficult trading conditions) and there is a real fear that the Scheme may collapse. No report on claims has been received. Mr. Smith reported this reflected NASPM's experience with its own Scheme which carries an excess of £1,000 and had been taken up by sixteen Members. There have been twentytwo claims, of which ten have been resolved, £18,000 has been paid out which is in excess of the premium income. Mr. Baker explained the insurers assessors are inexpert in potato matters and have settled some non-viable claims, which has required the insured to pay the £1,000 excess.

P.M.B.  
MERCHANTS'  
LICENCES  
CRITERIA:

The Chairman explained SPTA has been pressing the PMB to tighten up on the issue of merchant's licences but without stifling entrepreneurial initiative. The PMB has responded by suggesting a two-tier credit rating which is deemed unacceptable. SPTA has therefore formulated proposals which have been put to the Board. The Chairman (Mr. Hitchcock), while not enthusiastic, has agreed the proposals can be submitted to the British Potato Trades Consortium and having been pre-circulated/



pre-circulated, they will be discussed at that body's December meeting in London.

Mr. Aves pointed out that commercially speaking, credit risk is the seller's responsibility and any scheme such as envisaged could restrict trade on the time-involved factor alone. Consideration would also require to be given to Futures trading effects and experience of the Exports Credit Guarantee Scheme. The Chairman explained that the SPTA proposals are in the nature of an initial rough guide at this stage, hopefully to be refined through wider discussion in due course.

A.O.C.B.:

(a) Proposed charges - import and export work - Mr. Baker reported that in discussion with MAFF it had been indicated that there was not likely to be a charge for work re imports, that there would be charges for work re exports and that a separate decision would apply in Scotland. It was agreed this should be raised with DAFS during this afternoon's meeting.

(b) Date of next meeting - There was a brief discussion of the difficulty of the usual meeting during Smithfield Show week and so soon after today's meeting (which, as Mr. Hunter pointed out, had not been totally convenient as the apologies today showed). Mr. Aves wondered if a meeting coinciding with planting demonstration time might be suitable. It was agreed that the meeting with DAFS is valuable but perhaps a month later next time would be acceptable, perhaps with alternating provision of hospitality if only one meeting each year in Scotland, but no decision was reached.

The meeting then closed and Mr. Sherriff proposed and Mr. Smith seconded a Vote of Thanks to the Chair and to SPTA for its hospitality.