

REPORT OF COUNCIL  
of the  
SCOTTISH POTATO TRADE ASSOCIATION  
to the  
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF MEMBERS  
for the year to  
31st OCTOBER, 1986

As in past years, Council's Report deals first with the arithmetic of changes in the Association's Membership Roll during the past accounting year under review. From a starting point of 111 Members at 1st November, 1985, six Members resigned at various dates and two were suspended for non-payment of their Annual Membership Subscriptions. On the other hand, three new Members were enrolled during the year, resulting in a total Roll of 106 Members at 31st October, 1986. However, due to changes of ownership and other reasons, four of these are now no longer eligible for membership of the Association.

No doubt some part of this increased rate of reduction of Membership reflects the effects of the disastrous harvest in 1985 and the very difficult trading season that followed it. That apart, the underlying long-term declining Membership trend referred to in last year's Report continues to be of concern to your Council. Many other similar organisations, of course, share this same problem.

Last year's Report also recorded a very disappointing level of support from Members for the Association's Consequential Loss Insurance Scheme. Following the difficult season last year and to try to facilitate greater participation, the possibility of a reduction of minimum cover and premiums is being investigated. Without increased support there is a very real risk that premiums will have to rise which, in turn, will raise the possibility of the Insurance Scheme collapsing. In your Council's view, such a prospect is an extremely sad reflection indeed on all the time and effort devoted by all concerned in devising the Scheme in response to Members' needs.

When demitting Office last year our Past President expressed his disappointment that the problem of direct PMB-Processors trading had not been resolved during his Presidency. Council's continuing scrutiny of PMB activities has included a very close look at activities at Sutton Bridge. This was felt to warrant a thorough professional examination of the financial accounting procedures there, the cost of which Council instructed be paid from Association Funds. A delegation subsequently visited Sutton Bridge for discussions but Council's contention, that those accounting procedures are misleading, was rejected by the Board.

On his election to Office your President declared an intention to improve Council's communication with the Membership and with the Press. In implement of this intention, increased circularisation of detailed Reports on each meeting of Council and internal Committees and almost every other external meeting, together with extensive other Papers to all Members, has been welcomed. Feed-back in the reverse direction, however, has not kept pace and your Council continues strongly to urge ALL Members to contribute to improvements in this respect. Council is happy to report a very much improved liaison with the East of Scotland College of Agriculture, thereby avoiding contentious Press reporting of College material such as has caused problems for Members in the past.

During the past year your Council also introduced revised "Guidance Notes for Arbiters" and a copy of these has been sent to every Association Member. The problem of National Insurance Contributions on casual harvest wages also continued to be given Council's very close and energetic attention. The cost of obtaining an Opinion of Legal Counsel (Nicholas Fairbairn, Q.C.) and engaging expert professional representatives (Messrs. Arthur Young, C.A.) has been shown in the Association's Accounts. While this was expensive, it brought heavy pressure to bear on the DHSS. After considerable delay while it carried out an internal review, the DHSS revised its interpretation of its regulations. This promised very significant relief of this long standing problem. Your Council is particularly proud of this achievement and the fact that it enabled the express intention to issue Guidance Notes to all Association Members before the start of the 1986 harvest to be met. However, this revised interpretation is subject to the outcome of a test case referred to the Secretary of State for a formal decision. Regrettably that decision is still awaited six months later.

Your Council also initiated representations to the PMB on the effects of sales of Basic Area on the availability of rented land. This problem is having an adverse effect on a number of Association Members and it will continue to occupy Council's endeavours. Discussions with the Board and others have also been initiated and are continuing on the criteria for the issue of Merchant Licences. Your Council also acted on behalf of Members with problems in respect of use of red diesel fuel by contractors transporting Members' potatoes; the use of privately owned "Chep" pallets and the enforcement of the Association's copyright of its Conditions of Purchase and its Conditions of Sale. More recently, the Association's Conditions Committee has started an "updating" review of these Conditions, in parallel with a revival of the Association's/

Association's initiative to formulate Conditions for Exports, first drafted several years ago.

In the wider, external context involving other organisations, your Council's time and efforts have been much occupied in two important areas during the year. The first of these concerned proposed amendments to the Seed Potato Regulations, principally in respect of generation control of 'Elite'-class seed and non-separation of Veinal Necrosis from the tolerances for serious diseases. Council fought vigorously against generation control and although unable to prevent it, did succeed in deferring its introduction by one year (to Season 1987) and extending the control from two to three generations. The change for Veinal Necrosis, which also becomes effective for Season 1987, is the fruit of sustained Association pressure over a long period of time.

The other important area concerns Association representation in joint discussions with the NFUS, the PMB and SSPDC to secure a viable future for the Scottish seed potato industry and to determine the role of the PMB after 1990. These are clearly very complex matters which are incapable of quick or easy resolution. Your representatives feel encouraged, however, that the will exists for positive results and they believe the continuing discussions can bear fruit in the fairly near future.

Finally, this Report records a total of 49 meetings having taken place during the year. 17 of these were the Association's own "internal" meetings, the remaining 32 being 'external' meetings with other organisations at which your Association's representatives were present. Your President's share of this extraordinarily heavy workload involved his attendance at a total of 38 of these meetings and your Vice President was present at 29 of them.

## PRESIDENT'S ADDITIONAL REMARKS

Before delivering a few personal remarks which I prepared as a brief supplement to this year's Report of Council, I am bound to say I am utterly appalled by the extremely poor attendance at today's Annual General Meeting of Members.

Weather conditions, now much improved, cannot excuse this. Not one of the eightytwo non-Council Members of this Association has had the courtesy to telephone beforehand to offer an apology for absence. Our Guest Speaker, Mr. John Hay, has travelled some thirty miles, despite an ankle injury, to regale with his wisdom and wit an audience that could have been comfortably accommodated in a box-room.

It has to be said - the Members have let this Association down badly today.

As you have just heard in Council's Report, last year's workload was unusually heavy. To dispel any impression that it was borne by a one or two horse team, let me assure you all that it reflects the whole efforts of a very enthusiastic and energetic team. In particular I must express my sincerest thanks to my Vice President (George Brass) and Deputy Vice President (Peter Moffat), together with all Past Presidents and other Members of Council, as well as to our Secretary (David Hunter) and our Assistant Secretary (D. Blackmore) for their valuable contributions and support during a very difficult year.

That so much has been achieved clearly demonstrates your Council's ability to keep up with fast changing conditions. But no entity can exclude new blood and still prosper. To this end and to tap into the underlying vigour of the whole Membership, the procedures for nomination for election to Council were changed last year. The resulting response was sadly disappointing - unopposed elections usually indicate a dis-interested Membership. This has been overwhelmingly re-inforced by lack of attendance today.

In every Member's own self interest this has got to stop. The "team" concept MUST encompass Council and Membership together. Council has shown what it can do virtually unaided - how much more can be achieved with everyone's wholehearted participation? I exhort you all to take an active part in safeguarding your own livelihood, your own Association and your whole industry - remember unity is strength.

YOU HAVE HEARD FROM YOUR COUNCIL, LOUD AND CLEAR - NOW, LET YOUR COUNCIL HEAR FROM YOU.