

Report to S.P.T.A. Perth on the visit to growers in the Norfolk Area
on Monday 13th March, 1989, by J. E. Cook in the company of Maurice,
Archibald and Bert Mathie from the Department of Agriculture for Scotland.

We were met by Peter Pattrick of Beeson Group Ltd. and visited, firstly, Mr Robert Markellie at Wisbech, this farmer buys 30% Scotch seed, the remainder his own once grown. The main complaint was that he was not able to buy 50mm seed and the varieties that he purchased were Pentland Crown and Desiree for tendering to the Futures Market. The seed delivered this season seemed fairly satisfactory apart from powdery scab in sample of Desiree.

Second farm visited was Mr John Clark of Runners Farm, Wisbech. He grows mainly for the pre-packing market and wants all his seed free from silver scurf. The main variety he purchased was Pentland Squire and buys most of his seed from Highland Shropshire Seeds, although he did purchase some from Scotland and the samples seen contained powdery scab and silver scurf. Mr Clark stated that he went to Scotland and saw the farm on which the seed was grown and seemed satisfied with the set-up and considered the grower in Scotland to be conscientious but, unfortunately, the sample received was not up to standard.

The third farm visited was Mr Jim Smart, Marshland Smeath, who grows 40 Acres of Pentland Squire all from Scotch seed and he grows for the processing and pre-packing market and anyone who would buy his potatoes. He stores his own crop in a very open dutch barn and appeared to be in good condition, the Scotch seed purchased this year came from the Borders, two consignments of 20 Tonnes in a chitting house and all looked quite satisfactory, well chitted but some mechanical damage was apparent and his only real complaint was that the seed was too small. There was also silver scurf present, but that wasn't surprising because the humidity in the chitting shed was very high and root growth was also apparent. On the whole he was very satisfied with Scotch seed.

In the afternoon we were joined by Robert Beeson and we visited the Heading's at Chatteris and after a lively discussion on the merits of Irish and Dutch and English seed, they then showed us a consignment from Holland that had been complained on for dry-rot. Here again, the main complaint was that Scotch seed was too big and they wanted to buy 50mm samples or split-graded samples. Once again, silver scurf was the main complaint on the seed delivered as they grow mainly for the pre-packing market, they wanted samples free from skin blemish. They used to be big buyers of Maris Piper Seed direct from the farms in the North of Scotland, but interestingly enough they don't grow any Maris Piper now due to extensive soft rot problems.

We next visited Raine Brothers and here this visit was unfortunately pre-determined

due to the fact that they had a rather serious complaint on powdery scab and wet-rot from two sources of supply in Aberdeenshire and Arbroath area. The powdery scab complaint was confirmed by MAFF and had been reported back to the Department. The consignments under complaint had been replaced and the replacement seed seemed to be quite satisfactory with no sign of powdery scab or disease. On the whole they were very disappointed with the supplies of seed sent, but one imagines that it all could have been avoided by a better communication with source of supply.

The last consignments of seed inspected were on a farm of Mr Butcher nearby and the two samples seen were Nadine and Morene. The Nadine seemed reasonably satisfactory although there was a fairly high incidence of scab and the Morene looked better but it was noted that they had been in bags since the beginning of December and had sprouted rather badly in the bags and were, on the whole, not being kept in conditions favourable for keeping any seed.

Generally speaking the number of complaints for scotch seed was not too high, but it only takes one for a customer to be dissatisfied. There was no question of the visits to these farms being random visits, they were all pre-arranged and in many cases the identity of the scotch seed was difficult to establish due to labels not being available etc. One wondered about the benefit to the Department of Agriculture from this visit, I would think that the two inspectors will go home with the impression that all Scotch seed is poor, that we will have to tighten up our standards once again, especially on powdery scab, introduce a tolerance for silver scurf and have compulsory burning down, because they were all the points that were made by the various growers.