

REPORT on a MEETING of the
JOINT (NASPM/SPTA) LIAISON
COMMITTEE held in 8 Manor
Place, EDINBURGH at 11 a.m. on
Wednesday, 28th AUGUST, 1991.

PRESENT: NASPM - Messrs. D. Scott (President) C. Cox, W.H. Scott
(vice H.N. Aves), and P. Smith.

SPTA - Messrs. J.R. McArthur (President), R. Doig (Vice
President), J.M. Marshall, K.A. McKenzie and D.Y.
Stewart, Jnr., with R.D. Hunter (Secretary) and
D. Blackmore (Assistant) in attendance.

Mr. J.R. McArthur took the Chair and welcomed those
present to the meeting. Mr. Hunter intimated an apology
for absence on behalf of Mr. D. Smith (Deputy Vice
President, SPTA).

DISCUSSION:

The Chairman explained that the meeting had been
proposed by NASPM in response to demands experienced by
some of its Members from their customers to have
consignments of Scottish classified seed "Elisa" tested
for virus infection on arrival and to reject any that
exceeded the statutory virus tolerances. Explaining that
he was unaware of such demands being intimated to
Scottish Merchants, the Chairman first sought to quantify
the extent of such demands in England.

He reported some crop inspections statistics very
recently provided IN CONFIDENCE by SOAFD (formerly DAFS)
in advance of public announcement. Of 672 crops of
"Maris Piper" entered for growing crop inspections in
1991, 97 had been withdrawn before inspection. The
remaining 575 crops had all been extra-attentively
inspected twice and additionally, 100 leaflet samples of
each crop had been "Elisa" tested. 406 of these crops
contained absolutely no detectable virus infection at all
and a further 147 crops were also classified as being
within the Statutory Virus tolerances.

These results provided no pattern or conclusions on
virus infections. The Chairman felt the Scheme still
meets both Statutory and E.C. requirements and there is
no real need for fundamental changes in the Scheme or for
post-harvest testing and that the Conditions of Sale will
continue to stand up.

In reply to the Chairman's question, Mr. D. Scott
stated there had been a handful of enquiries from Members
but, in addition, there have been indications of claims
for loss of crops. NASPM has advised all its Members to
adhere to the Conditions of Sale, any deviations
therefrom undermining the protection they afford and
risking exclusion of any resultant claims from the
Arbitration service. NASPM has also written to MAFF to
enquire its intentions on post-harvest testing and a
reply is awaited.

During ensuing discussion NASPM felt that rogueing
of VTSC crops and rogueing of all crops for blackleg
should not be permitted. It was also stated that the
English NFU wants a three week period for complaints.
NASPM had also formed a small working party to frame a
reply, to the "challenge" letter (published in "Arable
Farmer") in co-ordination with SPTA. The Chairman read
out a reply letter he had already sent on his own
Company's notepaper.

Mr./

Mr. Cox viewed the interest of both Associations in all these respects as identical, with a first priority of removing worries from the top ware growers. He cited a recent PMB Report as unhelpful in this respect and urged maximum positive publicity of all available information to support this priority. The Chairman reported SOAFD's intention to issue a Press Release on the above-quoted Inspections results shortly, which SPTA would re-inforce through its own professional Press and Publicity advisor prior to the forthcoming Harvester Demonstration.

Mr. D. Scott enquired how much tonnage could be expected to be available under the Voluntary Premium Seed Scheme. In the ensuing discussion the Chairman stated he was aware of one instance in which growers had been offered a premium of only £3 per tonne. His own company had not been asked for or offered any Premium Scheme stocks. Mr. Doig pointed out that any buyer wanting early burnt down stock could negotiate a Contract to secure that (or any other) special requirement. Mr. McArthur pointed out that on its own, early burning down has no effect whatever. Mr. Smith felt that in preference to a given fixed date for all crops, each individual crop should be burned down within a given time after its second inspection. At Mr. D. Scott's prompting, Mr. Smith also related that on a visit to 14 growers' plots of 100 tubers of Scottish seed each in the Cambridge area, one plot "Elisa" tested as containing 40% virus infection showed only 10% on a meticulous visual examination and only 5% on a "normal"-type visual inspection.

Mr. W. Scott viewed the principal problem as one of presentation. He felt the Committee should consider how to overcome this to restore customer confidence and must also prepare for the eventuality of the Conditions of Sale being upset. Mr. Cox reported briefly on a current Court Action in which NASPM Conditions are being challenged. Mr. Hunter explained his professional reasons for believing the Conditions would still be upheld in law. He regarded the small amendments to the Conditions made by NASPM but not adopted by SPTA as insignificant in this respect. Mr. Smith felt urgent consideration should be given to reconciling the Conditions' ten-day complaints period with the 14 days officially adopted for the issue of a "Standstill Order".

Mr. Hunter pointed out that a 14-day period is not specified anywhere in the Regulations but had been officially arbitrarily determined and has no relationship with the 10 days specified for clearly stated commercial reasons in the Conditions. Mr. D. Scott, on the other hand, hoped that this anomaly could be resolved and unification of NASPM and SPTA Conditions of Sale can be achieved in readiness for next Season, possibly by establishing a joint working party. In further discussion Mr. D. Scott stated that although the English NFU welcomed a move towards a 14-day complaints period, it remains highly unlikely that they will ever approve Conditions of Sale as such.

The Chairman also explained that SPTA Conditions of Sale are "all of a piece" with SPTA Conditions of Purchase which have the approval of the NFU of Scotland. Any change to the complaints period, therefore, must be negotiated between four parties, not two, and it is highly unlikely that NFUS would accept what is a discretionary 14-day period as applicable for all complaints, whether 3 days or 10 days at present. He agreed/

agreed, however, that SPTA might agree to make an early approach to SOAFD to try to resolve the anomaly of the official adoption of a 14 days rather than a 10 days discretionary period.

Mr. Hunter asked the NASPM representatives for their interpretation of "the statutory limit" of virus infection referred to in their Secretary's letter. It was explained this referred to the requirement of "not more than 4%" in the daughter crop. Mr. Hunter pointed out that the actual Regulation (Sch.1 Part II para. 5b) specifically stated "4% by number of growing plants which show symptoms attributable to infection in the mother crop". Discussion accepted this to be an expectation that clearly depends on visual inspection of growing plants. For these reasons a laboratory test of mother tubers was not an acceptable criterion within the Regulations.

In summary, the Chairman stated that the representatives would report back to the meetings of their respective Councils on 4th September, the SPTA in particular in respect of (a) an approach to SOAFD regarding the 14-day anomaly; (b) Press publicity; (c) whether to consider changes to the Conditions (NASPM to consider possible adoption of Conditions of Purchase); and (d) advising Members not to deviate from the Conditions.

In conclusion, Mr. Marshall expressed deep concern on how and by whom samples submitted for "Elisa" testing have been selected. He felt this could be open to abuse. Mr. Cox felt SSPDC should be more careful and much more positive in its comments to the Press and the media generally. In reply to Mr. W. Scott, the Committee felt a joint NASPM/SPTA statement should not be issued immediately. The Chairman thanked the Committee for its very frank and workmanlike discussion and the meeting was then closed.