

REPORT OF COUNCIL

OF

THE SCOTTISH POTATO TRADE ASSOCIATION

for the year to 31st October, 1991

TO

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION

in the Wheel Inn Motor Hotel, Scone,  
on Thursday, 9th January, 1992

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Seven Meetings of Council were held during the year under review, full Reports on each of which have been issued to each Member of the Association.

At the commencement of the year there were 94 Members on the Association's Membership Roll. Four Members resigned and three new Members were enrolled during the year so that overall, the total Association Membership Roll was reduced to 93 at 31st October, 1991. It is disappointing that recruiting efforts during the year and particularly at the Ingliston "Potato" event in February, coupled with the introduction of measures to encourage closer direct two-way liaison between Council and Association Members, did not reverse the decline in Association Membership experienced in recent years.

It will have been evident to Members from the circulated Reports that a great deal of Council's time and effort during the year was taken up with matters involving the Scottish Seed Potato Development Council. During the year S.S.P.D.C. was granted a further five-year term without the Poll of Levy Payers for which your Association has repeatedly called. Serious concerns were expressed regarding both omissions from and inaccuracies in the Minutes of that Council's meetings. Concern was also expressed regarding the secondment of S.S.P.D.C. staff to what was perceived to be controversial commercial activities. These concerns were the subject of correspondence between your Association and S.S.P.D.C. during the year and will continue to receive your Council's close attention during the current year.

This Association's longstanding advocacy for increased tuber inspections was rewarded by the introduction of statutory inspection of all consignments of Scotch seed potatoes. Following a voluntary trial run to identify and to overcome any potential practical problems, the statutory arrangements now in place appear to be operating satisfactorily.

The early part of the year under review will also be long remembered for complaints alleging a high level of virus in Scottish seed delivered to the Cambridge area of England. Although these complaints were founded on laboratory testing of tubers in a manner which was inconsistent with the provisions of the visually-based inspections of the Statutory Classification Scheme, the Scottish Office Agriculture & Fisheries Department carried out a thorough and detailed investigation. The results of that investigation disclosed that the seriousness of the problems had been grossly exaggerated but also highlighted areas where beneficial improvements could be introduced. The Department has very recently issued proposals in a Consultative Paper, which your Council will be considering later this afternoon.

The P.M.B.'s reconstituted Joint Consultative Committee met on four occasions during the year. In discharge of its primary function, and despite vigorous insistence by your Association's representative in concert with the only other Scottish representative (from the NFUS) not to exceed 150,000 hectares, that Committee's recommendation for a 1992 Target Area of 154,000 hectares was adopted by the P.M.B. and subsequently became the Ministry's approved Target Area. The Committee also considered Grading Standards and initiated efforts to improve the accuracy of predicated yields statistics. All of these topics are expected to receive the continuing attention of that Committee and your Council during this current year.

Following/



Following its re-establishment, the joint (NASPM/SPTA) Liaison Committee met on two occasions during the year under review. The discussions at these meetings were agreed to have been very well worthwhile. It is likely that NASPM may seek to remove what it believes to be anomalies in the present complaints periods and this topic may well form part of further joint discussions during the current year.

The year under review also included a revival of your Association's Press and Media activities. Although a six month's trial contract with a professional consultant was felt by Council to have been most beneficial, the costs involved had depleted the available funds to the extent that the renewal of the contract would have necessitated the raising of additional funds. Your Council decided such additional funding should not be sought from Members in the current adverse economic conditions and accordingly the consultant's contract was not renewed. It is hoped, however, to be able to continue to utilise the consultant on an "as required" basis.

In European matters there had been an acceleration in activities towards completion of the Single Market by the end of 1992. This has included the revival of very longstanding efforts to introduce a European Potato Regime. The extreme complexity of this matter, which has defeated all earlier efforts, appears now to be resulting in what is being termed a "light weight" regime. Proposals for such a regime have been "put back" for further refinement but there can be little doubt that we must expect to hear much more of this topic in the months ahead.

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In this same context, Members will be aware that their Association now operates a Group Subscription Scheme to Agra Europe's weekly "Potato Markets Report". This authoritative and highly respected specialist publication provides "up-to-the-minute" comment on all European Potato matters and is available at a substantial discount (which increases with each additional subscriber) to all Association members. Full details may be obtained from your Association's Secretariat.

Your Council has been much encouraged by the increasing "feed back" from Members. You are reminded that it is YOUR Association and it exists to serve YOUR needs. You are urged to use its facilities, to make it work for YOU and for YOUR prosperity in the year ahead.