

REPORT on a MEETING of
REPRESENTATIVES of the SCOTTISH
OFFICE AGRICULTURE & FISHERIES
DEPARTMENT and the SCOTTISH POTATO
TRADE ASSOCIATION in Pentland House,
EDINBURGH at 2.30 p.m. on Thursday,
16th JANUARY, 1992.

PRESENT: S.O.A.F.D. - Messrs. G. Brown, D. Hall and A. Robb, with
Mrs. M. Barnes in attendance.

S.P.T.A. - Messrs. R. Doig, K. McKenzie and D.Y.
Stewart, Jnr., with D. Blackmore in
attendance.

Mr. Gordon Brown chaired the meeting. Mr. Doig explained the Association's preference for discussion of the Department's Paper on options for change in the SEED POTATO CLASSIFICATION SCHEME (SPCS) and thanked the Department for its prompt response to the Association's request for this meeting. The Chairman stated that the Department shared this preference and a meeting with NFUS also will take place early next week.

Mr. Doig expressed the Association's disappointment at the simultaneous release of details to the industry and the Press, which latter had indicated they were final. The Chairman explained the release had been deliberate to pre-empt rumours. He gave a firm assurance that changes are not pre-determined and that the Press will be recalled on conclusion of consultations.

It was agreed paras. 1-11 of the Paper were introductory/explanatory. In respect of para. 9.3 Mr. Doig believed Red Pontiac problems arose in Spain (confirmed) and Mr. Hall explained this variety is susceptible to both virus A and virus X. The presence of either on its own is defined as mild mosaic in E.C. terms, but as very severe mosaic if they are both present. Mr. McKenzie queried the reliability of "Elisa" tests (already discarded in France) which still allow virus infection through in tests on VTSC clones (Mr. Doig adding that leaf tests of Nadine clones in 1991 detected virus A). In reply Mr. Hall explained that "Elisa" tests are extremely specific and depend on the use of particular serums, Leaf tests being reliable with Tuber tests a little less so.

Mr. McKenzie explained that SPTA Council's discussions had favoured retention of a visually-based inspection scheme and Mr. Doig expressed the view that English customers are more concerned about powdery scab than virus problems. He also reported a call to tidy up the question of plant populations and Mr. Robb replied that although once amended already, this matter is being looked at again. Mr. Doig further reported pressure for "Elisa" testing of all VT and SE1 stocks as the highest priority. The ensuing discussion covered the extent, the cost (£1,000 per crop of SE1) and the sheer logistics of such a course. Mr. Stewart spoke to the lack of faith in these highest grades while Mr. Robb, speaking for combined tolerances, reminded the meeting that a single defective plant puts an SE1 crop down to E grade. Mr. Doig/

Doig urged concentration of field monitoring on SE1 as the only true-seed crop produced in Scotland, all other grades having to be dual-option crops. Mr. Brown asked how the industry would react to increased fees arising from the proposed changes. Mr. Doig suggested this topic be deferred until later in the meeting, but Mr. McKenzie stated his view that on top of the current national economic recession, higher input costs already had seed growers "on their knees" and increasing numbers of them are moving out into ware production only. He felt it to be imperative to restore the confidence of Scottish seed growers.

Mr. Doig asked for clarification of the meaning of para. 16.1 of the Paper. Mr. Robb explained that control of aphids must be the responsibility of the grower, which the Department will monitor. Mr. Hall added that virus Y rather than leaf roll is the most problematic of the two all over Europe and the most difficult to control. Enlarging on the Department's monitoring function Mr. Robb explained this would be on a zonal basis but SPTA rejected this, preferring countrywide control with automatic downgrading. Mr. McKenzie reminded the Department of the Association's longstanding and continuing total opposition to compulsory burning down of seed crops, explaining the underlying reasons for this and citing an earlier Department Paper on this topic about two or three years ago which supported the Association's position. Mr. Robb also gave details of the envisaged timetable of crop visits and inspections. During discussion thereof SPTA was unable to accept that any of these should be without prior appointment and/or unaccompanied and conveyed its Council's concern that increased crop visits would increase the risk of blackleg spread. Mr. Robb also stated it was not envisaged that crops would be visited after the end of July except for aphid monitoring purposes and he gave an assurance that only specified varieties (e.g. Maris Piper and Red Pontiac) would be liable to a third inspection.

In discussion of para.22 Mr. Doig highlighted that Scottish ware growers are already disadvantaged vis-a-vis their English counterparts. He also quoted the view that the Department's power over ware crops was less than adequate. The Department admitted it can enter ware crops only if documentation is faulty; it also considered downgrading of SE1 to E a sufficient incentive for seed growers to control aphid incursions. Mr. Hall regarded the risk of ware crop to seed crop spread of infection as minimal. Mr. Robb stated the aim is to inspect 5% (i.e. 300) ware crops again this (1992) Season and that 12 ware growers had been made to burn down a crop in 1991, one of which was police enforced. The Department agreed to implement the Association's proposal that this information be given the widest publicity.

In respect of para.26 Mr. Doig reported the view that a Nil tolerance for virus in VTSC would be impractical (as Mr. McKenzie pointed out, it has even been found present in clones) and Mr. Stewart regarded non-differentiation, which would allow the present tolerance of 12 plants per acre to be increased to 50, as a retrograde step. On the other hand (and taking para.27 and the position of exports into account) the Association felt that the existing system, under which one single faulty plant can put a whole crop down, must end. The Association undertook to reconsider this matter and Mr. Hall repeated Mr. Brown's earlier remark that the Paper's recommendations form a single whole, which any changes or deletions could unbalance.

In discussion of para.29 Mr. McKenzie repeated his preference for downgrading rather than compulsory burning down. Mr. Hall felt this would encourage more dual purpose planting and in Mr. Doig's view would also lead to more ware with "smalls". Mr. Doig suggested a new grade, combining all daughter crops of VT1 including those classified as SE1, be introduced, perhaps with compulsory burning down because it would be purely a seed-only crop. Mr. Robb pointed out this would introduce a virus tolerance into VT class. It was felt this suggestion should be considered further.

To clarify the import of para.35, which the Association believed would allow labelling and movement of "approved stocks", Mr. Hall explained it referred solely to inclusion of nursery VTSC clonal material within the SPCS. In conclusion, Mr. Doig conveyed a call for more Department resources to be devoted to the prevention of fraudulent consignments. He also expressed the Association's appreciation of a very useful and workmanlike meeting and a willingness to meet again if this would be helpful. The meeting thereupon concluded.