

REPORT ON THE WARE POTATO IMPORTS COMMITTEE - 27TH OCTOBER, 1992
HELD AT 50 HANS CRESCENT, LONDON.

Tony Strawson, P.M.B. member was in the Chair. He forwarded apologies from the P.M.B. Chairman, Vice Chairman and Chief Executive.

Minute of the meeting held on the 11th March, 1992 was approved - no matters arising.

REPORTS

G.B. report was given verbally by John Markham. As he had just been presented with a watch for twenty five years service with the P.M.B. he apologised for not having tabled a written report.

Area cleared in store is 111,296 hectares as against last year 130,403 hectares - 72% harvested - only 76% of the crop check weighings returned indicates approximately 7,000,000 tonnes against last year 6,000,000. Crop 60 tonnes per hectare as against 52 tonnes per hectare last year. **[BIOLOGICAL YIELD]**

P.M.B. have OFFERS of 430,000 tonnes.

P.M.B. have BOUGHT 148,000 tonnes.

P.M.B. have BOUGHT a further 1,000 acres in the drill.

Earlies yielded 409,000 tonnes against 379,000 tonnes last year.

UNKNOWNNS - How much of the remainder of the crop will be harvested and how much will be left. It could affect 200,000 tonnes. We were told the crop was good quality, good size and good skin finish. Robin Pooley, Richard Harris and Paul Young all disagreed with the report on quality - saying the potential for crop loss is high due to poor quality tubers.

Two principal varieties bought so far:-

Record - 60,000 tonnes.

Estima - 57,000 tonnes.

BELGIUM - REPORT FROM THE BELGIAN EMBASSY.

Due to the good prices for potatoes for the 1989, 1990 and 1991 crops the 1992 crop has increased in area from 1991 by 22%. Sharp fall in prices. Bintje at £14 - £15 ex farm. Quality is fair, not much blight (this was disputed by the Dutch delegate). Stocks extremely high. Very few exports. Prices will remain low.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND.

Total production of 670,000 tonnes. an increase of 120,000 tonnes from last year. Late planting, dry at tuber initiation, low tuber count, large and poorly shaped tubers, hollow heart, not good quality. 50% of the crop still in the ground. Very wet land conditions. Keeping quality suspect. "They're not going to store greatly". Kerrs Pink £70 - £80, Record £60 - £70, Maris Piper £70, other whites £50. A lot will go for stock feed.

Area up, yield up, quality down, prices down.

FRANCE.

Due to poor returns for other C.A.P. commodities, plantings have increased and yields have increased. Stock up by 1.2 million tonnes compared to last year. Exports down. Price £30.00 per tonne ex farm. Growers have already received a Government Subsidy of 50,000,000 francs to plough potatoes in and another 60,000,000 francs for main crop destruction has just been decreed. At today's rate of exchange this is equivalent to £12.8 million. Growers are receiving about £900.00 per hectare by the French Government.

NETHERLANDS.

Entire area increased by 4%. Too much seed area was planted but due to very high rejection rate at post-harvest of 7.1% the seed available is more in line with requirements. However, the unclassified area will go as ware.

Yields are high - possibly more than on the Dutch paper attached.

Export is difficult. Buyers do not need potatoes. The Dutch are competing with France and Belgium.

Blight is extensive in Bintje and will cause storage problems. Many poor quality potatoes being forced on to the ware market. April Dutch Futures £35.00 per tonne. Prospects very bad. Today's price for Bintje £16.00 ex farm. Starch industry buying ordinary ware potatoes as they are cheaper than the contracts they have with growers at £26.00 per tonne. No real export.

GERMANY.

Increase of 22,000 hectares in German production. Big problem with Virus Y in seed - worse than the Dutch say their problem is. Virus particularly bad in earlies and starch varieties. North Germany had a drought and has a small crop. Southern Germany has a large crop. Delegate believes the figures for yield in the enclosed tables are light.

"We have surplus - low prices".

Today's price £40.00 per tonne. This is sucking in some imports from Holland, France and Belgium. Consumption down from 75kgs to 74kgs per head. 1 kilo less equivalent to usage of 80,000 tonnes raw material.

Common scab a problem. Dry matter lower than last year. Many potatoes put into temporary storage, not frost-proof, now these potatoes are being forced on to the market. Low prices - big demand from Eastern Europe "BUT THEY HAVE NO MONEY - IF YOU SEND THEM TO EASTERN EUROPE THEY ARE GIFTS".

SPAIN.

Prices low - £40.00 ex farm - prices will weaken as France, Belgium and Holland flood the Spanish market. 27,000 tonnes of French main crop already imported into Spain.

THIS CONCLUDES THE REPORTS FROM VARIOUS COUNTRIES.

A.O.C.B.

Brendan O'Donnell from Ireland made a strong plea to Doctor Spitz from the European Commission in Brussels to take into account the desperate plight of potato growers in Europe and that when his potato regime is announced it should not just be a window dressing exercise but it should be a strong regime to avert the collapse of the potato industry.

E.C. REGIME REPORT FROM DOCTOR SPITZ.

The draft of the potato regime has been has been blocked since May because:-

- (1) C.A.P. has kept the Commission occupied.
- (2) The E.C. are worried about Maastricht.
- (3) G.A.A.T. talks are now in deadlock.

However, Dr. Spitz did say the Commission will not produce a regime with strong teeth and they will not have a potato regime which involves area control with a funding to growers. He advised us there would be very little money put into the potato sector of agriculture in Brussels. He concluded by saying controlling production and yields would be extremely difficult and he could see no way if implementing area control.

Date of the next meeting 10th March, 1993.

Hendry Lindsay

28. 10. 1992.