

BPTA Presidents Address

1st July 2015

Ladies & gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to report the activities of your BPTA Council over the last 12 months.

Season 2014/15 has been an extremely challenging year for the whole potato industry across Europe with consumption down by 10+%. There is no obvious solution to this consumer downturn, a matter discussed yesterday at the East Midlands Potato Day at Holbeach.

The situation is not simply due to competition from pasta and rice or perception that potatoes are dirty, laborious or fattening! Consumer research indicates that consumers are not consciously reducing purchases.

What can be done? AHDB Potatoes has remit and budget to promote the product. BPTA has lobbied AHDB Potatoes to divert some of its R&D budget towards research into the health benefits of eating potatoes.

There is a clear and present need for clarification by independent research that potatoes continue to represent a nutritious, healthy and tasty staple that has been enjoyed by our forefathers and is now being eaten by more people in the world than ever before.

Moreover the potato unlike rice and the wheat that goes into pasta is British-grown and has excellent “green” credentials. We then need to redouble our efforts in getting this message across to government, opinion formers and consumers. BPTA believes that there is little point continuing with the current level of R&D spend without significant investment in arresting the consumption decline. It is self-evident that spend on the former without the latter represents poor use of our limited resources.

On a positive note seed potato exports from Scotland have once again broken all records. The industry and the regulatory authorities merit much praise for this achievement. A fact not to be overlooked is the increasing requirement for export quality seed from England, this area continues to grow & in many cases compliments the Scottish seed exports.

One cloud on the seed export horizon is the concentration of exports to North Africa and the Middle East particularly Egypt. This part of the world is volatile and it is risky to have so many of our potatoes in one box!

Therefore it is important that we continue to gain a greater share of export opportunities in other countries such as Russia, Israel, Turkey and Indonesia and also to pursue new markets in China, India and sub-Saharan Africa.

BPTA therefore supports and welcomes the efforts of SASA and AHDB Potatoes in cultivating links with the governments in these countries and in facilitating inward and outward missions. The industry is ready to play its part in this process. Together we can continue to extend our reach and ensure that many more farmers around the world can benefit from healthy Scottish seed.

I will now give a brief overview of the various BPTA Committee's work over the last 12 months

Europatat

BPTA continues to play an active role in Europatat. Most of the important decisions affecting our industry are now taken in Brussels and Europatat has the ear of the European Commission. Colin Herron chairs the BPTA's Europatat Committee and Europatat's Technical & Regulatory Affairs Commission.

Colin, Charlie Greenslade BPTA Secretary & I attended the Europatat Congress in Dusseldorf, Germany in early May. Charlie has also

participated in all meetings and teleconferences of Europatat Seed Potato Commission.

Raquel Izquierdo de Santiago has replaced Frédéric Rosseneu as Secretary General of Europatat. It is the intention of the BPTA to have her visit UK and BPTA soon. Colin Herron has been re-elected as Chairman of the Technical and Regulatory Affairs Commission.

Ware

In addition to the consumption/promotion issue BPTA has been keeping tabs on the acrylamide debate and on the continuing debates on approved agrochemicals for use on potatoes. The Russian situation is ongoing & the BPTA are doing as much as possible to ensure we remain at the business end of the discussions.

Seed

We are awaiting publication of UK legislation implementing amendments to the Seed Potato Directive with the new seed potato grades. FERA have already implemented these grades for the coming season to ensure that as many queries/issues are ironed out before Jan 1st 2016.

Legal & Arbitration

A quieter year on the arbitration front with the conclusion of 2 RUCIP arbitrations and only one BPTA arbitration. Experience with the RUCIP arbitrations and expert assessments indicated a need for training of more experts and arbitrators. An expert assessment training event was held in Scotland in November and a further larger 2 day training event for RUCIP arbitrators and assessors is planned for England in the autumn. Details of this will be circulated shortly.

BPTA held a membership seminar in conjunction with our Scottish legal partner Thorntons Law LLP covering the following topics:

1) Why use BPTA Conditions?

2) Incorporating the BPTA Conditions.

3) Complaint resolution.

The seminar took place on Tuesday, 30th September 2014 at Thorntons Law LLP office, Dundee and attracted 18 participants. Those attending heard from Michael Upton a prominent Advocate who gave the BPTA Conditions a ringing endorsement!

Education and Entertainment

It was with great disappointment to have to cancel at short notice the Annual Dinner Dance. This is the main social event of the year & requires members support. Abortive expenditure was minimised to a loss of band deposit of £100 as it was decided to hold a dinner at the hotel doubling as a Past President's dinner and a dinner to honour and award Bob Doig with the prestigious Haigh Trophy. This placated the hotel somewhat for the late cancellation.

In light of this BPTA surveyed members on Education and Entertainment activities. A very disappointing return rate of 28 responses from a membership of 110 (25%) and an individual distribution of 192 suggests a degree of apathy about these activities and your Council is analysing this outcome and will reflect on this in deciding what to do going forward. The golf, fishing and curling competitions were all held successfully and yesterday saw the completion of a 2 day Growing Crop Training course here at SASA with 8 participants.

Finance and Membership

Membership remains relatively static in terms of overall numbers but as usual there are a handful of resignations due to retirements and reorganisations matched by new memberships. Council is pleased that AHDB Potatoes are now Associate members of the BPTA and its Head of Seed and Export, Robert Burns has been co-opted as a non-voting member of the BPTA Council. Robert's attendance at BPTA

Council meetings will enable real time liaison on important and topical issues such as Russian Market Access and other export opportunities and difficulties.

In addition to this we continue to work with AHDB Potatoes through representation of BPTA Council members on the AHDB Potatoes various committees. Also new to the ranks of associate membership of BPTA is NFU Scotland. BPTA has reciprocated by taking out NFUS Professional membership. We will be working with NFUS to further develop our relationship perhaps with BPTA observing at meetings of NFUS Potato Committee with reciprocation at BPTA Council meetings.

We already have close liaison with NFU for England and Wales through BPTA Council member John Addams-Williams who also sits on the NFU Potato Forum. We will continue to examine ways in which we can further cement our relationship.

Last but not least BPTA and the Pre-Basic Growers' Association have reciprocated associate membership. We continue to make overtures towards the Fresh Potato Suppliers' Association. We see clear advantages for its members in having representation via BPTA on Europatat's Packers Commission.

The BPTA Financial situation is in good order and its fee from providing the secretariat to RUCIP arbitrations means that not only can we afford to run RUCIP arbitration training but we can do so whilst proposing a standstill in BPTA membership fees.

For first time BPTA has had an election to Council. At this time I would like to thank Tony Barnes for his involvement in many areas of Council before having to stand down following his departure from the industry.

I am pleased to see returning Council members:- *Colin Herron, Martin Cockerill & Vincent Lumb* and it gives me great pleasure in welcoming New Council member:- *Miriam Doe*

I hope you ALL enjoy your time with BPTA & please get involved as much as possible.

This season we saw the retirement of two stalwarts of the seed Potato industry in Scotland – Mr Bill Dandie & Mr John Marshall Council & I'm sure many others wish them well in their well earned retirement.

Disappointingly few members have signed up for the membership-only area of the BPTA website. It is easy to do but if you need help the secretary is available to help.

Council will consider whether to introduce measures to obtain more prompt payment of membership fees. There are a small number of members who do not pay timeously and require inordinate effort by the Secretary to obtain payment. So a plea to all members to settle their account promptly.

In closing & on behalf of the membership I would like to thank all Council members for their input over the last 12 months. Time taken to attend meetings is time away from the business & I am grateful for the continued support.

My thanks also to the Secretary – who works away behind the scenes on your behalf ensuring that we are not drowned by the volume of emails, paperwork & other information that comes across the threshold.

It has been a pleasure to be your President over the last 12 months and I look forward to the next twelve months & wish you all a successful, prosperous & trouble free 2015/16 season. Thank you.

Russ Kelsey July 1st 2015