

## BPTA Presidents Address

6th July 2016

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

Season 2015/16 saw a much needed reduction in both seed & ware crops being planted in the UK, as a result of the abysmal market in 2014/15.

The result being that the trade at large had a much better season – stocks cleared at acceptable or near acceptable values & the ware market chasing surplus/acceptable seed & seed tops for processing until very recently.

That said, the European situation for the coming season looks somewhat concerning, the estimated area for the NEPG – Northwest Europe Potato growers is up 5% to 553,000Ha – with Belgium increasing by an incredible 10,000Ha – these figures do not include seed or starch areas – this is certainly a cause for concern for the coming season.

I mentioned last year in my report that consumption across the whole potato industry in Northern & Central Europe was down by over 10%. This figures hasn't changed over the last 12 months & is still a major concern for all those in the potato industry & must be a continued focus for change.

What can be done in the UK to help turn this issue around? AHDB Potatoes has remit and budget to promote the product. BPTA has continued to lobby AHDB Potatoes to divert some of its R&D budget towards research into the health benefits of eating potatoes. The introduction of the campaign “more than just a bit on the side” is a good start point & will hopefully gain traction in the months to come – but, are AHDB missing a market by targeting the 25-44 female section of the UK populous – with programmes like MasterChef & Can’t cook; Wont cook, being so popular.....are they sure they have the right target audience....???

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.

Unlike rice and the wheat that goes into pasta; potatoes are British-grown and have excellent “green” credentials. We must aim to redouble our efforts in getting this message across to government, opinion formers and consumers.

The UK Industry as a whole needs time to take account of the recent EU referendum and all the “baggage” (wanted or unwanted) that this will inevitably bring with it as the UK prepares to leave the E.U – there are already & there will be many more questions asked in the coming weeks/months – the BPTA will be actively seeking a clear, balanced and informative information flow from Brussels to the UK membership of how Brexit may affect the UK Potato Industry, indeed only yesterday we have seen a brief from Jane King, Chief Executive at AHDB setting out their role as they see it in Brexit.

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

### **Europatat Committee – chaired by Colin Herron**

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

The Europatat Sec Gen' Raquel Izquierdo de Santiago visited Edinburgh in February, enjoying a tour of SASA before attending the BPTA Council Meeting at the RHAS Rural Centre, West Mains, Ingliston, presenting an up to date report of the activities at EU level of the association. The visit was well received & Raquel enjoyed the opportunity to escape Brussels for a short time!

Archie Gibson & I were present in Brussels for the 2016 Europatat Congress entitled "Not business as usual" where for the first time the event was jointly held with Freshfel. A very interesting two days of meetings and the AGM saw the new Europatat board sworn in of Jos Mouyshand (Belgium) as President, Domanico Citterio (Italy) as Vice President & Gilles Fontaine (France) as Treasurer.

The Europatat Congress in 2017 will be held in Antwerp.

### **Ware Committee – chaired by David Burks**

The Chairman, has brought some formality to Council by presenting written reports for each of the meetings – these have been very well received by Council – for which many thanks. In addition to the consumption/promotion issue, BPTA has been keeping tabs on the ongoing acrylamide issue and on the continuing debate on approved agrochemicals for use on potatoes. The BPTA has been very vocal within the UK & EU in the defence of two key potato products – Diquat & Glyphosate. Council will continue to be so as and when required.

The BPTA has also been actively involved in the discussions surrounding Epitrix and ware imports from certain regions of Spain & Portugal. The phytosanitary requirements the UK currently have must remain in place to minimise potential impact this pest will have in the UK.

### **Seed Regulations Committee – chaired by John Williams**

Since January 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 the UK seed trade has been working to the new Potato Directive with the harmonised Seed potato grades. In the main – there have been very few issues resulting from this change. SASA introduced the new system in the autumn of 2015, giving the trade time to adjust and become familiar with the system before the formal implementation in 2016 – sometimes foresight is an advantage & SASA should be commended for this.

Last month, following the announcement by SASA of a 3<sup>rd</sup> inspections for seed crops in an attempt to address the issue of blackleg in certified Scottish seed lots – a well-attended industry meeting was held at the offices of Agrico UK to give SASA a chance to explain their reasoning and decision to implement the inspections. The meeting was well received and good discussions ensued – albeit the outcome is a *fait accompli*. To ensure that the effects of such a implemented scheme are known/recorded, a SASA/trade/Scottish Agronomy - field scale trials are to be set up to monitor the impact 3<sup>rd</sup> inspections will have on the plant health/disease spread on potato crops.

### **Export Committee – chaired by Vincent Lumb**

The issue surrounding Russian market access is ongoing. The current status being that RKN are not interested in sending inspectors to countries that are offering small lots of seed for export to Russia – costs of doing so are debilitating & the Russian Government do not

have the resources to cover these. Interested parties wishing to export must cover the inspection costs themselves. So, for the time being – this market appears to be closed to the UK seed export industry. The BPTA will continue to monitor this area closely to ensure we remain at the business end of the discussions.

The long standing discussion of the export of mini tubers from the UK to Canada has come to the fore again – the BPTA are actively involved in representing member’s thoughts/opinions and representation at EU level in this latest round of discussions/negotiations with the Canadian authorities. More on this issue in the months to come.

There has also been progress with the Chinese authorities in the exportation of UK seed potatoes to Beijing. Initial discussions have been extensive and have provided a base for future discussions to be built on – phytosanitary concerns and disease thresholds are currently being debated. This is very much “work in progress”.

### **Legal & Arbitration – chaired by Gerard Croft**

A busy year has seen an updated BPTA Constitution approved at the EGM in October 2015.

Experience with the 2014 RUCIP arbitrations indicated a need for training of more UK RUCIP experts and arbitrators. At the October Council meeting in Leicestershire, a two day RUCIP Arbitrators & Expert Assessors course was held under the excellent tuition of Tomas Herkenrath. This very well attended session provided valuable information on all aspects of RUCIP & the requirements to carry out an Expert Assessment. To follow on from this Council is looking at planning a membership seminar on Opportunities and Risks of trading under RUCIP – details of this to be forwarded in due course.

At the Europatat Congress – it was announced that the RUCIP Secretariat, currently located in Paris is to be relocated in Brussels. This was deemed to be pragmatic and a cost saving exercise, bring all the relevant parties under one roof.

The BPTA is being consulted regularly as the Europatat working group seeks to modify and update the 2012 version of RUCIP trade rules.

### **Education and Entertainment – chaired by Miriam Doe**

The first curling dinner took place in February at the Dewar's centre, Perth – following the second leg of the BPTA Curling competition. An opportunity for newcomers to try their hand at curling was also on offer & was well supported – hopefully more curling teams for 2017 as a result. This very successful event saw 42 attendees enjoy dinner and entertainment after the completion of the curling. A very enjoyable night was had by all – and we will be looking to repeat this again in 2017.

Council has decided to shelve the fishing & golf competitions in 2016 – but will keep an open mind on reviving them in the future.

There is a Growing crop refresher course being held tomorrow July 7<sup>th</sup> at SASA with 8 attendees – hopefully the weather will behave for them to get the most out of the day. There are plans for a tuber course along similar lines in November 2016 – please make an effort to support this.

The Haigh Trophy was awarded to John Marshall, late of WCF for many years stalwart service to the UK Potato Industry. Even in retirement John continues to actively promote and be involved within the industry & was again in attendance at the Chelsea flower in May

## **Finance and Membership – chaired by Andrew Skea**

Membership for 2015/16 remains relatively static in terms of overall numbers but as usual there have been a handful of cancellations due to retirements and reorganisations – but these have been matched by new membership applications.

Despite some reorganisation at AHDB Potatoes, Robert Burns is still co-opted to Council as a non-voting member. The aim being that Robert's attendance at BPTA Council meetings will hopefully enable real time liaison on important and topical issues such as Chinese & Russian Market Access, other export opportunities and difficulties in the seasons to come.

In addition to this we continue to work with AHDB Potatoes through representation of BPTA Council members on the AHDB Potatoes various committees.

We continue to 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.

We continue to make overtures towards David Walker & the Fresh Potato Suppliers' Association. We see clear advantages for its members in having representation via BPTA on *Europatat* Packers Commission.

This year, as in 2014/15 - BPTA Council required an election. This is extremely encouraging, for two consecutive years there is more interest from people wanting to serve on Council. This year we saw 5 candidates offering themselves for consideration and three positions available.

At this time I would like to extend sincere thanks to *Jim McCreight & Graham Bennett* for their involvement & contributions at Council, they have been much appreciated.

I am pleased to see *Andrew Skea* returning Council for another stint, Andrew obviously has too much time on his hands to have been involved with SPTA & BPTA since 2004!!

It gives me great pleasure in welcoming *Sandy McGowan & Angela Cliffe* to Council & I hope ALL Council members enjoy your time with BPTA & please get involved as much as possible.

I'm sure that Council & the membership will join with me in wishing Paul Hart from Nickerson Seeds our best wishes for a well-earned retirement after 26 years in the seed potato industry – he was a stalwart of the UK seed potato industry and a tireless campaigner for the Safe Haven Scheme & UK origin seed.

### **Closing remarks**

Past President's terms of office have often been marked by notable occasions – John Bell & the merger of the SPTA & NASPM to form the BPTA in 2006; Colin Herron & the Europatat Congress in 2010; Gerard Croft & the revamped Terms & Conditions of Sale in 2012 to name but some. Up to the 23<sup>rd</sup> June – I was wondering how my term may be marked – perhaps the President that survived the Scottish referendum vote..... then along came the 24<sup>th</sup> June 2016 & Brexit .....so in true political style – I'm off – thanks very much & good luck!!

In closing & on behalf of the membership I would like to thank ALL Council members for their valuable contributions over the last 12 months, meeting are conducted in a relaxed, focused and quite often passionate atmosphere – a good recipe for getting things done. Time taken to attend meetings is time away from the day/day business & I

have been very grateful for the continued support from Council over the last 24 months

My thanks also to the Secretary – who works away tirelessly 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.

So, after two years at the helm, it is time to pass on the President's baton to Graeme Prentice, in doing so I am sure we are in a safe pair of hands for the next two years.

It has been an honour to have been your President over the last two years - I take this opportunity to wish you all many successful, prosperous & trouble free seasons to come.

Thank you

Russ Kelsey June 30th 2016.