Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
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An Roinn Talmhaíochta agus Forbartha Tuaithe
Mànaistrie o Fairms an Kintra Fordèrin

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To: NFU (plus NFU Scotland and Wales), Potato Council, BPTA, PPA, FPSA, FPC, FUW, UFU, NIPMA, AFSB

Date: 4 June 2015

Dear Sir/Madam

EPITRIX

Further to the UK Plant Health Service's letter of 1 May about interceptions of potatoes from Spain with evidence of Epitrix damage, I am writing to provide an update on the situation.

The Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate has now intercepted 3 consignments of potatoes from a non-demarcated area of Spain with evidence of Epitrix presence. In each case, the potatoes had been washed and although larvae were present, they were dead.

In a more recent case, a consignment of potatoes from a non-demarcated area of Spain was intercepted with evidence of Epitrix feeding damage. Although no live pests were detected, these potatoes were unwashed, which increases the risk that live Epitrix may be present. Other interceptions have taken place showing evidence of feeding damage in washed potatoes, but with no pest presence.

In response to these findings, the Spanish authorities have recently introduced a new demarcated outbreak area, in Andalucia, but interceptions are still being made from non-demarcated areas.

Given the evidence that controls in Spain are not proving fully effective, the UK Plant Health Service will intensify its monitoring of potatoes from Spain and associated actions. In particular, we will:

- Inspect 100% of notified consignments of unwashed potatoes from mainland Spain.
- Inspect 50% of notified consignments of washed potatoes from Spain and unwashed potatoes from the Balearic islands (these islands are geographically separate from the mainland and past experience/evidence has suggested a lower likelihood of pest presence there, but the 50% monitoring level will help to assess the situation and review whether this remains the case).

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- Inspect 100% of consignments from suppliers involved with recent interceptions.

- Require that where there is evidence of live pest presence in any consignment, that the consignment is destroyed or re-exported.

- Irrespective of whether there is evidence of live pest presence, require that unwashed* potatoes showing signs of Epitrix feeding damage are destroyed or re-exported (without washing there is a strong suspicion that adults or live larvae may be present in such potatoes).

- Require that, in all cases where an interception is made, any future consignments imported to the same UK premises from mainland Spain must be washed before being despatched to the UK.

*if the potatoes are accompanied by a plant passport showing clearly that they come from a demarcated area, with evidence of compliance with EU Emergency Decision 2012/270 (which permits soil removal by brushing, as an alternative to washing), we will consider on a case by case basis whether there is evidence or suspicion of live pest presence before taking action

Given that washing seems to be the most effective means of removing (or killing) any Epitrix which might be present, we are recommending that, as far as possible, only washed potatoes are imported from Spain. We appreciate that this will be difficult for some businesses, so are not prohibiting unwashed potatoes, but will be taking a stricter line with unwashed potatoes to reflect the higher risk level. In particular, importers should note:

- The greater intensity of inspections of unwashed potatoes (described above).

- The intention to require re-export or destruction of unwashed potatoes showing signs of Epitrix feeding damage (described above).

Bearing this in mind, importers should also note that where they have tipped unwashed potatoes (e.g. into boxes) prior to inspection, where re-export or destruction is required as a result of feeding damage or pest presence, it will be at the importer's expense to re-bag or reload the potatoes (under official supervision) to facilitate safe transport.

We also urge importers to take effective hygiene measures regarding their outgrades, to protect against the possible spread of the pest. In particular, we recommend that such outgrades are contained before safe disposal in landfill or by anaerobic digestion.

We believe that these measures are proportionate and technically justified, given the serious threat posed by this pest and evidence about the situation in Spain.

We would welcome your help in the following ways:

- Disseminating this information to your members.

- Encouraging vigilance amongst your members (a short factsheet is attached for this purpose).

- Encouraging good compliance with the statutory notification scheme, to facilitate inspections.

- Although not part of the notification scheme, it would help if importers could specify whether consignments have been washed when making their notifications.

These measures are being taken as a temporary response to the current situation in Spain. We will keep the position under review and are also raising awareness at an EU level (through the Plant Health Standing Committee) and beyond (through EPPO). If there is evidence of further non-compliance with the EU Decision and repeated interceptions then we may need to consider specific national legislation to better protect against introductions of Epitrix. Such legislation could include requirements that all potatoes from Spain may only be imported if they have had soil removed in Spain (by washing or brushing, or potentially just washing, as this seems the most effective disinfestation process). We welcome your views on whether you would support such an approach, should it be necessary.

Yours faithfully

Richard McIntosh
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