British
POTATO REVIEW

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JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2025

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WHO GOT THE BEST VOTE IN THE ROASTIES TASTE TEST?

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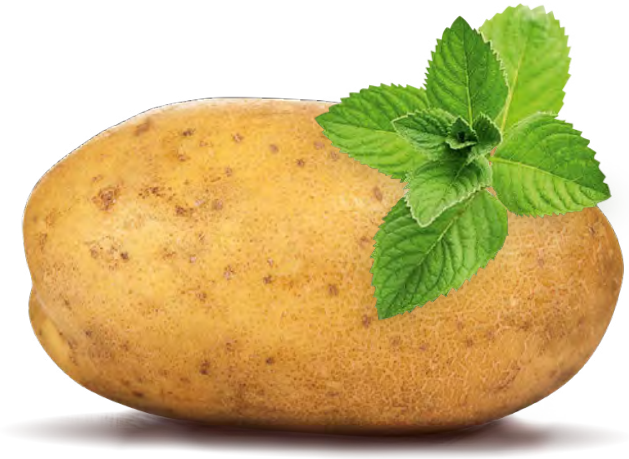

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Editor's letter

HAPPY New Year one and all! After all the over-indulgence of the past few weeks, I'm sure I'm not the only one who's now considering how to tighten that belt over the coming months – and I'm not just talking financially!

As we enter 2025, we've again got some new year predictions to share with you from various members of the potato supply chain and their insights make for good reading on pages 18-23. We'll also be doing a 'year in review' on the British Potato website, so be sure to keep checking in at www. https://britishpotato.co.uk/ for a recap on what the past year brought us.

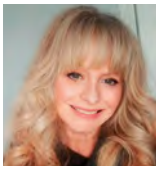
This issue kicks off the year with some great news features about trials, awards, training opportunities, science and more. Learn the latest on the Crop Innovation Centre, work with wireworm, a spraing collaboration and PCN best practice.

Andrew at Hutchinsons shares seasonal tips on planting uniformity, and we learn how legumes could pave the way for better pest control and soil health in potato growing.

Legislation has a big presence in this issue, with the Budget having brought in several changes before Christmas. With that in mind, we consulted experts in the legal, financial and recruitment sectors to gain their insights on how to handle the inheritance tax storm, while our regular Legislation Specialist Alex Preston gives his insights on the repurposing of the potato levy funds.

It's always good to have something to celebrate in industry, so we were delighted to hear how potato growers in Jersey have been rewarded for their efforts using trap crops – that's one we'll be covering in depth in our March issue. Also, before Christmas, we were fortunate to be invited to the Scotts open day near Boston and see how this family business continues to grow and evolve, with the next generation now making their mark in the industry.

Next, we're getting ready to attend LAMMA this month and hope to catch up with a few of you there. In the meantime, happy reading and lots of luck with the next season's crops!



Stephanie Cornwall

Editor

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Editor
Stephanie Cornwall 01778 395055
stephanie.cornwall@warnersgroup.co.uk

Sales Manager
Victoria Brown 01778 392046
victoria.brown@warnersgroup.co.uk

Publisher
Juliet Loiselle 01778 391067
Julietl@warnersgroup.co.uk

Design
Dean Cole
deanc@warnersgroup.co.uk

Subscriptions
01778 392464
subscriptions@warnersgroup.co.uk

Subscriptions & advertising copy
Potato Review, Warners Group Publications,
The Maltings, West Street, Bourne, PE10 9PH

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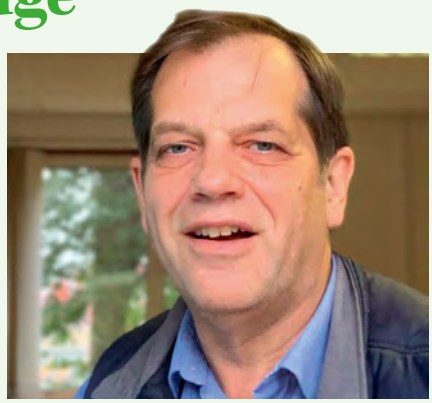
Opportunity to further potato storage knowledge



THE Potato Store Managers' Course, which has been run by Potato Storage Insight (PSI) since the disbandment of the levy-funded AHDB Potato in the UK, will continue in 2025 and is now open for bookings.

Store expert Adrian Cunnington, who spent many years carrying out potato storage research for AHDB, has been leading this annual, certificated course in the UK for nearly three decades.

"Since 2022, the course has been a part of PSI's offering to industry and aims to continue to set the standard for excellence in potato storage management," said Adrian.

The two-day course will run on March 4th and 5th and will be held at Greetham Valley Hotel & Conference Centre near Oakham, Rutland.

Next year's course will repeat the opportunity for delegates to sit the exam for the BASIS (Stored Potatoes) qualification, an element successfully introduced to the training in 2024. The online exam will be on April 1st. The addition of this option in 2024 meant it became more attractive to those specialising in potato storage without broader agronomy training.

"The training offers a great chance for both new and experienced store managers to enhance their understanding of storage and benefit from the wealth of knowledge," said Adrian who will lead the course with his colleague, Glyn Harper, a respected trainer since 2010. Both were formerly based at the Sutton Bridge research site for many years before its closure in 2021.

The course is designed as a two-day, residential programme, focusing on a relaxed and discussion-based delivery of information. It combines practical, interactive training sessions with networking opportunities, including an informal evening dinner. The format is tailored to maximise delegate engagement and to give all participants in-depth understanding of storage management for their particular sector or specialisation.

Key elements of the course include risk and cost management, vital in today's commercial potato storage world. There is also extensive coverage of disease threats, sprout control management and the all-important topic of ventilation – crucial for environmental management in all potato stores.

A copy of the course prospectus can be downloaded here.

An early bird discount of £50 per person is available until December 31st and further details are available from Adrian here.

Last season for mancozeb use

FOLLOWING the expiry of the active substance approval earlier last year, the sale and supply of any plant protection product containing mancozeb ended on November 30th.

For growers with stocks of mancozeb-containing products, any stock purchased before the deadline can still be used next season.

UPL, which produced the mancozeb-containing Manzate 75 WG and Nautile DG, worked hard with its distributor partners to supply enough for this season, which saw a rise in demand following the surge in strains resistant to CAA and OSBPI fungicides on the continent, according to Geoff Hailstone, UPL Potato Technical Lead for the UK and Ireland.

The loss of mancozeb coincides with the first discovery of the 46_A1 strain in the UK. Geoff says that any stocks left over for blight programmes next season will benefit resistance management and present an opportunity to trial what blight programmes may look like after mancozeb.

He said the company had seen a significant increase in the sales of products like Proxanil (cymoxanil + propamocarb and he expected this to continue as it is the next best option as a tank mix partner for resistance management.

"The two actives in Proxanil have no reported resistance issues. They are both the only members of different chemistry groups," said Geoff.

"Cymoxanil is known to be one of the few actives with kickback activity and has a very low risk of developing resistance. Propamocarb is the only active with reliable anti-sporulant activity across all known strains and has good movement in the plant."

Supplier donates defibrillators

POTATO supplier Branston has donated Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) to two Lincolnshire businesses, helping to provide vital life-saving support to local communities in the event of an emergency.

Following a number of fund-raising events throughout the year, Branston match-funded the total raised to donate defibrillators to Mint Lane Café and Metheringham Gym, and recently hosted a training session for both businesses, facilitated by LIVES, to teach volunteers how to use the equipment and perform life-saving CPR.

The latest donations are part of Branston's ongoing support of local community initiatives, including regular donations of potatoes to both Mint Lane Café and Let Them Eat Cake, a not-for-profit organisation that helps those facing homelessness in the area. As well as being an affordable cafe, surplus shop and a base for Let Them Eat Cake, Mint Lane Café provides a warm welcome to the Involve@ Lincoln wellbeing centre, which hosts activities including counselling, peer support groups and creative therapy sessions.

Ian Blackmore from Involve@Lincoln and Marion Foster from Let Them Eat Cake were both in attendance to receive the donation, which will support the many local people who use the thriving Mint Lane Café hub in the event of a medical emergency.

Branston's donation has also served as a helping hand to team members at Metheringham Gym, who had started fund-raising for an AED earlier this year to provide an additional safety measure for both gym goers and the local community. Branston's support meant the gym was able to install the AED earlier than anticipated. Ian Greaves, who owns the gym, received the defibrillator along with team members, which will be situated on an external wall for easy access.

HR Director at Branston, Simon Telfer, said: "Giving back to the Lincolnshire area is very important to us at Branston, and it's rewarding to see the results of our team's fund-raising go to such good use. Having access to a defibrillator can save lives in the event of an emergency, so it's vital that local communities have access.

"Mint Lane Café and Metheringham Gym both serve as hubs for the local community and are very worthy recipients of the defibrillators. We're continuing our fund-raising efforts as a team at Branston and we're looking forward to making more donations in the future."

LIVES provides emergency care in critical situations and works with communities to ensure that any individual who suffers a 999 medical emergency in Lincolnshire is surrounded by the best rapid response care available.

Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) can strike at any time. When it does, using a defibrillator has proven to be the most effective response. Defibrillation within three minutes of SCA increases the chances of survival to over 70%.

The potato supplier will also be donating defibrillators to more organisations across the country, close to its Scotland and Somerset sites. This includes Crewmeke Riding Stables, Ilminster Town Centre, Abernethy Tennis Club and Oudenard Community Hub in Bridge of Earn.

TRIPS seasonal results unveiled

THIS season's results from the Innovate UK-funded Transformative Reduced Inputs in Potatoes (TRIP) project were unveiled recently.

The project, which is a partnership between Emerald Research, Dyson Farming Research, Light Science Technologies, Bangor University and The James Hutton Institute, features Emerald's OptiYield soil analysis and crop nutrient recommendation system, which has been used to prescribe the fertiliser, foliar nutrient and biostimulant regimes used in the trials.

The second season of trials has continued to assess not only the effect of switching from 100% soil-applied nitrogen and phosphate to majority foliar-applied, but also the results of decreasing overall nitrogen and phosphate volumes by up to 50% compared to conventional recommendations when supported by ERL's proprietary biostimulants.

Emerald says the results have provided a clear insight into the cumulative benefits of 'stacking' biostimulants and taking a more preventative and holistic approach to improving crop performance and efficiency, as opposed to a product-by-product treatment regime.

The results were made available to view, along with advice and further information, at the Croptec show which took place at the NAEC, Stoneleigh, before Christmas.

Early harvest in Ireland

EIGHTY per cent of the Irish main crop potato harvest was completed by the start of November and virtually all crops were out of the ground mid-month.

Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) national potato committee chair, Sean Ryan, said weather and ground conditions had been excellent and he was optimistic that good prices would be secured from retailers for Irish potato growers.

Crisps producer and grower gives TV crew an insight into potato challenges

FAIRFIELDS Farm, a potato-growing business in Wormingford, Essex, has been featured in a national television programme, looking at the effects on this year's British potato harvest.

In a recent episode of Countryfile, Fairfields Farm co-founders Robert and Laura Strathern spoke about their farm and the current challenges they are facing, including increased production costs and unpredictable weather conditions. TV viewers also got a behind-the-scenes look at the farm's production line.

Since the late 1980s, the weekly documentary series Countryfile has covered stories relating to rural, agricultural and environmental issues.

In this episode, presenter Joe Crowley visited Fairfields Farm, which grows crisping varieties, during harvest. About 1,000 acres of land are used to grow potatoes at the farm, producing about 25,000 tonnes a year.

During the episode, Robert said: "You can soon find yourself in a loss-making scenario. Potatoes have become a very high-risk crop."

He went on to add: "We've been able to lift most of the time but we had a very wet spring. March, April and May were quite wet months so that delayed planting for this year and that delayed harvest date as well.

"Now you're on a race against the clock and the weather to get the crop in before it turns."

He said the 2024 crop had been a "mixed bag" and detailed how the farm's cold stores, where its crops can be kept for up to a year, was also being affected by rising energy costs.

"Electricity is a big part of our costs, so when inflation happened for power, that had a big impact on our business," he said. "But for making sure we've got crop available it's imperative we've got our own crop in our own store, so we've got control of it."

Following the episode's airing, Rober spoke to a local newspaper in which he said he was delighted to have been invited to feature on the show.

"We're delighted for our brand to have featured on such a nationally-loved show and showcase the passion that goes into our potatoes and crisps," he told the Southend Echo. "It was a fantastic opportunity to highlight the challenges that many potato farmers face across the country, but also to share the story of our family-run business and the innovation behind our products."

"We hope that many catch up on the episode to see what makes Fairfields Farm so special."

To view the episode, visit **bbc.co.uk/programmes/m002482x**.

Aldi roasties come out on top

ALDI'S frozen roasties have come out top in a blind taste test carried out by consumer insights service Which?, beating Aunt Bessies and McCain.

Roast potatoes from well-known brands Aunt Bessie's and McCain were sampled by Which?'s 65-strong panel in a blind taste test, alongside eight supermarket offerings including Aldi, Asda, Morrisons and Tesco.

Aldi and M&S topped the rankings, Aldi's spuds being the cheapest on test. Aunt Bessie's also put in a good showing, ranking third.

In its online review, Which? said the Aldi potatoes has "impressive flavour".

"Three-quarters were fans of the fluffy interior, while two-thirds loved the crispy outsides," it stated, adding that the budget roasties, which come in 1kg bags, were "an excellent crowd-pleasing choice".

Morrisons, Sainsbury's and Tesco scored just fractionally lower than Aunt Bessie's, while McCain lost marks for looks and flavour in this year's taste test.

The consumer insights outlet goes on to add that an air fryer is a great low-energy option for spuds. More frozen potato brands are now including air fryer instructions on the packaging as it's become an increasingly popular way to cook.

All the potatoes on test were blind-tasted and rated by a panel of 65 people in October at a specialist test lab. The panel of testers was made up of people who regularly buy and eat roast potatoes, and broadly represented the demographic profile of adults in the UK by age range, gender split and more.

Academics sought for workshop

ACADEMICS are being sought to contribute to a workshop that could provide new services for potato growers and suppliers.

Agritech-e has partnered with Lincam to host a series of workshops designed to help translate research into impact, and the first one on January 31st will focus on potatoes.

The organisers are looking for things that can transform production by growers and offering support to help develop commercial ventures from scientific work.

Featuring industry speakers to "frame the challenges", those who attend the workshops will be mentored and guided to develop a commercially-relevant concept and pitch it to an expert panel. They'll receive feedback on their suggested solutions, and could be invited to further develop their ideas and pitch to an Investment Committee for translational funding and further mentorship and support.

"We're looking for academics from different disciplines to fuse your ideas and research into these sectors," a joint statement announced.

Finding Nemo

How hybrid has grown in popularity since being launched in store

A HYBRID potato named after cartoon fish Nemo is in high demand, according to retailer Tesco.

The potato, which is grown in Lincolnshire and Suffolk, was named after the fish because of its unusual markings. It proved popular when it went on sale in limited trials during previous Christmas periods at the store, leading to a call for greater quantities to be provided.

As a result supplier Branston has upped the quantity it is growing.

Sales and Marketing Director, Lucia Washbrook, said: "Demand for roasting potatoes rockets by around 500% in the run-up to Christmas compared to a standard shopping week. Nemo is a fantastic roaster, which has scored higher than traditional roasting favourites Maris Piper and King Edward in taste tests. It also performs brilliantly mashed or baked. We've doubled the quantity grown this year so that we will have plenty available throughout the season."

Tesco potato buyer Lucy Moss said the potato's energy-saving credentials have helped to boost its popularity. The Nemo variety can cut cooking time by 25%, saving energy in the home.

Lucy said: "The Nemo is now well on its way to becoming a modern British classic potato and is already being talked about by those who have tried it as the ultimate roasting spud. The potato is considered a game-changer not only because it can slash cooking time compared with the average roasting spud, but also because of its wonderful creamy taste, rich fluffy texture, crisp outer skin and distinct golden colour."

"We carefully select the best growers on the best land to grow this premium potato."

Branston has planted enough of the Nemo variety to last for seven months based on previous sales data and the supermarket hopes this will make it easier for shoppers to 'Find Nemo' in stores.

Nemo potatoes have distinctive pink skin with creamy yellow patches around their large eye-like markings, giving them a bi-coloured appearance and leading to them being named after the cartoon clownfish.

The environmental credentials of Nemo are strong too – it requires relatively small amounts of fertilisers and much of this nutrition can be organically-derived, according to Branston's Director of Agronomy Mark Willcox.

Branston plans to further increase availability of Nemo over the next few years as seed volumes expand and believes it could join the King Edward and Maris Piper as a classic roasting potato.

Mark said: "Establishing a new potato takes many years as we need to understand how and where it grows best while testing it in the market. At the same time, potato seed multiplication takes four to five years to build up to full commercial volumes, so this gives us time to fully understand its strengths and weaknesses.

"We are very pleased with how well Nemo has performed in Tesco's Finest range over the over recent Christmas periods. Based on this success, this year we planted enough to maintain it in store for up to seven months, based on previous sale rates.

"We carefully select the best growers on the best land to grow this premium potato."

He added: "It has strong disease resistance and uses water efficiently, especially where applied by drip irrigation. Many of the Nemo fields have benefited local biodiversity through the planting of flower-rich grass field margins."

Nemo is a phureja hybrid variety, which combines the vigorous fast-growing nature of original Peruvian potatoes with the hardiness of modern European varieties from the Solanum tuberosum Solanaceae family.

It has the golden yellow flesh typical of an Andean phureja. Its uniform cell structure enables it to cook much more quickly.

The Tesco Finest Nemo potatoes cost £2.30 for a 2kg bag and will be available in more than 400 stores.

Get a fix on potato crop nutrition

A new Syngenta nitrogen fixing biostimulant for potatoes, VIXERAN®, could provide crops with an equivalent of 30 kg/ha conventional N fertiliser this spring, and create a more resilient nutrient strategy to cope with increasingly challenging seasonal conditions.

The highly efficient endophytic bacteria in VIXERAN® convert atmospheric nitrogen into a nutrient form that is readily accessible to potato plants, advocates Syngenta Potato Technical Manager, Andy Cunningham. It is a new opportunity to reduce the reliance on high levels of conventional fertilisers, whilst supporting soil health .

Potato crops have repeated surges in demand for key nutrients through the growing season - especially nitrogen at times to fuel a rapid green leaf canopy, and then to supply the building blocks of carbohydrates laid down during tuber bulking, Andy advises.

"And it is also incredibly important during tuber initiation, when the plant's vigour at the time will dictate the number of tubers set, which is ultimately the yield potential of the crop."

One of the key advantages of using foliar applied VIXERAN® early in the growing season is that it goes on consistently supplying nutrient to the developing plant, even if conventional fertiliser applications are disrupted by weather or soil conditions.

VIXERAN® action

The VIXERAN® bacterial strain of *Azotobacter* salinestris is unique in its high nitrogen fixation activity and its triple mode of action – working as a foliar and root endophyte inside the plant, as well as in the soil rhizosphere.

What sets the VIXERAN® bacterial strain apart - and makes it so applicable for field applications - is the speed at which it gets to work and its resilience to climatic conditions, which means it will provide reliable results more consistently, in a wider range of crops

He advocates use in potatoes would be a single application, typically at the hooking stage or start of tuber initiation, giving effective coverage of the foliage and for soil colonisation around the plant. Trials have shown that for simplicity of application, VIXERAN® is compatible with most crop protection products and liquid fertilisers.

Research has shown VIXERAN® typically generates around 30kg of readily available N taken up by crops over the course of the season. Growers and agronomists can plan to use that to reduce inputs and cost of artificial fertiliser, or choose to use it as an additional nutrient resource to help increase crop yield.

Syngenta trials have shown optimum timing of VIXERAN® application at root hooking or early tuber initiation, advises Andy Cunningham.

Vixeran key learns

- Provides 30 kg N/ha
- Consistent nitrogen supply
- Foliar and root endophyte
- Single easy application

BIOSTIMULANTS TO POWER POTATO CROPS

VIXERAN® is one of an increasing range of Syngenta Biologicals for use in potato crop agronomy programmes, along with the well-proven temperature stress mitigation of QUANTIS® and the renowned benefits of MAXICROP® seaweed extracts in vegetable and potato crops. Biostimulants can be fully integrated with conventional chemistry strategies. That combines enhanced plant vigour, with protection from pests and diseases for more sustainable use of resources and overall higher yields of quality potatoes.

PotatoPower

Potato-grown protein could be a gamechanger for baking

EGG protein grown in potatoes could pave the way for a new era in baking applications.

Molecular farming startup PoLoPo is working with global ingredients tech company CSM to develop egg protein powder for baking applications.

Founded in 2022 by scientists with a deep understanding of plant genetics and protein expression, PoLoPo uses proprietary metabolic engineering techniques to turn potato plants into micro-biofactories.

Potato plants manufacture and store the target proteins in the tuber. Tubers are harvested when they reach sufficient size. Their proteins are then extracted and dried into a functional protein powder that integrates into current food processing lines and formulations.

Commercial baking and other CPG food categories use ovalbumin extensively for its functional properties such as texture, thickening, and increasing shelf life—ovalbumin from molecular farming offers the same performance in an ingredient that is cleaner, more sustainable, more affordable, and more price-stable. Popular applications for ovalbumin include pastries like croissants, muffins, and donuts.

CSM and PoLoPo will now collaborate on developing PoLoPo's ovalbumin powder for baking requirements, including foaming, gelation and water-binding functions, as well as provide side-by-side assistance with process optimisation, regulatory, and safety requirements.

Their joint goal is to supply a price-stable product that is cheaper, cleaner, and more sustainable than egg protein derived from chickens.

CSM Ingredients Group Managing Director Christian Sobolta said: "Startups like PoLoPo are visionary innovators that play a pivotal role in developing concepts and pushing boundaries, and CSM is committed to bringing these innovations to the broader food value chain. The global market for ovalbumin powder is projected to reach $36 billion by 2032, and PoLoPo presents an opportunity to change the dynamics of this category in a way that benefits planet and profits."

PoLoPo CEO, Maya Sapir-Mir, said the collaboration will open more doors for PoLoPo to work with more packaged food companies. "Commercial baking is clearly a key lane for us, and CSM's technical and commercial expertise is strategically valuable for reaching that industry."

PoLoPo has submitted for USDA regulatory approval, expected within six months, at which point US partners and growers may begin cultivating PoLoPo's potato plants.

The company has won multiple innovation awards and has raised $2.3 million from leading food-tech investors including FoodLabs, Milk & Honey Ventures, CPT Capital, Siddhi Capital, Plug and Play, and Hack Capital. PR

"Startups like PoLoPo are visionary innovators that play a pivotal role in developing concepts and pushing boundaries, and CSM is committed to bringing these innovations to the broader food value chain."

Growers 'willing and able' but support needed, survey reveals

A NUMBER of British potato growers took part in a survey carried out by the Country Land and Business Association (CLA) in the lead-up to the national Budget, which revealed how they want to feed the nation and deliver for nature, but see the government's Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes being critical to their survival.

Progress has been made transitioning to the new schemes post-Brexit and CLA President Victoria Vyvyan said most potato growers were 'willing and able'.

Richard Solari, a potato grower in Shropshire, who took part in the survey, said: "We have some awkward-shaped fields, some with steep banks, which haven't been the most productive over the years. With the various options available to us within Countryside Stewardship we have been able to benefit the environment in these areas. Ahead of establishing our potato crop within the eight-year rotation, we're finding the two-year legume and clover leys very beneficial for improving both soil structure and fertility."

Victoria said the survey, whose results came in just before the Chancellor announced the new government's first Budget, showed most felt the Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes had the potential to lead the world in "creating a sustainable agriculture and environment policy".

However, any delays in rollout, and insufficient funding risked undermining confidence and stability and could lead to potato farms going bust, she added.

"Without the right economic, regulatory and political conditions, growers will be unable to deliver on the multitude of societal demands that ultimately fall on us," she said.

The poll, which is based on responses from 250 farmers incorporating potato and other crops, found:

- 80% of respondents said they 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that payments through the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) and Countryside Stewardship (CS) schemes are critical to ensure their businesses stay viable. Just 8% 'strongly disagreed' or 'disagreed'.
- Most want to play an active role in delivering environmental improvements – 85% 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that they support the concept of using some agricultural land to protect and enhance wildlife and the environment.
- Three-quarters of respondents said they are currently enrolled in SFI or CS schemes. Of those, income of between £10,000 and £30,000 a year to fund the delivery of a range of environmental outcomes was the most common bracket, with 35% falling into this category.

The results come just before the Chancellor announced the new government's first Budget. The farming budget of £2.4bn a year has not grown in a decade, despite spikes in inflation, major shifts in the importance of domestic food security in a changing world, and recognition of the scale of the environmental challenges.


Richard Solari


Victoria Vyvyan

The CLA had called for the agriculture budget to be increased to £3.8bn a year in England by 2027/28, to help the industry deliver more across ELM schemes, tree planting and food security.

- **Our legislation section, which can be found on pages 48-51, covers the Budget and gives some advice on how to handle the changes in inheritance tax.**

‘It’s a sin to bin!’ Consumers urged to value their spuds more

WASTE management companies, green campaigners, local authorities and more joined the call for consumers to reduce the number of potatoes making their way into landfill in the run-up to Christmas

With statistics revealing that 11.5 million potatoes are still being thrown away by UK households over the Christmas period, and current figures from WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme) showing that potatoes, along with cooked leftovers (homemade/pre-prepared meals), and bread, top the UK’s most wasted food items, the call went out to consumers to be more mindful.

WRAP data shows that an average 2.9 million whole potatoes were thrown away in the UK every day in 2023 and the amount increased dramatically over Christmas, representing a financial loss to households and an unnecessary input into landfill.

WRAP CEO Harriet Lamb said: “We can all learn from our nans – shop like your nan, cook like your nan ... that generation never wasted anything. They made soups from leftovers, sewed on new buttons, bought just what they needed and made things last. These are valuable lessons to help us all have festive fun while caring for the environment.”

Waste Managed’s Steve Traviss was amongst those calling for more sustainable consumer practices.

“At Waste Managed, we’re passionate about helping individuals and businesses reduce their environmental footprint—not just during the holidays but throughout the year,” he said.

Local government members also campaigned for better food management over Christmas.

In its online campaign, Caerphilly County Borough Council recently stated: “Did you know 11.3 million roast potatoes are thrown away each year on Christmas Day? Don’t forget to make a list and check it twice when you go shopping and reduce your food waste.”

North London Waste Authority also highlighted that potatoes are the most wasted food item in the UK and says much of the waste could be avoided if people made better-informed choices.

“Fifty-six per cent is wasted due to personal choice to leave parts of the potato, such as skins on a jacket potato, 25% of potatoes are not used in time, and 17% is from cooking or serving too much,” the organisation stated. “Small changes in the way we store, cook and purchase potatoes can have a big impact. Storing potatoes correctly can mean they last weeks not days.”

Too Good To Go, an app which helps Brits buy food from restaurants and cafes that would otherwise be thrown away for a small cost, shared good practice advice urging consumers to think before they binned potatoes over the Christmas period.

Branston donates two million meals to Fareshare nationwide

TWO million meals have been donated to FareShare UK thanks to a generous supply of regular spuds from national potato supplier Branston.

A supporter of FareShare UK since 2017, Branston regularly supplies the charity with potatoes to create nutritious, filling meals for the users of its almost 8,500 services across the country, including lunch clubs, homeless shelters and community cafes. FareShare takes surplus food from across the food industry and distributes it to independent organisations that all work to fight hunger and tackle food poverty.

Surplus food provided by Branston equates to 840 tonnes of spuds and highlights Branston’s continued commitment to community causes as well as reducing crop waste.

Branston Director Mark Willcox said: “We’re always looking to find ways to minimise waste from our farms and factories whilst maximising crop utilisation. Potatoes are a nutritious and healthy side-of-plate staple that really does help feed the nation! On top of that, they’re a great British farming success story.

“Food poverty is such a challenge in this country, and the work that FareShare does to combat this is incredible. We’re pleased to be able to play a small role in this and will continue to work with our partners to redistribute surplus spuds and support in any way we can.”

Branston handles more than 350,000 tonnes of potatoes a year and supplies both fresh and prepared potato products.

Director of Food at FareShare, Simon Millard, said: “By providing FareShare with surplus food, Branston makes a huge difference to ensuring that good food goes to people in need, not waste. Their support helps to address the environmental issue of food waste at the same time as strengthening communities across the country and ensuring people in need have access to healthy diets. Thanks for helping FareShare make the food go further.”

‘Rapid and radical’ action needed

A RECENT Defra report revealing that the percentage of highly food-secure households in the UK has dropped from 87% in 2019/20 to 83% in 2022/23, has prompted a call for more support for potato and other vegetable growers.

A highly-food secure household is defined as all people at all times having access to enough food for an active, healthy life.

While a large majority of households in the UK continue to be food secure, the report reveals a notable decrease, which has coincided with increased financial pressures to household budgets from high general inflation and high food inflation.

Soil Association Head of Food Policy Rob Percival said the report shows the UK is facing significant challenge and “rapid and radical” action is needed.

“Climate breakdown and nature loss are already undermining the UK’s food security, and it’s going to get worse. We need this new government to listen. Many farmers have been warning of a growing climate threat for years, and we’re yet to see the necessary response. Rhetorical commitments to ‘roadmaps’ and ‘strategies’ aren’t going to fill bellies – we need hard, secure investment in nature-friendly and organic farming, which can help build resilience by protecting soils and wildlife.

“The promised government food plan needs to boost British fruit and veg production and consumption while addressing dietary inequalities and ensuring everyone can access healthy, fresh and minimally-processed foods that do not come with a big cost to the environment.”

Earlier this year the Soil Association led a campaign calling for a horticulture strategy that aims to double British fruit and veg production and consumption, through agroecological farming.

The campaign and policy report, co-authored with The Wildlife Trusts and Sustain, urged government to start with supporting schools to serve up healthy, veg-packed meals for children.

Applications for scholarships open

APPLICATIONS for 2026 Nuffield Farming Scholarships will open on January 29th, and those in the potato growing and supply sector have the chance to study a topic they are passionate about.

Nuffield Farming seeks to support and develop future leaders through scholarships that unlock individual potential through study and overseas travel, as well as advance UK agriculture through Scholars sharing their ideas upon their return.

Applications are welcomed from those aged 25-45 residing in the UK and working within or influencing the farming, food, horticulture, rural and associated industries. There is no requirement for academic qualifications or a connection to Nuffield Farming, but a passion for the chosen study topic and a willingness to learn are essential.

Nuffield Farming offers extensive support for applicants, including regular online ‘open evenings’ for questions about the process, assistance from local Nuffield Farming Scholars and mock interviews for those shortlisted.

The first online open evening will be held on January 29th at 7pm. During the event, there will be an opportunity to learn more about the application process and hear from 2023 scholar Roisin Taylor. To register for this session, please email charlotte@nuffieldscholar.org.

Those interested in applying can learn more about the application process and eligibility requirements by visiting **https://www.nuffieldscholar.org/scholarships/how-apply**. Applications will close on July 31st 2025.

Joined-up efforts through Enigma I have been crucial to changing the status quo for wireworm control.

Invasion of the north

Research unveils the possibility of future wireworm threats

SPECIFIC modelling undertaken as part of Enigma I, a two-year R&D project led by Fera Science and supported by leading industry partners, suggests that wireworm will become more prevalent in northern areas of the UK, and at higher elevations over the next two decades.

Dr Andrew Crowe, Senior Spatial Data Scientist at Fera, said rising soil temperatures, driven by climate change, are creating a more hospitable environment for the pest.

"Following thorough identification processes, including DNA barcoding, we've been able to produce maps that show the current geographic ranges of the five wireworm species of most concern to growers across the UK," he said.

"Building on this, we've also modelled the wireworm activity to predict how these geographic ranges are likely to evolve between now and 2040, as soil temperatures rise, owing to climate change. We've been able to forecast where the pest could become an issue for farmers in the future, and which species they need to look out for."

Using life history studies in lab cultures and from field samples, Fera scientists have also investigated the wireworm life cycle and how this alters at different temperatures, which could affect damage patterns.

"These insights have enabled us to model wireworm populations throughout the year, informing on-farm risk assessments, and filling significant gaps in knowledge – as much of our knowledge on wireworm populations comes from just after the Second World War," said Andrew.

"As a result, we're providing our partners, such as Syngenta and G's Growers, with vital, up-to-date information on where and when to target sustainable pest control methods to be most effective at protecting crops."

The initial Enigma I project will be completed in February 2025, evolving into a second phase of research steered by the priorities of industry partners.

"Incorporating data from the first project, we now plan to build a bespoke risk assessment for each project partner based on crop type, crop rotation, location and other risk factors, alongside a suite of actions and options to reduce wireworm populations," said Andrew.

"We will also investigate the effects of cover crop mixes funded through the SFI (Sustainable Farming Incentive) scheme on wireworm development, and test a small selection of non-chemical control agents for the pest."

Dr Andrew Crowe, Senior Spatial Data Scientist at Fera

Organisations interested in being involved in the second phase of this Enigma research project into sustainable wireworm control are being invited to explore partnership opportunities. PR

To find out more about Enigma I achievements and express an interest in further research, visit: **https://www.fera.co.uk/our-science/enigma-research-model**

The Crop Innovation Centre (CIC) at The James Hutton Institute, Invergowrie.

New Crop Innovation Centre officially opened

Innovations to be developed in the field, farm and lab to make potato crops more resilient.

UK Secretary of State for Scotland, Ian Murray MP, and First Minister of Scotland, John Swinney MSP, have officially opened the Crop Innovation Centre (CIC) at The James Hutton Institute in Invergowrie, where work to future-proof potato crop production will be carried out.

The CIC is home to the Advanced Plant Growth Centre (APGC), which was created in partnership with the University of Dundee Plants Sciences Division. The 8000 sq mtr building also houses the International Barley Hub (IBH).

The building was funded as part of a £62m investment through the Tay Cities Region Deal (TCRD) by the UK and Scottish Governments, which also facilitated the construction of the Mylnefield Farm building and the IBH Field Centre on The James Hutton Institute's Invergowrie campus.

New innovations will be developed in the field, farm and lab to make potato crops more resilient.

One such project being undertaken at the APGC is the TuberGene research project that has been funded as part of UKRI's National Engineering Biology Programme and aims to harness the power of gene editing to address pressing challenges and secure a sustainable future for the potato industry. This is a partnership with Lincoln-based R&D company B-Hive Innovations and supplier Branston Ltd.

Chief Executive of The James Hutton Institute, Professor Colin Campbell, said: "We received funding for the Crop Innovation Centre in 2020, and the project is underpinned by decades of research at The James Hutton Institute along with partners.

"It cements the reputation of Scotland and the UK as global leaders in research and innovation. It was a pleasure to welcome the First Minister and UK Secretary of State to Scotland today to officially name the facility, and we're grateful for all of the support we have received to make this ambition a reality."

The APGC seeks to address global food, non-food and pharmaceutical crops. It is made up of five facilities:
A molecular phenotyping centre (to study the characteristics of crops at a molecular level, such as their DNA, proteins and taste and aroma molecules);
a high throughput phenotyping platform (which allows the collection and analysis of data in large quantities); a vertical growth tower; a post-harvest storage facility; and next-generation controlled environments with the ability to replicate current, and predicted future, global crop production conditions.

It will utilise facilities like indoor vertical farms, which use LED lights to mimic optimised outdoor conditions, accelerating the breeding and growing of climate-resilient and low-input crops.

UK Secretary of State for Scotland, Ian Murray, said: "The Advanced Plant Growth Centre will revolutionise crop production to address critical food security issues."

The 8000 sq mtr building will be powered by a high-performance data "computer farm", which is one of the largest in the UK, and will also house a phenotyping centre, due to open in Spring 2025.

Over the next 10 years, the centre is projected to contribute to collaborative industry projects. PR

Secretary of State, Ian Murray MP, First Minister, John Sweeney MSP and Professor Colin Campbell.

Worldwide crop losses highlighted alongside call for collaboration

NEARLY half of the potato crops worldwide are lost every year in the field because of lack of water, extreme weather conditions, pests and diseases, those who attended HZPC's recent Potato Days event were told.

With the theme, Resilience Revolution, the Dutch breeder's event focussed on this and the fact that even a third of the crops that are healthy when harvested are lost further down the line.

The breeder used the event to highlight the increasingly important role breeding is playing in making potato crops more resilient and bringing down the number of losses and to call for stronger collaboration and cooperation within the potato industry as a whole.

"Together, we may take bigger steps towards a cultivation that utilises the full potential of fields around the world," the company's recent press announcement stated.

As part of the new theme, Royal HZPC Group showed its resilient varieties and panelists including Erika den Daas, CEO van Meijer Potato, Giulio Romagnoli, CEO van Romagnoli Patate en Dick Zelhorst, CEO van Aviko, entered into a discussion with each other. Prof Martin Kropff talked about resilient food systems and the Innovation Centre showed how resilient varieties are created.

The company also paid tribute to its former CEO Gerard Backx at the event, who has stepped down after serving for 23 years. His successor is Hans Huistra. In lieu of retirement gifts, Gerard asked for donations to The Paul Speijer Fund which offers African students the opportunity to study plant sciences at Wageningen University & Research. He handed over a cheque for €25,000 to Nicole Smit, the fund's founder and widow of Paul Speijer.

Founded in 1898, and rooted in Dutch soil, HZPC has expanded to become an international market leader in potato breeding, seed potato trading and product concept development. Its potato varieties are optimised for local growing conditions and the business frequently shares expertise and solutions relating to climatic, cultural and commercial challenges faced by growers and suppliers. It exports to more than 90 countries.

Breeder's gross margin affected by weather

HIGH rainfall took its toll on seed breeder HZPC's yields during the 2023 potato crop year, shareholders have been told.

The crop year in Europe was characterised in Europe by a late start owing to high rainfall, followed by a hot and dry period. As a result, seed potato growers' yields were significantly lower than normal.

Royal HZPC Group's gross margin decreased to €67.3 million. This was caused by lower volumes, which were not fully offset by higher prices.

At the General Meeting of Shareholders, the Royal HZPC Group considered and adopted the 2023/2024 financial statements, having heard how the potato breeder showed its resilience despite the challenges in volume and yield.

By closely controlling costs, a net profit of €6.1 million was realised before deducting the costs of the Connecting Growers program. The dividend was set at €5.20 per certificate by the General Meeting of Shareholders.

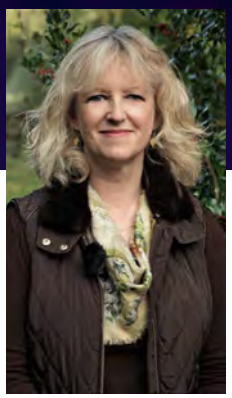
The total volume of sales and licenses in the fiscal year reached 940,963 tons, almost equal to the previous year (944,293 tons). Despite the lower harvest in northwestern Europe, this was offset by an increase in license growing in Asia and the Americas. Total sales for the fiscal year amounted to €415 million.

Former CEO Gerard Backx said: "In 2023/2024, we were not able to achieve the growth we had estimated. However, in the special year 2023/2024 we showed how important resilience and adaptability are to our employees, growers, customers and partners. We pushed boundaries and saw a new balance emerge, with our strategy of focusing on different segments and regions paying off."

Hans Huistra, who has now taken over the role of CEO, is optimistic about the current year. He said: "Royal HZPC Group has built a very good market position over the years. A lot has been invested in new, promising varieties and there is a strong international organisation with a solid home base in the Netherlands. With our employees, growers, clients and partners, we have an excellent starting position to grow in the coming years."

What does 2025 hold in store?

The past 12 months have been nothing if not eventful. So what can the potato industry expect during the coming year? We asked various people what they anticipate.

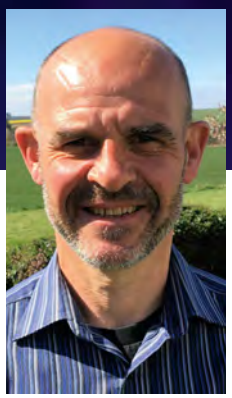

Belinda Clarke


Marcus Palmer


Luke Murphy


Nick Cesare


Rob Highfield


Ian Toth

Featuring the warmest June on record then the wettest-ever August, weather challenges were ever-present for potato growers in 2024.

The political landscape also saw major changes, with a new government coming into power. At the same time, the overall drive to achieve sustainability and environmental targets was ramped up a notch and we've seen some notable partnerships being formed within the industry to tackle these.

So how has the industry fared overall this past year, and what is the outlook for 2025?

British Potato Review asked people from different sectors of the potato industry to look into their crystal balls and predict what the coming year has in store for us.

What, if any, notable climatic impacts, do you think are likely to be felt in the coming year?

BELINDA: Extreme weather events have become the norm, which impacts everything we do in agriculture. This is especially true for potatoes, where too much or insufficient water dramatically affects profitability. Several large potato growers are Agri-TechE members, and they have used the connections built within the community to help create a more resilient growing system to tackle climate instability.

Outside of the potato crop, climate change is driving a serious look at alternative crops, such as lentils, soybeans, and other cereals. There's also a strengthening of interest and support for paludiculture, which could compete with potatoes for fenland.

MARCUS: We are told last year (2024) was the warmest on record, but I'm not convinced we saw that in our part of the country. If predictions are right, then it might get warmer, but I think we will see more extremes of wet weather and prolonged dry periods in between.

LUKE: We can only expect more unpredictable weather with the increasing effect of climate change.

NICK: We will see an increase in the acceptance that we need to accelerate many of the environmental plans and schemes that have been discussed and introduced, albeit slowly, in recent years. Over the coming year, we will see an increased investment in carbon capture, solar, and wind power.

ROB: With extreme weather events occurring more frequently over the past five-10 years, it wouldn't be a shock to encounter a drought in the summer of 2025 and a wet autumn. Although I hope that this won't be the case. Growers are increasingly looking to improve their harvesting and handling equipment to manage conditions.

IAN: Both drought and flooding have become commonplace across Europe in recent years and this trend is likely to continue and is likely to become even more pronounced in the future.

What's your business outlook for the next 12 months?

BELINDA: Very positive – we have a huge member pipeline, and several major international organisations have confirmed they will join us as members. ➜

MARCUS: Our outlook for the next 12 months is a very positive one, with increasing interest and orders for Algifol as more people are realising the benefits of biostimulants in modern-day agriculture and horticulture, where inputs are being scrutinised from both cost perspective and also environmental, I also see better prospects for winter cereals next year as establishment is much better than last year at this time going into winter.

LUKE: Speaking to many people in the potato and packaging machinery industry, things are fairly steady in terms of people spending large sums of money on capital projects. However, the service side of GIC's business and the fact we refurbish our own machinery means we will have plenty of work and another successful year.

NICK: I think 2025 is very difficult to forecast. The government's recent budget and the increased employer's national insurance contributions will put pressure on businesses, and I'm not sure how that will pan out. Hopefully, PACE will see potato businesses looking to improve their efficiency through automation.

ROB: We will be continuing with our proactive R&D programme with emphasis on automated box handling, reducing forklift movements and improving crop yield.

IAN: (declined to comment)

THE PANELISTS:

Belinda Clarke OBE, Director, Agri-TechE
Belinda is the founder of Agri-TechE, an independent membership organisation that brings together growers, scientists, innovators and entrepreneurs to create a global innovation hub for agri-tech.

Marcus Palmer, Managing Owner, MJP Supplies
Marcus Palmer is a grower with more than 260 acres in South Lincolnshire, and since 2005 he has been the UK distributor of Algifol, a seaweed-based biostimulant which has been proven to enhance potato crops.

Luke Murphy, Director, GIC
Nick is a joint owner and director at GIC, a manufacturer of vertical form fill and seal packaging machines that are relied upon by some of the UK's leading potato packers.

Nick Cesare, Managing Director, PACE Mechanical Handling
Nick Cesare has been working in agriculture for more than 40 years and, since 1996, has been pioneering robotic and automated packing solutions.

Rob Highfield, Sales Manager, Haith Group
Rob Highfield, Sales Manager of Haith Group, a supplier of vegetable handling systems. He has a demonstrated history of working in the mechanical or industrial engineering industry.

Ian Toth, Director, National Potato Innovation Centre
Ian is a science group leader at the James Hutton Institute and Director of the National Potato Innovation Centre. His science focus is on pests and pathogens of potato.

What key issues is the potato industry likely to face in 2025?

BELINDA: Without the science to drive new solutions, I fear for our ability to overcome the challenges posed by pests and diseases and abiotic stress such as weather. This is coupled with the pressure to reduce pesticide use and improve soil health.

I am still trying to figure out the change in the UK's potato R&D landscape. I sense the pipeline of innovation and adoption is slower for potatoes than five-10 years ago. Researchers are increasingly relying on BBSRC funding, which is more for supporting the "R" in R&D rather than the more applied "D", along with some Defra support through the Farming Innovation Programme.

A UK R&D strategy for potatoes is needed, which I know some people are working on, but we also need creative models to fund R&D, leveraging public-private partnerships. I'd like to see this happen in 2025.

MARCUS: I think growing potatoes in 2025 will be challenging if growers decide to grow more acreage and get better yields than in 2024, as planting conditions could be better this spring than last year due to waterlogged soils from the wet winter of 2023. This could have massive impacts on markets because consumption is still falling. I think water supply and climate could also play a part in quality, as we know the weather doesn't always play along, and if we experience drought conditions through the summer, the yields and quality could suffer. I think technology and prediction models will need to be used more often to try and mitigate these extremes.

LUKE: I can only speak for the machinery manufacturers, but the rising costs of employment, in particular National Insurance, will result in less money within business and, therefore, a lack of growth in the economy and, in particular, a lack of spending on large capital projects. Returning to strong growth within the UK economy is the key to both business and our collective national success.

NICK: I think the key issues in 2025 will be similar to those faced in 2024, namely the unpredictable, often extreme, weather conditions and a lack of people prepared to work in agriculture.

ROB: As a result of the recent budget announced by the new labour government all businesses will feel the effect of the rise in minimum wage and national insurance hike.

IAN: As well as climate, the industry faces a number of other challenges in 2025 including the continued loss of pesticides and need to find alternative methods to protect crops from both the weather and pests and diseases, ongoing regulatory issues (including EU exports and imports), profitability and a lack of new blood into the industry.

What will the political outlook be?

BELINDA: Turbulent! With such major geo-political unrest and new governments settling in across the major economies, there is a risk that issues affecting our industry (such as trade deals) take a back seat against other priorities.

On a positive note, we hope that a more enabling regulatory environment will allow new genetic technologies to deliver benefits for the potato industry.

MARCUS: The political outlook is already very different from what we have known, but we expected change, so we will have to adapt and change if we want to survive.

LUKE: A Starmer government has a big mandate for change within the UK and delivered, in their words, 'a budget for growth'. I have my doubts that taxing businesses to pay for increased public spending will deliver this, but this remains to be seen, and I hope I will be proved wrong. People are very unforgiving of political parties and if the National Insurance changes hamper wage growth, you will see a dwindling of support for the Government. Whether we have sufficient finances as a nation to deliver all that our citizens demand of the state will be the most significant ongoing topic for the entire term of this Government. ➜

NICK: That's a wait-and-see!

ROB: Since we left the EU there have been ongoing challenges related to trade agreements and tariffs and these issues are likely to persist, however the new government may negotiate new trade agreements. Farmers will likely need to adopt more sustainable farming practices, including reducing carbon footprints and improving soil health. The government may look to incentivise these practices through grants or subsidies.

IAN: Hopefully discussions with the EU will be positive, leading to a more open market.

What personal goals are you setting for 2024?

BELINDA: Maintaining a better work-life balance is always a failed New Year's Resolution, but one I'm determined to try and stick to in 2025!

I'd also like to reduce the carbon footprint at home and in the business – in 2023, Agri-TechE emitted the equivalent of 170 shipping containers of carbon dioxide, and we need to do better.

MARCUS: Personal goals are to drive our business forward in different ways using technology and diversification to hopefully give us more free time.

LUKE: I don't set personal ambitions. I am very content and just wish to continue this way.

NICK: I don't tend to set personal goals, but in terms of business, I want to expand PACE's market presence, especially when it comes to CoBots. These low-cost, highly efficient, quick-to-install and programme robots have the potential to make a huge difference to potato packers.

ROB: *(declined to comment)*

IAN: Ensuring that industry, academia and governments work together to make the potato industry a continued success. We hope to do this through the National Potato Innovation Centre.

What are your sport predictions or aspirations?

BELINDA: As someone with absolutely zero interest in any sport, I am pretty ill-placed to comment!

I guess I'd hope for a wider engagement at the grassroots level to teach and inspire teamwork and reduce "screen time "– I don't care what the sport is as long as participants get fitter and interact as humans with each other!

MARCUS: I don't really follow sport, but I do enjoy shooting, so I will always try to fit a few more days in with good friends and company away from the business.

LUKE: I would like to see my football team, Leeds United, promoted after coming so close last year. I would also welcome a more level playing field regarding finance in football, particularly at the top end of the Premier League, as I think the whole culture of football in this country developed over 150 years, the passion and the rivalries are in danger of being destroyed as clubs become geo-political playthings.

NICK: I'm a lifelong, die-hard Ipswich Town supporter. I want them to stay in the Premiership.

ROB: I always look forward to the Six Nations and hopefully we see an improvement from England compared to last year's third place finish. Man Utd are under new management and will finish in the top four this season! You heard it here first.

IAN: *(declined to comment)*

What technological advancements do you think are worth watching or anticipating?

BELINDA: The rise of Artificial Intelligence. It's already here – right now, it has the equivalent cognitive capacity of a dog (as compared with a fruit fly just two years ago). It will accelerate in its capabilities, and we need to engage now with it to avoid being left behind.

Much more is expected now of plant breeding to solve future challenges, which is why I also expect gene editing to positively affect the industry. There are already examples of blight-resistant potatoes using new breeding technologies at The Sainsbury Laboratory.

Agri-TechE has summarised its members' thoughts on the future technology to watch out for in our Back to the Future Report, which is available on our website.

MARCUS: I think we will see more technology coming through in precision work and prediction models. As I mentioned earlier, prevention is better than cure, and if we can predict disease earlier or drought predictions, we can save on chemical inputs and build stronger plants to withstand extremes.

LUKE: Artificial Intelligence is already playing more of a role than we might think. I recently hailed a driverless cab in San Fransico, and for certain tasks, chatgpt makes a decent first job of drafting documents that previously took hours. What this means for society moving forward could be profound.

NICK: As well as an increased presence of CoBots, I think we will see more factories using autonomous mobile robots (AMRs). These are intelligent robots that can move around and make decisions independently in dynamic environments. They are already used in logistics, automotive, and consumer goods businesses. I think we will see them introduced to food manufacturing, including the potato industry.

ROB: Reducing labour requirements is always one of the driving factors when investing in technology. Automated warehousing and end-of-line robotic packing are getting increasingly affordable. Optical sorter technology is also continuing to improve. We exhibited again at Interpom in Belgium and after walking around there was evidently more machines on the market. ➜

How do you think the economy will fare?

BELINDA: I am no economist, but I am hoping for a period of relative stability with reasonable forecasts around modest growth and inflation being under control. Financial markets hate uncertainty and volatility, and that impacts everyone.

MARCUS: I don't claim to be an expert in the economy, but I see retail prices going up as many businesses will pass on extra costs from the increase in wages and National Insurance will have a knock-on effect as people will spend less as a result so we could see a downturn from this

LUKE: The economy will remain flat with low growth.

NICK: Being a glass-half-full type of person, I'm hoping that the increased introduction of automation will help the economy enjoy a year of growth!

ROB: Inflation could still be a concern, particularly if global supply chain disruptions persist or energy prices remain volatile. If inflation remains high then interest rates may remain relatively high, which could have a dampening effect on borrowing, investment, and consumer spending.

IAN: More precision ag around spot spraying is likely to lead to major reductions in chemicals, at least for certain applications. Improvements in marker development will play a major role in the development of new varieties with a range of important traits. The political framework for gene editing plants might shift and provide another tool for generating improved varieties. PR

HAPPY NEW YEAR

from GB Potatoes' CEO Scott Walker

This past year has flown by, and it seems each year becomes busier than the last. The past year has not been without its challenges. Prolonged wet weather at the start of the year delayed planting for many, resulting in varied yields across the country. That said, the 2024 harvest proved to be much smoother than the previous year in most potato growing areas, offering some welcome relief. This all takes place against the backdrop of a significantly smaller potato-growing area in Great Britain compared to a decade ago - a trend that should be a cause for concern for the Government.

Looking ahead to 2025, seed availability is likely to be a key challenge. Access to preferred varieties may not be guaranteed for all, highlighting the need for greater focus on the origins of our seed and how we ensure the industry can secure its requirements. With much of our supply dependent on a small number of mini-tuber breeders and pre-basic growers, there is an urgent need to strengthen seed security for the future.

Despite these challenges, there are many reasons to remain optimistic. The journey of GB Potatoes over the past year has been one of progress and promise. By uniting the supply chain, GB Potatoes has provided a platform for collaboration, innovation, and shared problem-solving. As we move into 2025, I am confident that we can maintain this momentum and turn obstacles into opportunities in order to safeguard the future of potato production in Great Britain.

A particular highlight of the year has been the signing of the grant agreement between the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) and GB Potatoes. This agreement unlocks the residual potato levy reserves, providing vital funding for projects that will benefit the entire industry. Delivering these projects over the course of 2025 marks a pivotal step forward for GB Potatoes and our collective efforts to support the sector.

As we welcome the New Year, I want to thank everyone across the potato community for your hard work, dedication, and resilience. PR

GB Potatoes

GB Potatoes announces new Chair

GB Potatoes has announced that **Alex Godfrey** will take over the reins as Chairman after being elected at the Annual General meeting on December 12th.

Outgoing Chairman Mark Taylor (left) shaking hands with the new Chairman, Alex Godfrey.

Alex takes over from Mark Taylor, who has been the Chair ever since the launch of the organisation in 2022.

Alex will be known to many in the potato sector as a director of the family business, RJ & AE Godfrey. The Godfreys grow potatoes across North and South Lincolnshire, as well as growing cereals, vining peas and sugar beet. Alex was the Chair of the NFU's Potato Forum for many years and has been the Vice Chair of GB Potatoes for the past year.

Alex said: "I am looking forward to my new role in GB Potatoes as the organisation really starts to gain momentum and delivers on its original premise. Under Mark's leadership, the organisation has achieved many things and established itself to become an organisation that truly represents the whole of the potato industry across GB.

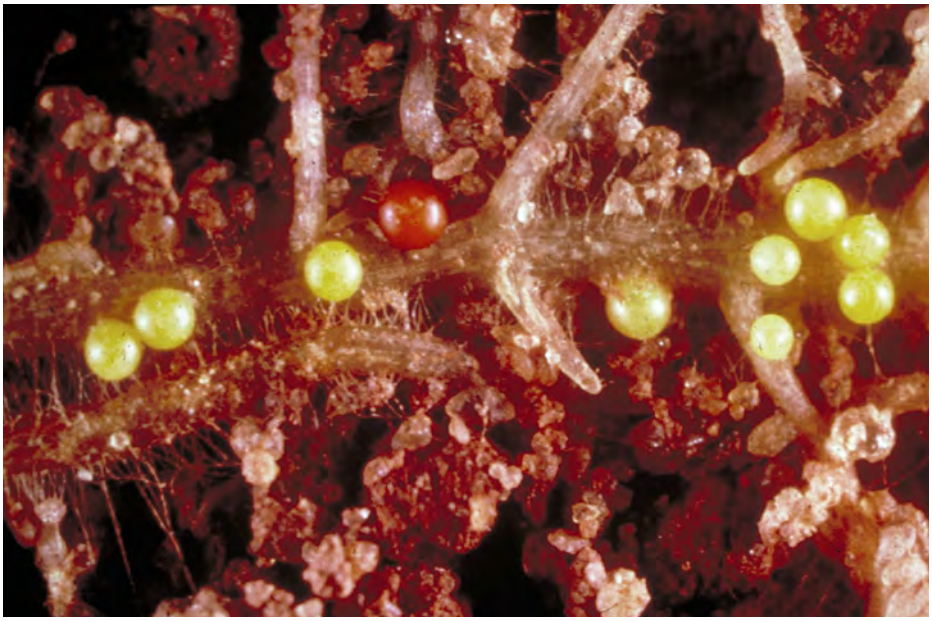
"As one of the founders of GB Potatoes, I have seen first-hand how we have made great strides in becoming the voice of the industry and providing true representation for our sector. I am grateful to Mark for everything he has done, and also because he is willing to remain on the GB Potatoes board for a few more months as we transition to a new Chair. I am also grateful to the board of GB Potatoes who have shown great faith in me, and I look forward to working with them and our CEO, Scott Walker.

Mark Taylor said: "After two years as Chair of GB Potatoes I feel that now is the right time to pass on the baton, and I am very pleased that Alex has been elected. His knowledge of the industry and the respect he holds within it are just what GB Potatoes need to take them forward to the next phase. I would like to thank the board for all their help and commitment to the organisation in my time as Chair.

As the Chair of GB Potatoes, Alex will serve for the next three years after which he may look for re-election for one more three-year period. PR

Timely nematicide reminder

Lead the charge in best practice nematicide use this spring: NSP reiterates operators' responsibility.



Cysts of Globodera pallida and Globodera rostochiensis, the two species of potato cyst nematodes that commonly occur in Britain. Photos: Central Science Laboratory, Harpenden.

THE Nematicide Stewardship Programme (NSP) is reminding potato growers to follow the best practice protocol if they need to apply granular nematicides, ahead of spring 2025, to help ensure products are used safely and remain available for future use.

NSP Working Group Chair, Patrick Mitton, highlights the vital role granular nematicides play in integrated pest management.

"As readers well know, Potato cyst nematode (PCN) continues to be one of the most significant challenges to sustainable potato production, costing the industry an estimated £50 million annually.

"To combat this, the granular nematicide fosthiazate remains an essential tool as part of an integrated programme of control, enabling growers to produce high-quality, nutritious potatoes while keeping on top of PCN," he said.

"An IPM focused approach to nematicide use, alongside cultural control methods, is vital in maintaining productivity and protecting soil health."

Patrick Mitton, NSP Working Group Chair

NSP's Best Practice Protocol

The Nematicide Stewardship Programme (NSP) was formed in May 2015, to promote the correct use of the nematicides.

The programme includes all stakeholders involved in the supply, distribution and use of these products, along with those who purchase crops, including representatives from NFU, PPA, Syngenta UK Ltd, Red Tractor Assurance, FPSA, and NIAB.

The NSP's framework for responsible nematicide use encourages growers to concentrate on training, calibration, and environmental safeguards as part of a programme which helps achieve effective and sustainable pest control.

A reminder of the key areas for growers to be aware of are outlined in NSP's Best Practice Protocol as follows:

1. **Qualify:** All operators must hold a PA4 or PA4G certification and are required to register with the National Register of Sprayer Operators (NRoSO).

2. **Calibrate:** Applicators should be inspected daily for damage or wear, with certified checks by a National Sprayer Testing Scheme (NSTS) engineer every two years. The volume of nematicide used must align with the area treated, ensuring the correct application rate. Calibration guidance is available on the NSP website.

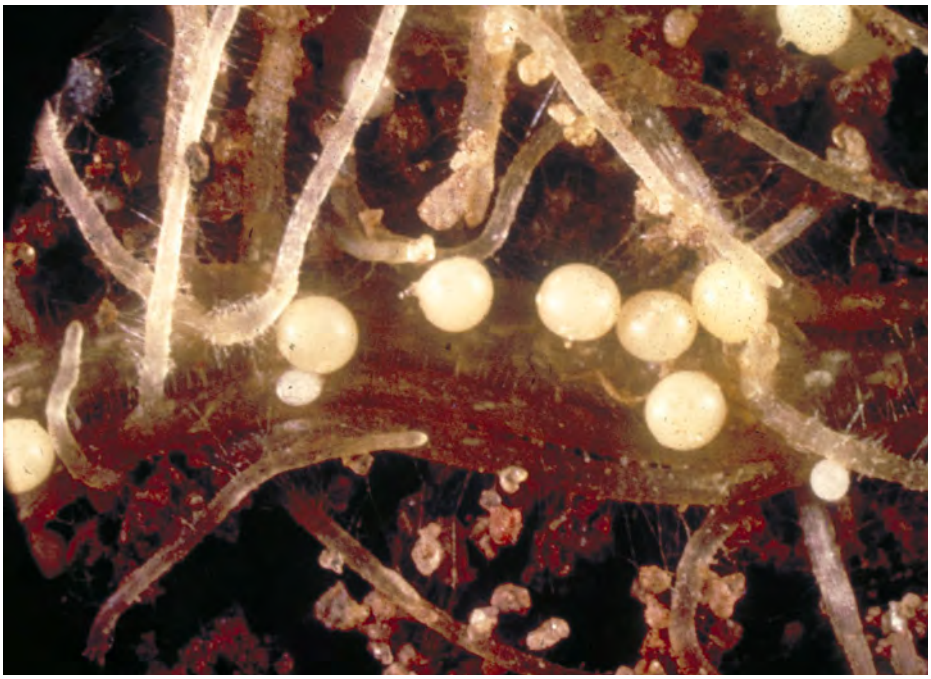
"Potato cyst nematode (PCN) continues to be one of the most significant challenges to sustainable potato production, costing the industry an estimated £50 million annually... the granular nematicide fosthiazate remains an essential tool as part of an integrated programme of control."

Patrick Mitton, NSP Working Group Chair

3. **Single Pass:** Nematicides must be incorporated into the soil in a single pass immediately prior to planting, leaving no granules on the surface.

4. **Shut Off:** Applicators must be fitted with an in-cab device to shut off granule flow at least 3 meters from the end of rows, allowing all pipework to clear before the applicator is lifted.

5. **Spillages:** Spillages should be managed carefully:
   - Small spillages must be buried immediately.
   - Large spillages should be collected in a labelled nematicide container for return to the manufacturer, with remnants on the soil buried promptly.
6. **Check:** Fields should be inspected 12 to 24 hours after application to identify any adverse effects on wildlife. Particular attention should be given to field edges, headlands, and areas where equipment was started or stopped. PR



For more information, visit the NSP website to ensure your practices align with the latest recommendations: **https://nspstewardship.co.uk/**

Tobacco Rattle Virus (TRV) symptoms on a tuber. The project will seek to improve diagostics for TRV. Photo: Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University

Seeking to advance on-farm spraing control

Industry-driven R&D project to tackle significant potato crop threat

FERA Science has launched a new industry-driven research and development project to tackle a potato crop threat, within the Enigma series, connecting leading partners, such as United Oilseeds, with world-class scientists.

The Enigma IV project is focused on advancing on-farm control of Spraing in potatoes.

Enigma Projects Director at Fera Science, Adam Bedford, said: "As with our previous Enigma research projects, we're uniting growers, agronomists and scientists to address critical challenges facing the agri-food sector, and very much welcome other organisations to join this journey."

The goal of Enigma IV is to improve predictive diagnostics for Tobacco Rattle Virus (TRV) - a leading cause of spraing, which has been known to damage up to 50% of potato crops.

Adam said Fera scientists will work closely with potato specialists to develop more efficient testing processes for TRV.

Enigma Projects Director at Fera Science, Adam Bedford

"Currently, the standard tests used for detecting TRV in potato seed require huge volumes of soil and take more than four weeks to produce results. We want to put spraing control in the hands of potato growers, using research insights to develop an in-field diagnostic service that's more cost-effective with a faster turnaround time."

He added: "The ultimate aim is to help growers manage the disease more accurately and minimise crop wastage."

The Enigma concept, which champions collaborative research, has proven successful with previous projects, including Enigma I, launched in 2022, whose partners included Syngenta, G's Growers, Pearce Seeds, Blackthorn Arable, Elveden Farms and Inov3PT. This supported Fera scientists with valuable insights on wireworm control.

As a result, scientists have now developed a photographic key that helps growers identify, monitor and control wireworm populations more accurately, Adam said.

"The results of our first Enigma project have shown that, by bringing scientists and industry partners together, we can make rapid progress in producing actionable insights for farmers and growers."

Organisations interested in contributing and collaborating on the industry-driven research are invited to explore partnership opportunities and can get in touch at **www.fera.co.uk/our-science/enigma-research-model**. Fera also supports and works closely with governments, academia, and leading research organisations. PR

"Currently, the standard tests used for detecting TRV in potato seed require huge volumes of soil and take more than four weeks to produce results."

Adam Bedford, Enigma Projects Director

‘Over the years, I have learned to appreciate the value of working as a team’

As Engineering Director in a family business, **David Haith** tells how he has learned from people and experiences over the years, after initially being thrown in at the deep end ...

Can you tell me a little about yourself. What did you aspire to be when you were growing up?

I am the youngest of seven siblings, a father of two, and a motorbike enthusiast. Since being a very small child, I’ve always wanted to work in the family business. I’ve always enjoyed making things. I can remember when I was 12 years old, I made two three-wheel trikes and sold them. I’ve built several bikes since then!

How did you embark on your career path and go about achieving your goals – tell me a little about how you came to be in your current position?

Like many people of my age, I started work at 16. In fact, I finished school on the Friday and started work on the following Monday. I was an apprentice fabricator for the family business, Tickhill Engineering.

I transferred to site installations a year later, working under my older brother, Chris. This gave me invaluable experience of seeing how our customers relied upon our equipment and gave me an insight into our customers’ needs and how we could make our machines more efficient.

I worked on site installations until I was 21, when I was promoted to workshop supervisor. As soon as I started in the role, the works foreman went off sick for six months, leaving me to learn the ropes quickly! It was a real case of sink or swim!

Since then, I’ve worked in several other areas of the business, ending up as Engineering Director heading up our research and development department, which really appealed to me because of my passion for engineering and manufacturing.

What experiences have helped to shape your career and inspire you?

Working in a family business meant I was often thrown into something new to fill a gap and had to learn very quickly on the job.

My dad was very good at looking at a problem and coming up with a solution, and I’ve inherited that from him. I love solving engineering problems. I find it incredibly satisfying when I can develop a solution to a problem that brings a real benefit to the person or company who had the original problem.

I love it when the sales team bring me a problem from a customer that needs solving. For instance, I remember when everyone used hydraulic box tipplers. It never sat right with us that hydraulic oil was in such close proximity to food products. I was determined to develop a solution and spent many days and nights thinking about how we could develop a way to empty the box without hydraulics.

I came up with the Rota-Tip electric box tippler. It was the first of its kind and went into production in 1998. It was and still is one of the proudest moments in my career.

Over the years, I have learned to appreciate the value of working as a team and getting the best results by listening to the opinions of others. It's often the case where the quietest person in the room has the best idea!

What are your main goals currently?
I currently lead our Research and Development department. We currently have a very long list of things to look at. It's always been that way at Haith. The company has always focused on doing things better, such as looking at how we can improve our machines and our processes. There's no better feeling than when a customer says, 'It's a shame you don't have a machine that can do this,' and then we find a way to develop just what they need.

Tell me a little about your business successes and failures and what you have learned from them.
For me winning not one but two Queens Award's for innovation is a measure of our success and to be still growing after all these years, solving problems and employing local people.

In terms of failures, I take the positives from them. When developing the first Rota-Tip electric box tippler, there were lots of designs that didn't work. It didn't happen overnight. That taught me to persevere with things if you think the problem you're trying to solve is important.

How has your own career outlook changed over the years?
I think over the years, I've become more aware of what other people need so that they can develop.

I have always wanted to be an engineer, and that was my goal when I joined the business. I was very focused on me. I was keen to learn and motivated to succeed.

As I've moved up and taken on more senior roles, especially as a director, I've become more aware of how I could help other people and support the next generation of engineers. I'm now really passionate about ensuring that the next generation of engineers have the knowledge, skills and support they need to progress. I guess that's part of growing older. You become wiser and want to help others more.

What challenges is the industry facing at the moment and what more could be done to meet and overcome these?
Farming and food production are struggling to attract people who want to work in the sectors. It's also increasingly expensive to employ people. Businesses have always tried to do things more efficiently, and automation has allowed them to do that. I think we will see this trend continue.

Then there's the weather. Recent years have been some of the wettest on record. Not only has this had an impact on growing conditions, crop quality and yields, but it has also meant that even more soil is coming into packhouses and processing plants. This is a real issue and something that we're increasingly asked to resolve.

What tips do you have for the future generation?
This is quite easy to answer, as I just have to remember what my dad told me. Make sure you learn as much as possible from the task you are given and the people you get the opportunity to work with. And, if you keep putting the effort in, the rewards will follow. PR

"I love solving engineering problems. I find it incredibly satisfying when I can develop a solution to a problem."

Keeping it uniform

Andrew Goodinson discusses how consistent planting helps to achieve standardised tuber sizes and bigger yields.

Andrew Goodinson, Agronomist and Potato specialist at Hutchinsons, offers advice and insights to help growers ensure the best results from their potato crops. Based in Herefordshire, Andrew has been working for Hutchinsons for 18 years and looks after 8000 ha of farmland, including farms in the Welsh borders, south Shropshire and Worcester. Most of the potato crops he looks after are destined for the crisping or processing markets.

THERE are several key actions and decisions growers can take ahead of potato planting which can have an impact on quality and saleable yield, so it's worthwhile considering the following points before beginning planting, according to Andrew.

Achieving a uniform crop contributes to maximising saleable yields within the size specification requested by the customer. The main factors influencing this include seed potato quality, soil conditions, inter-row spacing and planting depth.

Seed tuber depth depends on variety as stolon architecture influences tuber position, and some cultivars set their tubers below the seed, whilst others set them around the mother tuber. Consistency of the soil is crucial, and if seedbed preparation is inadequate, even the best soils will produce inferior crops, as uniform crop emergence and young plant vigour depend on a consistent, friable, warm seedbed.

"However, because of soil variations within the field, there are often areas which are drier or wetter than the rest of the field, which impact on the crops ability to grow roots and uptake nutrients," said Andrew.

"It is also a good idea to take into account the field conditions previous crops have had on the soil structure and, for example, harvesting damage, whether there is compaction, wheeling damage, and if any mitigation has been taken."

Variations in within-row spacing can result in some plants growing at different densities, resulting in varying tuber sizes, but as plant happens at different densities according to varietal characteristics, inter-row spacing depends on the variety being grown, he added.

"Seed companies and some processors produce their own seed spacing charts, which are a good place to start, but on-farm experience also plays an important role, so it is always advisable to undertake some seed rate trials on your own farm.

"As we need a certain number of daughter tubers per hectare, start by considering the uniformity of the mother seed. If there are six seed tubers in a 2m row, aim for 16 daughter tubers per plant. There are a number of factors which will help realise that number."

Placement fertiliser miss.

Emerged potato with seed-borne virus.

"Time spent preparing and sending washed samples for on-farm assessment is well worth it as you can then make informed decisions on how and when to plant for optimum results."

Andrew highlights that all too often, seed potatoes are treated like a commodity rather than a valuable input. Seed is frequently transported in nets or bags loaded on curtain-sided lorries and occasionally temperatures may be unsuitable (too cold) therefore can affect tuber quality.

"When they arrive on-farm, they should be inspected and split-graded into lots of 35-45mm, 45-55mm, and those above 55mm, plus small tubers between 25 and 35mm."

As the seed potatoes go over the grader, they can be treated with a fungicide before going in to store which will help reduce susceptibility to tuber diseases, Andrew said.

"At this stage it is often worthwhile sending a sample for disease assessment, looking for the likes of powdery scab and Erwinia spp, as these affect crop vigour and the ability to emerge and develop.

"If, for example, a crop has blackleg spores, it is advisable to plant later when soils are warmer and drier, so the mother tubers are subject to less cold stress and therefore are less susceptible to these pathogens."

The advice is the same if Rhizoctonia is identified, as the seed potatoes need to be planted in optimal conditions so they can establish quickly and grow away. Andrew points out that when seed potatoes are inspected at source, they are not washed, therefore it is harder to assess potential disease levels.

"This means that time spent preparing and sending washed samples for on-farm assessment is well worth it as you can then make informed decisions on how and when to plant for optimum results. Sending samples for analysis is also a good investment."

Seed choice and planting conditions are key to giving crops the best start, says Andrew.

"Thanks to the cold wet spring of 2024, for example, we saw a number of crops with 'little potato disease', where the crop emerges, sets early tubers along one root because conditions are not ideal, but these do not develop into commercially-acceptable sized tubers."

Andrew adds that it is possible to identify tubers with Rhizoctonia because they are misshapen, have a crazy paving skin finish, or have black pustules (sclerotia).

"At the moment we only have one powder treatment for black-scurf and stem canker, which is Rhino DSG (flutolanil), and all new products are liquid formulations."

Seed treatments such as flutolanil, fluxapyroxad and fludioxonil can be applied on the roller table during grading, and Andrew emphasises that they need to be applied before chitting or the onset of shoot growth, and should not be applied to newly emerging chits or shoots.

Soil-borne Rhizoctonia needs to be treated in-furrow via an on-planter spray applicator, notes Andrew.

"Both azoxystrobin and fluxapyroxad work well and they can be applied alongside biologicals at the same time," he said.

Knowing when such treatments are called for relies on historic knowledge of the field, such as the number of potato crops grown there over the past ten years, and whether or not they were lifted late.

"The longer the gap between desiccation and lifting, the higher the risk of Rhizoctonia developing and infecting the soil. ➜

"If you look closely at a wheat crop following potatoes, you can often see remaining potato haulms have Rhizoctonia pustules on them which may lead to the pathogen remaining in the soil and potentially putting future crops at risk."

Creating soil conditions for uniform planting

Cultivations play a crucial role in creating the necessary tilth to be able to plant at the optimum space and depth, continues Andrew.

"If you plant at less-than-ideal conditions, the plant may be unable to develop a good root structure or maximise uptake of nutrients and water. It does not matter whether you opt for various cultivations or a one-pass operation, the aim is always to get the soil into the correct state.

"The trick is to be flexible in your ideas and adapt to what needs doing in each particular field, and the conditions may vary according to topography and microclimates."

Technology, however, has helped to improve accurate planting, and the newer machines can work effectively at higher forward speeds.

Andrew points out that looking after the soil, even on short-term rented land, pays dividends.

"It is advisable to liaise closely with the landlord to know what has been grown on the field previously, and then take decisions on your strategy. This may include subsoiling, planting stubble turnips, Westerwold ryegrass, or cover crops.

"Some processors provide cover crop seeds free of charge to their growers as they understand the benefits they create.

"There may be advantages from applying biological soil products which, while costing in the region of £100/ha may result in a worthwhile increase in yields. Nonetheless, before recommending such activities we really need to do more trial work to explore the costs and benefits."

Soil temperatures crucial for good establishment

When it comes to planting, soil temperatures should normally be above 7 deg C, although for early planting it is acceptable for mother tubers stored at 4 deg C to go into soils at 6 deg C as long as they are not chitted.

"If they are already sprouting, putting them into cold soils exacerbates the risk of stem canker and blackleg," said Andrew.

"For maincrop planting, eyes should be open, but chits should not be bigger than 10mm because otherwise they are easily knocked off when planting, affecting vigour and emergence, because some of the energy needed for the plant will have already been used. There is also a risk of bacterial disease transfer."

Devising fertiliser strategy

Nitrogen (N) drives yield but not tuber numbers. Andrew said growers are often tempted to use too much.

"N is not a panacea, and excess amounts can delay bulking because the crop is too busy growing haulm," he said.

Deciding how much should be applied depends on the market the crop is being grown for, and any soil N supply left over from previous crops or from the application of manures should also be taken into account.

"It is time to move away from simply opting for 14:14:21 fertilisers," said Andrew. "If you are growing a seed potato crop, it is likely to need 110kg/ha, but if you are growing ware, it can be 200kg/ha or more."

Timing of application can also make a difference, but there are two schools of thought on which is the most effective: A single application in the seedbed or top-dressing, he notes.

"The decision should depend on the crop and your target market; early lifted potatoes and seed crops generally respond best to a single application in the seedbed, but there is an argument that if you are on light soils or irrigating, there is a benefit to splitting your application.

"Similarly, if the growing season is long, the crops benefit from top dressing."

Timing of the second application is key to efficacy, and peak N uptake is the start of flowering, so applications should be made before or at tuber initiation (TI).

"This can be done at the same time as blight spraying, or by using a granule. If it is applied too late it delays bulking and senescence," Andrew said.

He notes that there are times when extra N may also be required, for example if planting was undertaken in less than adequate conditions, with the result being that root systems are compromised. "This is where sap testing really becomes useful as it can indicate that the plants need some help," he said.

Trials are currently ongoing to assess products that once applied to the foliage, capture N from the atmosphere. "We are exploring different scenarios, including the effects on crop yield and quality when applied alongside the habitual N rates, but also when lower rates are used.

Little Potato Disease.

Symptom of planted too early cold soil.

"If we find that they can be used with lower N products brought on to the farm, it will also reduce the carbon footprint of the crop."

A place for starters

Starter – or placement – fertilisers offer an opportunity to optimise nutrient uptake immediately after planting, establishing a good root system and helping the crop establish and get away, says Andrew.

One of the reasons for using placement fertilisers is because plants are unable to uptake phosphate from the soil as a result of being locked up and unavailable.

Starter fertilisers are applied in the ridge close to seed tubers and ensure key nutritional elements are immediately accessible.

"Most types of placement fertilisers include nitrogen (N), phosphate (P) and small amounts of magnesium (Mg) and zinc (Zn), but their main use is to ensure rapid P availability," Andrew said, adding that this strategy can be particularly useful for growers using rented ground who do not have the opportunity to undertake long-term soil improvements to improve nutrient availability.

"Historically, many fields had animal manures applied and therefore have high P levels, but the nutrient may not be available to the crop. Ensuring its availability is key to tuber numbers and crop development."

On-farm trials

Setting up some on-farm trials to tease out how different products, spacing and/or seed lots may impact on crop yield, quality and profitability is often a good idea, says Andrew, noting that different conditions can impact on efficacy.

"Once you have decided what you want to assess, it would be useful to ask your agronomist to help you set trials up so that you can see any differences which occur quite clearly."

He advises undertaking trials on land that is as uniform as possible, because factors such as a change in soil type or even PCN hotspots could affect results.

Replicated treatments in small plots, although may be accurate, can be too time consuming for many busy commercial farmers to undertake, Andrew said.

"It is always best to site treatment in representative areas, checking any available soil or satellite maps. If the land is owned or on long-term rental, and there are arable crops in the rotation, there may also be yield maps – all of which help ensure that treatments are aligned taking into account any underlying within field variability."

He recommends marking out the plots, noting that easy location of the research area can be made by simply using What3Words or placing a white sheet of laminated paper adjacent to the plots.

Secondary growth.

"If you plant the same variety across different fields, and the seed potatoes are received from different lots, it is a good idea to put more than one lot in a field."

Assessments should be taken frequently throughout the growing season, and notes made and pictures taken. These can be summarised at the end of the season and the results used for comparisons.

"Timing of when measurements are made is crucial for them to be meaningful, as there are many natural variables that may affect results. Nevertheless, trials do not have to be complicated, and there are times when visual effects from basic trials can be quite clear," he said.

"If you plant the same variety across different fields, and the seed potatoes are received from different lots, it is a good idea to put more than one lot in a field, so we can compare any differences in establishment and development."

Experimenting with different spacing options according to tuber size and plant population are also easy to do and assess to find what works best on your farm, he adds.

"Fertiliser trials are easy to do because they entail simply switching the on-planter applicator on and off, so the rows receiving no fertiliser are clearly visible, and you can evaluate how well the product is working for you.

"Fertiliser trials can also explore the benefits and drawbacks of using different rates and different products. For simplicity, the area trialled should be the width of the fertiliser spreader, so you can apply the different rates or products by altering the settings on the tractor."

Seedbed fungicide seed treatment trials are another easy trial to do, as differences are quickly apparent when some beds do not receive a treatment, he said.

"The aim of the trials is to give the grower more information to help making decisions going forward, and make for good winter discussions." PR

A war-time staple

Discovery of a 1940s Ministry of Food newspaper advert highlights the important role British potatoes played during WW2.

A WAR-TIME advert from local newspaper, the Stamford Mercury, was recently discovered in which potatoes were highlighted as playing a key role in the war.

The advert featured in an August 1940 issue of what was then a broadsheet (A3) newspaper and was placed by the Ministry of Food.

It urged readers to eat more potatoes, stating that they offered 'energy and protection against illness'.

Because the potatoes were produced in the UK, eating them in higher quantities meant fewer ships were required to bring wheat from overseas as they could be consumed in place of bread, it went on to add.

The 'On the Kitchen Front' advert was discovered by Nicky Rogers, who works for *British Potato Review's* publishing company, Warners Group, while she was looking through archives.

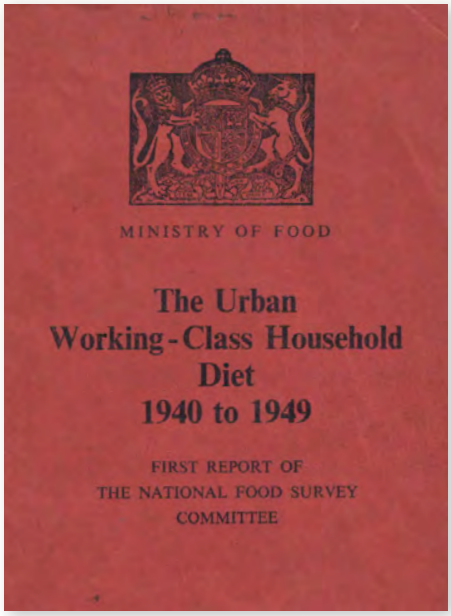
Vegetable protein was Great Britain's main source of protein throughout WW2 and potatoes made a substantial contribution to the wartime diet, according to 'The Urban Working-Class Household Diet 1940-1949', the first report of the National Food Survey Committee, part of the Ministry of Food.

Although they provided less than 10% of the calorie intake by urban working-class people, potatoes supplied between 40% and 50% of their vitamin C quota, as well as significant quantities of vitamin B1 and Niacin, also known as nicotinic acid, an essential human nutrient.

Most people ate around 4.5 lbs of spuds per week.

The situation for potatoes was bleaker just after the war, when severe weather conditions led to intense crop damage and shortages in the UK.

The winter of 1946–1947 was harsh all over Europe, and noted for its adverse effects in the



United Kingdom. It caused severe hardships in economic terms and living conditions in a country still recovering from the Second World War.

Cold spells brought large drifts of snow to the country. Towards the end of February, there were fears of a food shortage as supplies were cut off and vegetables were frozen into the ground. Many could not be harvested, and in some areas pneumatic drills were used to excavate them.

Between 10 and 20% of potato crops were lost. In total, frost destroyed 70,000 long tons (71,000 t) of potatoes and, as a result, potatoes were rationed for the first time.

A political instrument

The First and Second World Wars were particularly important in developing the technologies and institutions that enabled the potato to be used as a political instrument, according to Cambridge University's publication, 'Feeding The People'.

"Concerned to provide for the wartime needs of their populations, European governments actively encouraged potato consumption," the book states. "Nonetheless, the economic development models that emerged in the post-war years paid little attention to potatoes. Only recently has smallholder agriculture been incorporated into international models of food security.

"Just as the peasant know-how that spread potato cultivation across early modern Europe remained largely invisible, so the smallholder expertise that allowed the potato to preserve its genetic diversity has only begun to be appreciated by international development organisations."

Potatoes have since become a source of gastronomic pride, it goes on to add, with many countries registering specific varieties as part of their national patrimony.

Potato Pete

The cartoon character, Potato Pete, was created during WW2 to encourage children to eat more potatoes.

With the pressure on shipping, and the need to bring in munitions and other materials for the war effort, the British government encouraged people to eat more homegrown potatoes and less bread, which was made from imported wheat. One of the ways they did so was to invent the cartoon character who became a popular wartime figure.

Potato Pete had his own recipe book, published by the Ministry of Food and unrationed potatoes made it into all kinds of dishes, from pastry and sandwich fillings to desserts. PR

'Concerned to provide for the wartime needs of their populations, European governments actively encouraged potato consumption.'

Free year of learning, networking and study

Applications now open for second Fresh AF 2025, where potato professionals aged 18-40 can learn procurement skills, establish industry contacts and get first-hand insights into latest farm and supply chain innovations.

THOSE embarking on a career in UK potato growing are being invited to apply for a free year-long training programme aimed at inspiring and equipping them for the future.

Applications are open for Fresh AF 2025, a 12-month programme for up to 20 young farming professionals, which connects participants with industry leaders, businesses, and cutting-edge practices to prepare them for success in a rapidly-evolving agricultural landscape. Applications for those aged between 18 - 40 are open now until the end of January 2025.

The programme is organised by AF, a co-operative buying group for UK farms and rural businesses. Fresh AF was launched in March at the Euston Estate, and is a free-to-join programme sponsored by leading suppliers to farms.

Over the course of the year, participants engage in:

- Networking opportunities with peers and industry experts
- Study tours and site visits
- Workshops and events focused on procurement strategies, cost management, and the role of cooperative buying groups

The programme culminates in a closing ceremony at the Farmers Club in London, featuring presentations from participants and renowned industry figures, which in 2024 included established potato growers James Peck (Managing Director at PX Farms), and Mark Means of Terrington St Clement, as well as Forage Aid founder Andrew Ward MBE.

James said: "Fresh AF is doing an excellent job of broadening horizons and bringing valuable insights to farm businesses through the development of young employees.

The attendants of the first Fresh AF programme in 2024 visited Euston Estate in Suffolk, Vodafone HQ in Berkshire to explore agricultural technologies, Nufarm UK field trials in Cambridgeshire to assess weed control techniques, and Timac Agro in France to delve into sustainable fertiliser alternatives.

Personal development and training are critical for the growth of the agricultural industry, and I encourage young agri-professionals to get involved."

Fresh AF offers the opportunity to:

- Expand professional networks
- Gain exclusive insights into innovative agricultural practices
- Enhance knowledge of procurement, cooperatives, and supply chain management
- Boost decision-making skills and career ambitions

Tom Harrison is a director at HDF Farming Ltd, a family-run farm & contract farming business based in Northeast Norfolk, which grows potatoes and other crops. He took part in the 2024 programme and said it provided him with numerous learnings and networking benefits.

"It's been a great opportunity to get off the farm, learn about different aspects of the industry and meet other young professionals. We're focusing on building up soil fertility and reducing inputs without sacrificing yields and Fresh AF has provided invaluable knowledge in this area which we will apply on the farm."

Tom was amongst 20 young farming professionals who participated in a series of events featuring 51 speakers across four counties and two countries. The journey began with a launch at Euston Estate in Suffolk and included visits to Vodafone HQ in Berkshire to explore agricultural technologies, Nufarm UK field trials in Cambridgeshire to assess weed control techniques, and Timac Agro in France to delve into sustainable fertiliser alternatives supported by science.

Sponsors for 2025 include Timac Agro UK, Bayer, BASF, Nufarm UK, and Origin Soil Nutrition, Payne Crop Nutrition, Comm-Tech Voice & Data, Adama and Syngenta. PR

‘Working together is key as GB Potatoes starts a new chapter’

Alex Godfrey, the new Chair of GB Potatoes, reports on current action group activities, the establishment of the Fresh Sector Consultation Group and growth in merchant membership.

I MUST start this article by paying tribute to my predecessor as Chair of GB Potatoes, Mark Taylor. Mark’s energy and relentless optimism, and the depth and breadth of his knowledge of the potato industry has been crucial to the establishment and early development of GB Potatoes as a viable and credible voice of the industry.

We all owe him a debt of gratitude for the hard yards he has put in to get us to where we are today, and along with the rest of the GB Potatoes Board I look forward to building on that solid foundation over the next few years.

In his article in the last edition of *British Potato Review* Mark reflected on the journey so far as we built GB Potatoes from scratch between 2020 and 2022 and continued to grow it subsequently. There have been some notable successes, most recently and significantly the securing of the residual levy funds for the benefit of the industry. While this is definitely a success, it is important that we see it as an opportunity rather than an end result.

The funds will ensure the continuation (or resumption) of activity in seven key projects. These can be found on our website at www.gb-potatoes.co.uk. The work required will be commissioned and overseen by GB Potatoes led by CEO Scott Walker and assisted by Development Officer Graham Bannister with each project sponsored by one or more board member. We’ll be applying the lean management principles of GB Potatoes to this work to ensure the best possible value for the industry’s money.

The sums involved are useful but the work on which they can be spent is limited to the seven projects, and even on those, the money will be exhausted in a few short years. If we want to continue work on those core areas or build on it to improve outcomes (artificial intelligence to predict aphid flights, for example), we must invest further.

There’s plenty more to be done on areas that fall outside the scope of the residual levy

funds as well. PCN is one such area which is why, in conjunction with CUPGRA, we have commissioned an update to the Grower Guide which will be available to members of each organisation from spring 2025.

Mark set out his “three C’s” in the last issue: Co-ordination, Co-operation and Collaboration. I echo that call. Working together will be essential for our future prosperity.

There’s a fourth “C” that’s guaranteed: Challenge. All of our businesses will face challenges on multiple fronts over the coming years. Some of these we will each have to deal with individually. Some the residual levy funds will help us with this for a while. Some, like PCN and the availability of water and plant protection products, loom ominously and will require collective thought and action, which is already underway. Still others will bite us unexpectedly so preparation and responsiveness are key.

We have established lines of dialogue with both UK and Scottish governments and all major industry stakeholders. We have established a Seed Consultation Group chaired by Tony Bambridge and comprising highly experienced individuals to provide us with the deep knowledge and expertise specific to that sector. We are in the process of establishing a Fresh Sector Consultation Group, chaired by Mark Willcox, to make sure we have the same level of insight into the fresh and bagging markets.

We also have a strong and supportive associate membership, allowing us to draw on the expertise of the ancillary businesses that are so vital to the potato industry in Great Britain. The reputational management and information gaps projects, part of the residual levy grant, will also help us be still more prepared for new challenges.

Good channels of communication are essential to making sure we can respond to all the challenges thrown at us and those channels are now in place, so we urge members to use them. In the last couple of months we have established a new merchant category of membership to help us engage better with those who trade in potatoes without handling them. If that describes your business and you aren’t already a member, consider joining us to make sure your voice is heard.

We are, and will always remain, a listening organisation. As well as your membership we need your thoughts and ideas on what we’re doing well, what we could do better, what the industry is missing that we ought to pick up, or where the next challenge is going to come from. Please do get in touch with me on chair@gb-potatoes.co.uk or the team at **info@gb-potatoes.co.uk** with any views or suggestions. PR

GB Potatoes

Sustainable strengths highlighted by potato crop nutrition provider

OMEX Agriculture, which provides liquid fertiliser, crop nutrition and technical services for potato growers, has released its 2024 Sustainable Business Review in which it details some of the advances it has made within growing and the supply chain.

According to the report, 57,211,000 litres of rainwater were utilised at the company's main production facility and more than 1,485 trials were conducted globally to improve crop productivity and fertiliser efficiency.

Managing Director Sam Bell said: "Our aim is to expand initiatives that support regenerative agriculture, innovate responsibly, and strengthen our partnerships with farmers, suppliers, and customers to create a more sustainable future as part of the company's Greener Planet Commitment."

Fertiliser company acquisition

ICL, which provides speciality plant nutrition solutions for potatoes and other crops, has acquired GreenBest, a UK-based manufacturer specialising in bespoke fertilisers.

Earlier in 2024, ICL acquired Nitro 1000, a Brazilian developer and provider of biostimulants and CAF, a North American provider of bespoke agricultural formulations like liquid adjuvants and enhanced nutrients.

Somerset-based GreenBest is renowned for its flexible production capabilities, producing any quantity of bespoke fertiliser for customers across the UK and further afield.

Low sulphur levels

SULPHUR levels have been on the low side following extreme wet conditions in the latter part of 2024, according to the Potash Development Association (PDA).

Data from both NRM and Lancrop Laboratories over the past two years have shown an increase in crops with low sulphur levels.

Signs of sulphur deficiency in potato plants can include upward curving of the leaves or the plant turning a lighter green to yellow colour. Deficient sulphur levels can result in poor crop growth, delayed maturity and spindly plants.

Chlorosis can also result from severe sulphur deficiency, with plants showing pale green/yellow leaves that are reduced in size and growth may be stunted. Often seen on younger leaves first.

Although most potato growers had some respite from the rain at the end of October/early November, there was an increasing likelihood of sulphur levels being be on the low side.

Could legumes pave the way for better pest control and soil health?

Scientists working on new research projects are looking for potato growers to give inputs towards trials work.

SCIENTISTS at the James Hutton Institute are on the lookout for potato growers to participate in trials to measure benefits legumes can bring to soil used for potato crops, and to making them more sustainable.

Entitled legumES, the research project will seek to address key challenges in modern agriculture by focusing on the environmental, economic and social benefits of legume crops such as peas, beans, clover and promotes their cultivation as a solution to reduce potato growers' dependence on synthetic nitrogen fertilisers, lower greenhouse gas emissions, improve soil health and create more diverse and resilient potato growth.

Professor Pete Iannetta, of the James Hutton Institute, is co-ordinating the project through his joint appointment as a Senior Research Fellow at the University Catolica Portuguesa (Porto,Portugal).

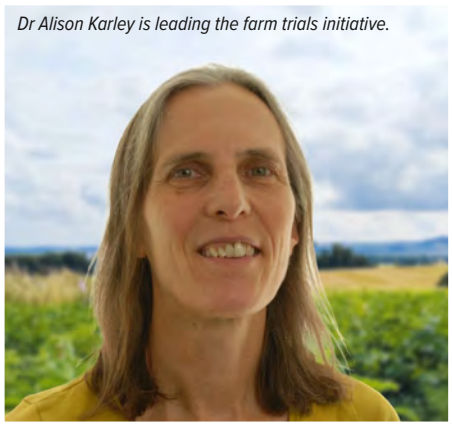
He said: "The potential of legumes to help realise more sustainable potato cropping is within the scope of legumes and has been a consideration for numerous colleagues and I at JHI for several years now, with some trials already having been undertaken, and new ones planned.

"It seems to me there is an opportunity for an interested potato grower to assess the potential of legumes by applying to become a project participant, and test the effects of legumes upon soil previously cropped with potatoes."

He said he and his team were keen to hear from any potato growers who would like a broader discussion on more sustainable potato cropping and the role of legumes.

"This might identify foci for future trials, and potential funding to support such trials," said Pete.

Professor Pete Iannetta, of the James Hutton Institute, is co-ordinating the project



Dr Alison Karley is leading the farm trials initiative.

Helping to mitigate other impacts

Dr Alison Karley, who is leading the farm trials initiative, said the project aims to quantify the environmental and socio-economic benefits of legumes from data gathered on-farm.

"The project aims to enhance biodiversity, contribute to sustainable food systems, and strengthen rural communities by providing alternative economic opportunities through legume-based agriculture. The research spans many European regions, ensuring that diverse ecological and agricultural contexts are studied," said Alison.

The project will aim to deliver practical, scalable solutions that contribute to agricultural sustainability, and inform supportive policy and governance options across Europe.

Pete said: "The legumES project looks beyond how legume crops such as peas, beans or clover may be included in crop rotations. It also examines how legume crops might mitigate the impacts that are already being experienced from climate change and biodiversity loss – including crop biodiversity loss - and their effects on nutritional security.

Ali added: "LegumES aims to quantify the environmental and socio-economic benefits of legumes from data gathered on-farm. We hope that working with farmers to run trials will provide much needed evidence of these benefits and help identify options for promoting the growing and consumption of legume products. The findings will hopefully inform policy and practice solutions."

The four-year project was awarded 6.2 million euros from the European Commission and the governments of Switzerland and the United Kingdom. It is being carried out by a multidisciplinary consortium of 22 partners from 12 EU countries, plus Switzerland and the UK, comprising research and technology organisations; micro, small and medium-sized enterprises; large companies and non-governmental organisations.

Alison said: "It would be a good opportunity for potato growers to trial legume effects on

"There is an opportunity for an interested potato grower to assess the potential of legumes by applying to become a project participant, and test the effects of legumes upon soil previously cropped with potatoes."

Professor Pete Iannetta, Project Co-Ordinator

the crop – either within season or in rotation and we'd be keen to hear from any potato growers looking to discuss ideas.

"For example, we are trialling a legume-based companion crop at the institute farm's Centre for sustainable Cropping to test whether this practice can reduce the number of aphicide sprays (for aphid/virus control) and improve soil nutrient availability," she said.

Farmers can register their interest by emailing legumES@hutton.ac.uk. Financial support and trial guidance will be provided. PR

More details of the legumES project can be found at **www.legumesproject.eu**

The qualities offered by peas, beans, clover and lentils are being examined by the project team.

Strong potato crop in North-East

AN abundance of russet potatoes was being envisaged throughout north east America this winter, according to east coast-based Cambridge Farms, which supplies and ships across the nation.

The company's President/CEO, Ken Gad, who co-founded the company in 1983, said talks with storage facilities has revealed that there has been a good quality Russet potato crop in the region, with most growers harvesting on time, or ahead of time, thanks to good weather conditions.

"It was almost to a point where it's been too warm and too dry in many areas," he said.

Growing regions such as Idaho didn't reduce their acreage enough this season to avoid a too-plentiful crop and processors have cut back their demand for Russet potatoes, so more crops are destined for the fresh market.

East Coast regions such as Maine and New Brunswick have had strong potato crops with good quality and tonnage.

In Idaho and Colorado, there are excessively large size profiles which could be a problem when supplying normal holiday business in consumer packs, Ken said. "They're going to way over-produce their large cartons of 40s, 50s, 60s, and 70 counts. They can't move them fast enough and they've got an exceptionally large supply of that in their storage."

Growing areas such as North Dakota, Manitoba, and other parts of Canada are also seeing a very large crop of good-quality red potatoes.

Yellow potatoes continue to gain popularity with fewer opting to grow white potatoes this season.

Kiwis devour more than $1 billion of potatoes

NEW Zealanders chomped through over $1 billion of potatoes last year - mostly in the form of chips or frozen fries.

The statistic is revealed in Fresh Facts 2024, an annual report from pan sector group United Fresh which outlines eating and exporting trends.

Total annual potato production decreased by 72,800 tonnes between 2019/20 and 2023/24, a drop of 13.7%.

Domestically-consumed processed chips and frozen/fries potatoes made up 61.3 percent of the total domestic industry value in 2023/24.

It's all in the past!

IN our November issue of British Potato Review, we carried an incorrect article in our international section with the heading "Quality issues prompted by 'unethical' growers".

We've since been made aware that, owing to a technological error, our source picked this up from a news bulletin from 1996 and the issues mentioned in that article do not apply to the present day.

We can only apologise for this error and advise our readers to disregard the article. We took steps to remove it from our online and digital news streams as soon as we were made aware. It is the first time this kind of error has occurred and we have no reason to suspect any sort of malicious motive.

We'd like to thank all those people from Maine who took the time to get in touch with us.

Potato research and breeding consolidation

FOLLOWING their merger around a year ago, two potato researchers and breeders have announced that they will be operating under one new name.

EUROPLANT Pflanzenzucht GmbH, which celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2022, and its sister company, Böhm-Nordkartoffel Agrarproduktion GmbH & Co. OHG (BNA), will now both operate under the name EUROPLANT Innovation GmbH & Co. KG.

EUROPLANT is a leading international company that breeds, multiplies and distributes potato varieties. The combination of resistance, ITs portfolio includes more than 100 state-of-the-art and high-performance table, processing and starch varieties.

EUROPLANT operates in more than 70 countries, including the UK, and has a global breeding and distribution network consisting of 14 subsidiaries, associated companies and contractual partners. It has an annual turnover of around 550,000 tonnes.

The renaming means all individual activities within the corporate group, including the entire value chain from basic research, breeding and cultivation to sales and export, now come under the same Europlant brand. A company announcement states that the consolidation establishes clear structures and facilitates communication with policymakers, customers, and partners.

In addition to Managing Partner Dr Justus Böhm, Jörg Eggers and Jörg Renatus will also join the management team.

5m hectares used for potato cultivation

FIVE million hectares are used today to cultivate around 100 million metric tons of potatoes in China, which is acknowledged as the world's foremost potato producer.

In a recent interview with China Daily, an English-language daily newspaper owned by the Publicity Department of the Chinese Communist Party, Simon Heck, Director General of the International Potato Center (CIP), said the nation is in a unique position for year-round production thanks to its geographic diversity.

This capability, alongside international collaboration and technological innovation in the sector, underscores the crop's contribution to China's agricultural landscape and food security.

Simon pointed out an emerging trend of investment in potato cultivation from sectors beyond traditional agriculture, showcasing the crop's expanding economic footprint. The potato's ability to adapt to various climates plays a crucial role in supporting food security, particularly in China's northern and northwestern regions amid the ongoing harvest season.

Since 1978, CIP's collaboration with Chinese agricultural bodies has significantly advanced potato and sweet potato production and Simon was keen to highlight the transfer of genetic resources to China, making it the largest beneficiary of CIP's global gene bank contributions. Varieties like "Cooperation-88" and "Jizhangshu" now represent a significant portion of China's potato output.

Addressing climate change, he pointed out its impact on traditional potato-growing areas in China. CIP's development of climate-adapted potato varieties, in partnership with local institutions, aims to mitigate these challenges. He also mentioned the importance of water-efficient crops in response to water scarcity concerns.

Science and innovation play a pivotal role in enhancing productivity and sustainability of potato production. Initiatives include leveraging artificial intelligence for resource optimisation and encouraging cross-sector collaboration to integrate biotechnological advances into potato cultivation.

Prices continue to rise

DESPITE potato harvest being almost over in Russia, prices have continued to rise.

The governmental statistics agency, Rosstat, said prices increased by 1.3% at the beginning of October, 2% in mid October, and a further 3.1% at the end of the month.

The overall cost of potatoes has increased by 54.7% since the beginning of the year.

A decrease in the size of planting areas, adverse weather conditions, rising transportation costs have been blamed by producers for the price increase.

Executive Director of the Potato Union, Alexey Krasilnikov, said last year there was a record potato harvest of 8.6 million tons and the wholesale price up until until May was 0.11 euros per 1 kg, so, compared to last year, the price was higher.

Adverse weather conditions in 2024 meant the potato harvest was smaller than last year. Production costs are also rising according to Head of the Organic Farming Union board, Sergey Korshunov.

Excellent harvest and 100% self-sufficiency

MONGOLIA had harvested 244,500 tons of potatoes by the start of October, representing a yield increase of 68,600 tons on the same period last year.

Mongolia is now 100% self-sufficient in potato seeds and is currently implementing a national three-year program for the production of virus-free, super-elite, and elite seed varieties.

The country requires 250,000 to 500,000 potato tubers annually. To date, up to 245,000 tons of tubers are produced nationwide.

Various initiatives have been helped the land-locked nation to make potato production a viable sustainable practice over the past 20 years.

In 2004, the Mongolian Potato Program (MPP) was launched as part of the Mongolian Farmer Association for Rural Development (MFARD), backed by the International Potato Center (CIP), with financial support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Mongolian Ministry of Agriculture. CIP clones were introduced, along with Chinese hybrid crosses for breeding new varieties. A seed production system was specifically developed for the country.

In 2011, the Mongolian Ministry of Agriculture reported that production had increased by almost 22% between 2010 and 2011, shortly before the project entered its exit period. Tumurbat Turmandakh, the Program Coordinator for MPP, said that in 2012, the initiative distributed a total of 970 tons of high-quality potato seeds to farmers throughout the country for spring planting.

Tuv Aimag (a central Mongolian province), is the largest potato-producing province in Mongolia and accounts for around 42% of the total land for potato production in the country.

In December last year, the domestic harvest for potatoes and vegetables set a record, with The Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry dubbing 2023 the "Year of Agricultural Revival."

Mongolia's domestic yield met the demand for potatoes at 100% in 2023 and set a record for vegetable harvesting for the first time in history. At that point, Minister of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry Kh. Bolorchuluun emphasised the need to increase the workforce, stabilise prices, and increase sales to increase historical success.

International potato gathering

THE German Potato Trade Association (DKHV) will hold its 19th International Berlin Potato Evening on the eve of Fruit Logistica on February 4th.

Around 500 international guests are expected to attend from trade, agriculture, politics, and science to discuss the future of the industry.

The event will take place at Hilton Berlin, Mohrenstraße 30 (entrance at Charlottenstraße), 10117 Berlin at 7pm.

New pre-cleaner to address high soil content in crops

SCOTTS Precision Manufacturing Ltd, a designer and manufacturer of cleaning and harvesting systems for potatoes, has launched a new pre-cleaner, the Terra-Siv.

The self-cleaning Terra-Siv is specifically designed to rapidly extract large volumes of loose soil and debris over a very short distance. It is designed to bolt directly onto the intake of any second-generation Evolution Separators or can be used as a stand-alone pre-cleaner.

Scotts' Managing Director Derek Scott said the main driver for the design is to assist growers dealing with high soil percentages in their crops.

"The Terra-Siv will turbocharge separators by removing high levels of loose soil and smaller debris. By eliminating this debris beforehand, the separator can operate more efficiently, removing larger particles and leaf matter."

The crop is supported on the tips of the stars, allowing loose soil to immediately fall between the fingers, while larger particles are drawn down into the valley between the star shafts.

"We have found that by mis-matching the star shaft speeds and adjusting the height of the second star shaft, we can then effectively entrain irregular-shaped objects deeper into that valley without pulling the crop through. The key is to eliminate any flex or movement within the shafts and supporting chassis while keeping the star fingers open in the heaviest of soils," said Derek.

He said this was achieved by stabilising the spacing between the stars.

"Having uniform star spacings allows us to maintain a very tight tolerance between the cleaning finger and adjacent stars. The use of a square-edged steel finger ensures the gap is repeatedly cleaned, twin roller bearings mounted on a cam shaft consistently flex the soft fingers, completing the self-cleaning cycle."

The design is focused on low maintenance and tool-free adjustment. Direct drive electric motor/gearboxes, along with remote greasing, are fitted as standard. For operator ease, all adjustments are made via push button or turnbuckles.

The unit consists of six individually direct-driven shafts, providing the following functionalities;

1. The first variable-speed "feed-on roller" (height adjustable by turnbuckle) offers a gentle landing for the crop and fixes the overall length of the separator.
2. The following star shaft, adjustable for speed, can be adjusted rearward by an electric linear ram to create a gap of up to 65mm (the "feed-on shaft" moves vertically to allow this).
3. The second star shaft is individually adjustable for speed and height.
4. The final soft "feed-off roller" is adjustable for speed and direction.
5. Below each star shaft is a highly efficient cleaning system, comprising of a slowly rotating cam shaft with single steel fingers passing between each pair of stars to constantly eliminate any buildup of soil. Between each steel finger, a double bearing mounted on a small hub rotates with each shaft, effortlessly flexing each finger to loosen compacted soil that builds up between the front and rear of each star finger.

200th QualityGrader produced

DUTCH manufacturer Flikweert Vision recently produced its 200th QualityGrader, just three years after the first machine was launched on the market.

What began as an innovation for the optical sorting of unwashed potatoes has evolved into a solution that can now also sort washed potatoes. The QualityGrader has made its way to companies worldwide.

Greater availability of crop management technology

GROWERS across East Anglia and South Eastern England now have access to crop.zone's innovative electric crop management technology following a new partnership between the company and agricultural dealer Tuckwells.

crop.zone's electric crop management systems include solutions for herbicide-free potato desiccation, cover crop termination, and weed control. These will now be available through Tuckwells' network of 11 outlets across Suffolk, Essex, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Greater London, Kent, Surrey, and East Sussex.

Box handling automation and strategic partnership

HANDLING solutions manufacturer Tong Engineering has announced a new strategic partnership with VHM Machinery, Netherlands manufacturer of high-performance box and big bag handling systems.

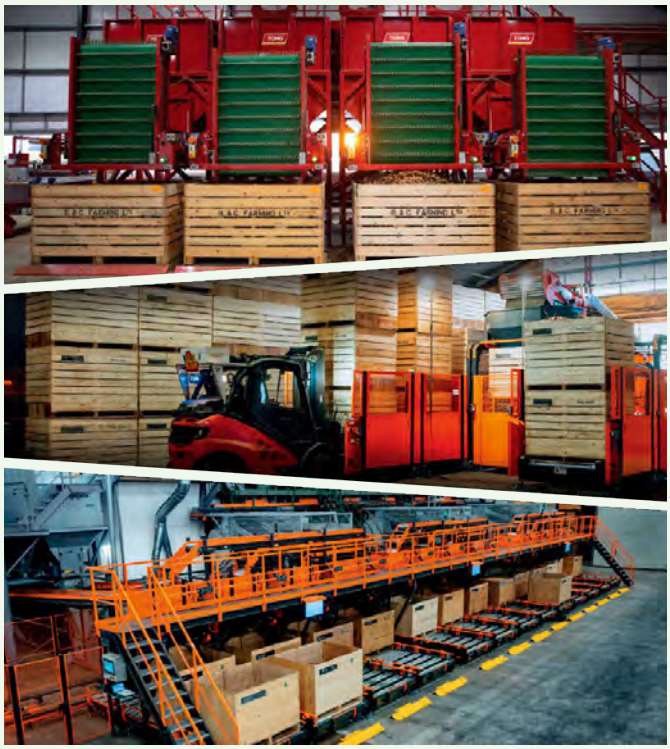
The new partnership will see Tong offering VHM's box handling solutions across the UK.

Charlie Rich, Business Development Director at Tong, said: "By integrating their fully-automated box and bag handling technology, we are strengthening our proven filling and tipping range."

From a flexible feed and discharge of boxes to and from the production process, to completely automatic stacking and destacking of boxes at either end of the handling process, VHM equipment is designed to bring continuous, high capacity box handling solutions that dramatically reduce or even remove the need for forklifts. The company's systems ensure the right boxes are in the right place at impressive throughputs.

"With a continued focus amongst vegetable producers to reduce costs and labour requirements, Tong is dedicated to designing progressive handling facilities that significantly reduce the reliance on the workforce through automation," said Charlie. "VHM's focus on achieving more output with less people, aligns perfectly with our vision."

Charlie said the company had already proposed a number of box handling solutions combining Tong and VHM equipment to customers in the UK, and said the labour-saving benefits alone looked set to transform their post-harvest handling processes.



New edition for high-speed sorter

DOWNS, a French manufacturer of potato receiving, handling and storing solutions, recently launched its new optical sorter for unwashed potatoes, the CropVision Plus, at Interpom, the European indoor trade fair for the whole potato supply chain.

The original CropVision sorter was launched in 2020 and the new version has been adapted to make optical sorting easier, while maintaining the high speeds achieved by its predecessor.

Improvements include more powerful processors for accelerated data processing and lighting technology which enhances defect detection, ensuring optimal sorting even for challenging potato varieties.

A newly-designed user interface offers improved ergonomics, simplifying operation and configuration for users of all levels. Market-first connectivity features enable real-time monitoring, remote updates, and simplified data management for maintenance.

AI-driven assistance simplifiesadjustment of sorter settings and a new operating system is exclusively compatible with the CropVision Plus range, featuring an intuitive interface designed for easy operation akin to smartphone usage, while the launch of the MyCropVision App offers an intuitive customer application accessible across all devices.

Key features of the MyCropVision app include centralised access to information about the CropVision Plus sorter, real-time supervision with remote status updates, personalised alerts, and real-time incident notifications.

Downs Managing Director Damien Dubrulle said: "We have listened to our customers' feedback and worked to integrate features that address the specific needs of our ever-evolving market."

Measurement system introduced

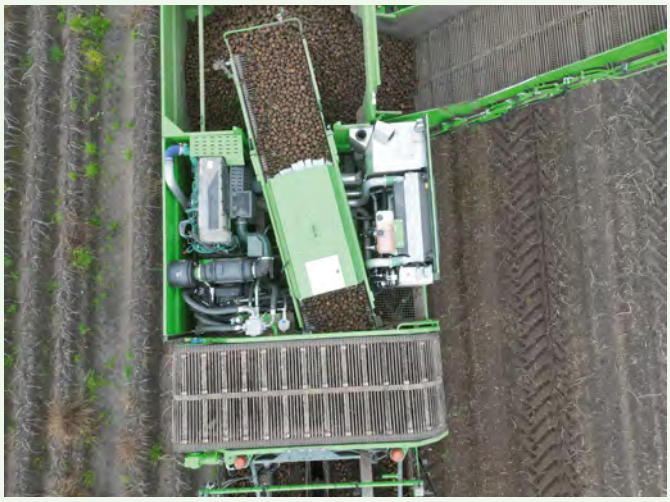
AVR has introduced a size measurement system on the Puma 4.0.

Thanks to the camera system on the bunker filling web, growers now get more accurate insight into yields. Potatoes are recognised using vision technology, while stones and clods are disregarded.

Pieter Galle, Product Manager at AVR, said: "For years, various yield measurement systems have been available for potato harvesters. One of the disadvantages of these systems is that they are nothing more than weighing cells relaying a certain value. The system cannot distinguish between potatoes and soil clods or stones.

"The size measurement system based on camera data first recognizes the potatoes in the product stream and then measures them. As a result, the displayed data is 100% relevant."

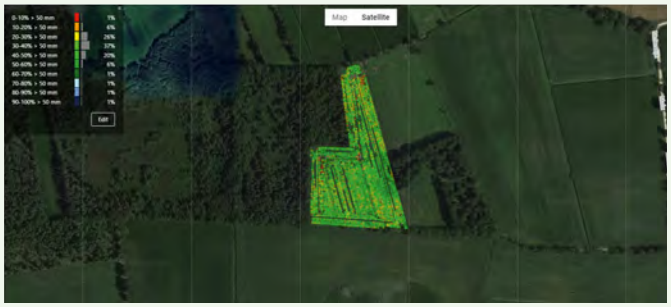
To gain a detailed insight into what is harvested in the field, AVR has integrated a digital size measurement system on the Puma 4.0 self-propelled potato harvester. This system utilises a camera mounted on the bunker filling web to determine potato size during harvest.



The images are processed through AVR Connect, and the gathered data can then be displayed in two ways.

The size measurement data can be displayed either as geospatial or matrix data. The geospatial data provides an overview of which potato sizes are harvested in each zone of the field. The matrix structure gives an overview of the different sizes (length and width) of the potatoes as a percentage of the total harvested quantity of a trip or field. All data ranges within the matrix can be dynamically adjusted based on specific customer needs.

The AVR size measurement system allows for a fully digital size outlay of the harvested potatoes.



Manufacturer marks 30 years with open day

POTATO processing equipment manufacture, Scotts Precision Manufacturing Ltd, celebrated its 30th anniversary on December 11th with an open day at the company's headquarters near Boston, Lincolnshire.

Founded in 1994, Scotts Precision Manufacturing Ltd has grown from a modest workshop into a leading manufacturer of state-of-the-art potato processing equipment, serving the evolving needs of potato growers and processors across the UK and beyond.

Managing Director Derek Scott said: "Our 30th anniversary is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our team and the trust our clients have placed in us. We are excited to open our doors and showcase the innovations that have kept us at the forefront of the industry."

During the Open Day, visitors had the opportunity to explore some of Scotts' most advanced equipment in the factory. These include its Evolution separators which have been designed to enhance the efficiency of potato cleaning processes, the Trinity haulm toppers, and the recently-unveiled Terra-Siv for soil and debris removal.

The open day, which started at 10am and ran until late, took place at Slate Worx, Station Rd, Eastville, Boston. Attendees had the chance to tour the factory, meet the team behind the machinery, and gain first-hand insights into the latest advancements in potato processing technology.

'Fresh approach to agri-tech needed'

A REFRESHED government agri-tech strategy that helps unlock the potential of agriculture and horticulture to deliver multiple societal benefits is vital to build on the success of the first government agri-tech strategy from 10 years ago, according to a new report from Agri-TechE.

The organisation's 'Back to the Future' report, marking 10 years of the not-for-profit membership organisation, provides a 360-degree overview of what is needed to maintain the momentum from the 2013 AgriTech Strategy. It reflects on both the successes and current challenges agri-tech faces.

Responses from over 70 contributors, including innovative farming businesses and estates, researchers and technology developers, investors, and technical and commercial service providers, shaped the report.

While there is much optimism for the next decade of agri-tech innovation, contributors also identify challenges, including a changed investment landscape, difficulties scaling solutions and businesses, a lack of secure revenue streams, and regulators failing to keep pace with innovation.

The responses clearly highlight the need for a new government agri-tech strategy, following on from the transformational strategy from 2013, says Dr Belinda Clarke, Agri-TechE Director.

"The 2013 strategy engendered a lot of fresh thinking, energy, external investment and innovation in the agricultural and horticultural sectors," she says. "But the sector is now in a very different place and needs new government focus to shape the future of agri-tech to enable it to help the sector meet new priorities."

These include a much greater emphasis on climate-smart agriculture to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and aligning on-farm productivity with environmental sensitivity to help reverse biodiversity declines and maintain clear water and air.

Dr Belinda Clarke, Director, Agri-TechE

> *"We need to stop promising farmers that a technology is going to change the world tomorrow."*
>
> **Dr Belinda Clarke, Director, Agri-TechE**

The government should also recognise that the sector delivers much more than just food and beverages. It also includes ecosystem services and industrial feedstocks such as biofuels, pharmaceuticals, and raw materials for textiles and construction.

"We need the new government to deliver a strategy for agriculture and horticulture that recognises the industry as a key component of our bioeconomy," said Belinda. "This, in turn, will inform a refreshed agri-tech strategy as one of the key enablers of unlocking the industry's potential."

While there is much optimism for the next decade of agri-tech innovation, report contributors also identify challenges. Photos: HarvestEye and Crop4Sight

Clear policies give clarity on the direction of travel and build confidence, she added. "Well-defined, long-term sector strategies can lever private investment and provide a roadmap for innovation success. A new strategy for the next decade is needed."

Among the other challenges for agri-tech companies identified in the report is how regulation is failing to keep pace with innovation. An example is the lack of clear regulation for emerging trends, such as the use of biological products. For agri-tech developers, earlier engagement with regulators from the outset of innovation is vital, the report suggests.

Scaling solutions also remains challenging, which could at least be partially helped through more government support for businesses, potentially via contracts or subsidies to help boost nascent industries. Without secure revenue streams, markets can be tough to penetrate.

Equally importantly, agri-tech developers are struggling to calculate return on investments for growers – vital information for growers to decide whether to embrace a new technology. That is leading to some on-farm fatigue, the report reveals, along with some technologies and businesses failing to deliver on their hype.

"We need to stop promising growers that a technology is going to change the world tomorrow," said Belinda. "While some growers are happy to be beta-testers, the majority want reliability and seek solutions that will work the first time."

The report identifies there is no shortage of new technology to help growers in the future. From conversational artificial intelligence that will allow users to ask specific questions of their data – and get sensible answers – to sensors that help growers understand what plants need for optimum nutrition and performance, and genetic tools for breeding plants and animals with valuable new traits.

These and other technologies will potentially deliver solutions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reverse biodiversity loss and maintain water quality.

Developments such as satellite imaging and GPS navigation, clean energy production through ground source heat pumps and anaerobic digestion, innovative lighting solutions, livestock wearables and metagenomic sequencing of plants, animals and microbes show how farm agri-tech has come in the past decade, said Belinda.

"The agri-tech community is collectively very optimistic about the next decade, but a new agri-tech strategy would give the granular clarity to inspire further transformative innovations," she said. PR

Repurposing the potato levy: A new step towards sustainable farming

In this new column, **Alexander Preston**, Founder and Managing Director of agricultural policy consultancy Preston Waldon, discusses latest policy effects and considerations for the potato industry.

Hailing from a farming background, Alexander Preston is the founder of Preston Waldon, a Hampshire-based consultancy dedicated to agricultural public affairs and reputation management that partners with organisations from the fresh produce, growing, surveying, building/ development, technology and estate management sectors. Having worked with FTSE 100 companies, trade organisations, MPs, and industry leaders, he advises on policies to boost revenue and reduce costs

AS discussions around the Autumn Budget ripple through the farming community, many growers are feeling the strain of rising costs, evolving subsidies, and increased regulatory demands.

These challenges have understandably taken centre stage.

Yet amidst the uncertainty, the signing of the grant agreement between the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) and GB Potatoes, which unlocks the residual potato levy reserves, is quietly but powerfully shaping the sector's future.

I sat down with Scott Walker, CEO of GB Potatoes, to explore how this will drive resilience and sustainability in British agriculture.

"The potato industry is in a positive place despite there being a significantly smaller potato-growing area in Great Britain compared to a decade ago - a trend that should be a cause for concern for the Government," Scott told me, underscoring the optimism behind this initiative. Far from being just another financial contribution, unlocking the residual levy money represents a strategic effort to pump prime initiatives to tackle obstacles, fostering resilience and growth across the entire potato supply chain."

What are the funds being managed?

Born from the residual reserves following the wind-down of AHDB Potatoes' levy payer activities, the residual fund has been given as a grant to be managed by GB Potatoes to address critical challenges and opportunities facing the sector. From pest monitoring and disease control to reputation management, the grant is an investment in keeping British potato farming competitive, resilient and forward-thinking.

"Growers must be part of the conversation to ensure that policies are developed with their best interests in mind."

GB Potatoes will use the grant to pump prime initiatives. As the money runs out over time, it aims to secure industry funding to ensure the projects are self-sustaining. This progressive model supports the industry in becoming financially independent while ensuring long-term agility and self-sufficiency. It's a forward-looking approach that helps the sector tackle today's challenges without compromising tomorrow's potential.

Driving sustainable agriculture forward

"We are seeing more and more interest in regenerative agriculture," Scott said. "These practices can be one of the options to building resilience against changing weather patterns and resource pressures."

His enthusiasm mirrors what I've observed in my work with Yorkshire Water and Compass Group, namely that regenerative agriculture has moved from concept to practice, becoming an essential strategy for sustainable farming.

Potato late blight remains one of the most significant threats to UK potato production, with estimated industry losses of £50 million

per season. To tackle this challenge, residual levy funds are being used to establish a sustainable, industry-funded initiative. Monitoring genetic shifts in the blight population and its sensitivity to fungicides is a critical component of this effort.

The Fight Against Blight initiative focuses on detecting genetic changes in the late blight population and assessing its resistance to key fungicides. Last year, reports showed minimal changes in the Great Britain disease population. However, vigilance remains essential, especially as fungicide-resistant strains have been confirmed in parts of northern continental Europe.

By addressing these challenges proactively, the industry aims to protect Great Britain's potato crops while promoting sustainable agricultural practices. Another key project supported by the grant involves improving aphid monitoring across Great Britain. Currently, growers use yellow water traps to track aphid activity and assess virus risks. GB Potatoes is planning to modernise and expand this system, leveraging data modelling to provide farmers with more accurate and timely information. "The goal is to equip growers with better tools to manage their crops effectively so they can stay ahead of pests and diseases that threaten their harvests," said Scott.

More than environmentalism

This is about more than environmental ideals. It's about securing the future of an entire industry. As Scott points out: "It's not enough to simply react to changes. Growers must be part of the conversation to ensure that policies are developed with their best interests in mind." Through active engagement with policymakers, GB Potatoes is ensuring that the industry's voice is heard, and its needs are met.

With increasingly ambitious carbon neutrality targets from the UK government, the potato sector is positioning itself not just to comply, but to lead. This proactive stance ensures that the industry remains at the forefront of sustainable farming practices while safeguarding its long-term viability.

A final thought

What truly stands out is the personal connection GB Potatoes fosters within the industry. Supporting initiatives like the 'Grow Your Own Potatoes' school programme reconnects people with their food and inspires the next generation to value agriculture. "Kids can see how a simple potato can grow into a whole crop," said Scott. "It's about building understanding."

How GB Potatoes will use the residual levy funds embodies this ethos. It's not just a financial instrument, it's a collaborative effort to support farmers, researchers, and innovators dedicated to feeding the nation. It's about transforming challenges into opportunities, nurturing the land, and building a resilient future.

As our conversation winds down, Scott's optimism is infectious. The potato might be humble, but the industry behind it is anything but ordinary. PR

For more information visit **www.PrestonWaldon.co.uk**

Revisions to Red Tractor

NEW and revised standards for Red Tractor Fresh Produce and GLOBALG.A.P. assurance schemes came into effect on January 1st.

GLOBALG.A.P. recently released version 6 of its IFA Fruit & Vegetables standard, which includes significant changes. As a result, the Red Tractor Fresh Produce standards have been updated to align with these revisions, including adding an optional section to the standards with GLOBALG.A.P.

To streamline the process, dual certification for both Red Tractor and GLOBALG.A.P. is now available, enabling you to meet both standards with a single audit.

Pause to single trade window

THE UK Government has announced that development of the Single Trade Window (STW) in the 2025 to 2026 financial year has been paused to allow for a re-evaluation.

The purpose of the Single Trade Window (STW) is to provide a single UK border service that streamlines data across government and trade.

The border has undergone radical change in the last few years, including the addition of new digital capabilities and, in the meantime, the government will further engage with traders, ports, software developers and other key stakeholders to better understand their needs for the future of operating at the UK border.

As part of its efforts to support businesses trading across the UK border, the government will consider the role of the STW and provide an update as part of the next phase of the Spending Review, reporting in late Spring 2025, a recent statement announced.

Changes to Scottish support payments

ORGANIC growers will automatically be eligible for government support payments in a post-Brexit policy change to incentivise sustainable growing in Scotland.

The Scottish Government now requires growers to create a whole farm plan for protecting nature and climate to qualify for the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS).

Unlike England, Scotland is retaining the BPS system used in the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, under which payments are made based on the amount of land being farmed. But changes are being made in Scotland around eligibility for the scheme including a new requirement for a whole farm.

To receive payments, growers will need to submit information to government covering how their entire farm system will deliver in biodiversity, integrated pest management, carbon, and soil analysis.

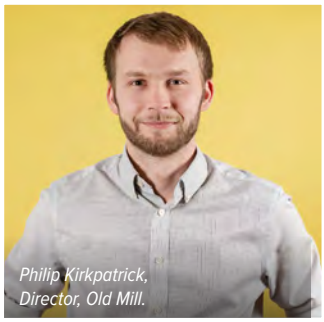
All BPS applicants must complete at least two audits by May 15th, and all others relevant to their business by 2028. Any grower certified organic will automatically qualify for the integrated pest management areas.

Weathering the IHT storm

With changes to inheritance tax sparking unrest, what steps can growing businesses be taking to weather the impact? Preparation and good management are key, according to experts.


Jeremy Moody, Secretary and Adviser, CAAV.


Paul Harris, CEO, REAL Success.


Philip Kirkpatrick, Director, Old Mill.


Victoria Vyvyan, President, CLA.

THE alteration to Inheritance Tax, with a new £1 million cap on the value of combined agricultural and business assets qualifying for full relief, means that from April 2026, many growers' farms which were previously exempt, will be liable to the tax at 20%.

This decision has sparked discontent among some family-owned farms.

David Armstrong from Bardney, Lincolnshire, who grows 3,500 tonnes of potatoes a year for supermarkets and crisp makers, was amongst those who attended a recent protest march in London. In an interview with the BBC, he said he faced a tax bill of up to £700,000 when his elderly parents pass away.

"When you get up in the morning the first thing you think about is what are we doing today? The second one is this at the moment," he said. While accepting the government's need to stop tax avoidance from outside of the farming industry, he said there must be a better way.

The Duchess of Rutland also attended the march. At Belvoir Castle, Leicestershire, her family farms 4,500 acres. They farm potatoes, as well as peas and sugar beet.

In a post she wrote for the Telegraph, she stated: "Like so many traditional estates, the Belvoir Estate's success rested on a mutually-beneficial partnership between landlord and tenant. The family-farm tax hits both sides hard, as it puts a charge on the land for all except estates owned by corporate landowners."

She said tenancies were already being given by growers unable to navigate Defra's new grant system which she said gave them less income than the old EU subsidies.

"Less land will now be re-let when tenancies are given up and the inheritance tax changes could result in land being sold off in small parcels as pony paddocks and lost to agriculture forever," she said.

"One begins to appreciate why the ordinary farmer feels beleaguered by the IHT changes"

This viewpoint was echoed by Country Land and Business Association (CLA) President Victoria Vyvyan who said: "Many farmers, operating on slim margins, will now face having to sell land to pay inheritance taxes."

The Central Association of Agricultural Valuers (CAAV) believes more farms will be affected than initial figures suggested, including potato-growing enterprises, owing to the way data was collected from HMRC based on previous APR claims. Currently, APR applies to land and buildings, not business assets like machinery and storage commodities. Under the new rules, these assets fall within the IHT calculation.

Partner at Spencer West LLP, Michael Miller, said he had been very busy before the Budget arranging transfers of farmland to the next generation but had since seen a lull. He said, unlike growers holding machinery and storage commodities, non-farming investment owners only held agricultural land so were less likely to exceed the limited allowances and be caught by the tax. "One begins to appreciate why the ordinary farmer feels beleaguered by the IHT changes," he said.

What's the next step?

So what can family growers do to weather the changes?

Director at rural accountant Old Mill, Philip Kirkpatrick, said there are practical steps to take to try and mitigate the effects.

"There's no getting away from the fact that these are huge changes, which are going to cause a lot of heartache. The important thing is not to panic: Take stock, ensure your accountant has a thorough understanding of asset values and ownership, and make a plan," he said.

Agricultural and business assets will still qualify for 100% relief up to a cap of £1m per person (over and above the nil-rate band, which is tax free up to £325,000 per person, or up to £500,000 where eligible for the residence nil rate band as well). Above the £1m cap, relief on eligible assets will apply at a rate of 50%, meaning effectively inheritance tax (IHT) will be levied at 20%.

"So, for an individual owning a farm worth £3m, attracting a nil-rate band of £325,000, the first £325,000 is tax free, the next £1m qualifies for agricultural (APR) or business property relief (BPR) at 100%, so remains tax free. The remaining £1.675m incurs a tax bill of £335,000," said Philip.

It's important to remember that the £1m eligible for APR / BPR is not just land, it's all the working assets, including machinery, he said, adding that the cost of any loans or mortgages secured against the property could be deductible.

The changes only take effect for deaths after April 5th 2026 – so any inheritance triggered by death before that date will be subject to the existing, unlimited APR / BPR rules and it's important to check the reliefs available rather than taking them for granted, Philip stressed.

"Those whose estates will be subject to large tax bills on death will have to decide what to do about it: Spread the ownership of assets among family members to maximise the reliefs available, sell land to fund the tax bill, or borrow money to pay the tax bill. Borrowing money to service that debt will put a considerable strain on a farm business," he said. "I think there will be a lot more land coming to the market."

The most sensible option to mitigate tax bills is to spread assets around the family. The £1m APR / BPR allowance does not pass automatically to a spouse, so the first thing is to ensure that both spouses are making the most of their allowances. "You can pass assets onto a spouse without any tax being incurred," said Philip.

Landowners can also pass assets on free of IHT, provided they survive seven years from the date of the gift. For any gifts made before the day of the Budget (October 30th), there is no cap on the value or tax-free element of the gift. But gifts made from October 30th onwards will count towards the £1m cap.

"These changes are going to encourage people to hand on assets much earlier in life, which probably isn't a bad thing for the industry. However, how the Government has chosen to do this is going to hurt some families, particularly those suffering unexpected deaths and early inheritance won't suit everyone – each family and business situation is different, and the day-to-day implications must be considered, not just the tax benefits."

One option likely to see significant uptake is life insurance, to cover the potential cost of IHT bills. "If you're making gifts and are concerned you could die within the seven-year window, you might take out insurance to cover the potential tax, just for that period. It could be an affordable solution."

When restructuring asset ownership, it's also important to consider capital gains tax (CGT) implications, he warns. While gifts to spouses are tax-free, other gifts are liable to CGT, at 18% (basic rate taxpayers) or 24% (higher rate taxpayers). Holdover relief is one option, to defer the tax liability, and if it's the donor's main house, principal private residence relief can be available.

If it's a more comprehensive business restructure or sale, business asset disposal relief (BADR - formerly entrepreneur's relief) may apply on gains up to £1m per person. Currently levied at 10% tax, BADR will increase to 14% from April 2025 and 18% from April 2026.

Philip envisages considerable uncertainty for tenant growers. "Landlords letting land only qualify for the £1m APR / BPR allowance, so on death we could see parts of estates sold off to pay the tax and the investment case for non-farmers to buy land has got worse. This may end up being a positive for the industry, however it will certainly cause some upheaval over the next few years."

Pension funds – pending a consultation - are also expected to fall within the estate from April 2027, and will therefore be subject to tax on death. Those looking at passing assets down to the next generation will need to consider what assets they retain for their own financial security over the course of their life.

"Every business and situation is different. But what's critical now is not to bury your head in the sand. Take stock. Work with your accountant and trusted professionals, and don't rely on any tax planning or wills that have been done in the past without checking it still stacks up. There is no substitute for careful planning for the future, now more than ever."

The importance of staffing and preparation

Investment in staff may seem like a mute point at this stage, but CEO of staff specialist REAL Success, Paul Harris, said now more than ever, the industry needs to reassure its people, stay calm and make a plan for their businesses and the people in it.

"These policy shifts, while significant and unwelcome at a difficult time for our industry, do provide an opportunity for farms across the UK to reflect on key areas like succession planning, managing staff costs, and getting the best from their teams," he said.

Starting the discussions around succession is essential, he said. "Inheritance tax changes bring attention to the importance of preparing for the future. By planning early and taking a proactive approach, we can ensure our farms remain resilient, adaptable, and ready for whatever lies ahead."

The increase in minimum wage is another change set to impact the industry. "We must consider innovative ways of balancing labour costs while still investing in our teams. Rising wages may be challenging, but they're also a reminder that a well-supported, motivated workforce is invaluable."

Investing in people can pay long-term dividends, he added. "Showing commitment to your people builds loyalty, morale, and resilience - essential to weathering any storm. Even as labour costs rise, investing in those around us can yield returns which far outweigh the expense."

Overall, the growing community is a force which is stronger together, he says. "We must hold our nerve, support one another, and stay invested in our industry. By staying committed to our goals and taking a proactive stance, we show that agriculture in the UK is strong, adaptable, and ready for the future."

He also stressed that, although the Budget's impact has attracted a lot of attention on social media, it's important to consult the facts and get relevant advice, as there is much scare-mongering.

"We must hold our nerve, support one another, and stay invested in our industry. By staying committed to our goals and taking a proactive stance, we show that agriculture in the UK is strong, adaptable, and ready for the future."

'Contained' impact on industry

A report from Andersons, which provides business advice, research and analysis to the agricultural sector, reveals that while the IHT change could affect the ability of many growing families to sustain their businesses through succession, from an industry-wide perspective, the direct impact may be more contained.

"Farmland is likely to remain within agricultural use, even if ownership changes hands. When farms face the pressure of "death duties", neighbouring farms may expand their holdings, allowing more successful farming businesses to grow sustainably," the report states, adding: "The key point from a macroeconomic perspective is that all the land is still farmed."

The Andersons report goes on to add: "The more successful businesses will be the ones that grow. Notably, none of the businesses in the example would be large – all are likely to be family farms therefore this does not necessarily drive the growth of large corporate farms. This is a huge issue for individual farming families, but far less so in terms of food output." PR

Yotam to lead on ethylene application and remote monitoring advancements

POTATO storage solutions supplier, Restrain, has appointed Yotam Guetta as its new Head of Technology.

Yotam brings with him a wealth of experience in sustainable agriculture and agritech, having held senior roles at Infarm since 2019, where he served as Head of Agronomy and Global Crops Operations Manager.

Restrain supplies ethylene technology which keeps potatoes sprout-free, quality-stable, and ready for market. Its systems create a stable ethylene environment in bulk, box, ambient, and refrigerated storage set-ups.

In 2017, Restrain began designing and manufacturing its own catalytic generators which, combined with advanced microcomputer technology, enable control and monitoring through future internet connectivity.

Managing Director of Restrain, Benedikt Cramer, said: "We are thrilled to welcome Yotam to the Restrain family. His deep knowledge of sustainable farming and passion for innovation will be instrumental as we continue to scale and refine our technology, driving the next phase of our growth."

In his new role, Yotam will lead the development of enhanced application methods for potatoes, as well as onions and tomatoes. He will also lead improvements in Restrain's remote storage monitoring solutions and explore opportunities to expand into additional crop categories."

Championing the cause of local growers

THE British Frozen Food Federation (BFFF) has appointed Karen McQuade as its new president, succeeding Ian Stone, who has stepped down after serving in the role since December 2020.

Karen, a highly-respected industry leader, steps into the post of President following her election at the federation's Annual General Meeting on November 13th.

She brings 25 years of experience in the frozen food sector, having attended her first BFFF event in 1999, and has made significant contributions to the industry since.

She is committed to sourcing locally and supporting British growers and producers.

New supply chain manager

VEGETABLE handling equipment manufacturer Haith has announced the appointment of its new Supply Chain Manager, Alan Hewitt.

In his new role Alan will have overall responsibility for procurement, stock levels and Haith's parts and after-sales departments.

An experienced engineer whose career began in 1999, Alan has been involved in all aspects of supply chain management, including logistics, sales, purchasing and warehousing.

He said: "I am currently mid-way through a modernisation of the parts department procedures. In the next few months, we will fully overhaul several systems to further enhance the department's efficiency."

Haith's Managing Director, Duane Hill, said: "The creation of the Supply Chain Manager role marks an important milestone for our company as we continue to grow and evolve."

Away from work, Alan is a keen mountain biker, guitar player and vintage computer enthusiast.

Mathieu joins Tong's team

UK potato handling equipment manufacturer, Tong Engineering, has appointed a new French representative, Mathieu Aspar, as Tong expands its presence in France.

Mathieu, from M.A.T Harvesting, brings a wealth of experience in the agricultural sector, having worked closely with vegetable growers worldwide, particularly in France and the USA.

Visitors to the Tong stand at Interpom later this month will have the opportunity to meet Mathieu on the Tong stand.

Sales Director of Tong Engineering Simon Lee said: "We are delighted to welcome Mathieu to the Tong Engineering international team. His close integration with the French market and proven track record in the agricultural industry will ensure that our French customer base receives our high-quality equipment backed by the local service and support necessary to optimise their operations."

New CEO appointment in water resources

CHRISTINE Snell has joined the CEO group at Water Resources West to represent the interests of agriculture, horticulture and other sectors which abstract water outside of the public water supply system.

Christine has plenty of experience working with food manufacturers and the agriculture community. She is a partner and business director in AJ & CI Snell, one of the UK's leading fresh and frozen fruit growers and a member of the Berry Gardens Co-Operative that is the largest producer/supplier of soft fruit in the UK.

Water Resources West (WRW) is a group of abstractors, their representatives and their regulators.

Mick retires after almost five decades

MICK Haith has retired after 47 years with handling machinery manufacturer Haith, which was founded by his father, George Haith.

Mick's interest in engineering began when he was seven, helping his father. As a teenager, during summer holidays, Mick worked alongside his brother Chris on factory refurbishments for companies such as Knights of Norfolk and H C Tinsley, earning 25p an hour for his efforts.

Mick officially joined Haith in 1976, aged 16, painting eight-tonne bulkers at the company's Castle Green site in Tickhill. Mick then moved to Haith's Sunderland Street site, installing bulker belts and as servicing combine harvesters and pea viners alongside his father.

In 1977, he moved to Haith's current Armthorpe site, travelling to work on a motorcycle with his tools packed in a rucksack. Mick's passion for motorbikes led him to enter sidecar racing with his brother David.

In 1985, Mick took on the challenge of running another Haith business, Ramsey Rent, a company he ran for two years, before returning to Tickhill Engineering Co Ltd, working in the stores covering for his brother Nigel, who had been injured in a go-kart accident. As well as overseeing the stores, Mick, who passed his Class 1 license with only two days of practice, also spent time as a delivery driver for the company when needed.

Mick continued in the stores department for the remainder of his career, culminating in his promotion to Procurement Director.

Managing Director Duane Hill said: "Mick's passion for engineering and knowledge of Haith equipment are well known. It's incredible to think that Mick has worked for his family's business for nearly 50 years. He has made a massive contribution to the company in those five decades. We will all miss him."

On his final day, Mick was presented with a gift voucher for his favourite hotel and enjoyed a Christmas brunch with family, friends and colleagues.

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Damien Dubrulle said: "We have listened to our customers' feedback and worked to integrate features that address the specific needs of our ever-evolving market."

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