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POTATO

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2024

REVIEW

**TOP TIPS FOR
CHOOSING VARIETIES**

**BREAKING DOWN SPROUT
CONTROL BY SECTOR**

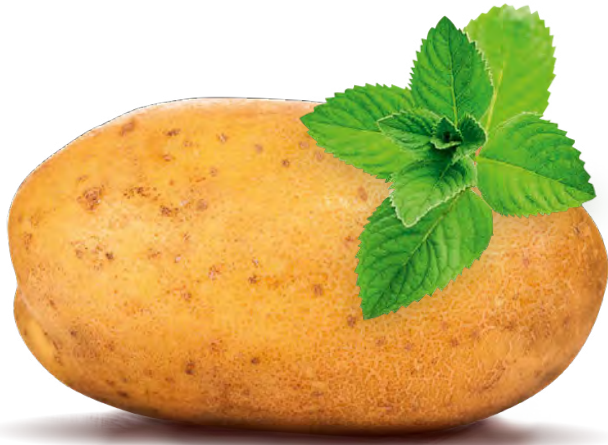
**KEEPING SEED
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Editor's letter

INDUSTRY collaboration seems to be a key theme on many of the topics we've covered in this issue of British Potato Review and we're always keen to see how organisations and companies can work together for the greater good of the potato sector.

It's rare to see machines from more than one manufacturer in the field, but that's what happened in Lincolnshire, when six top-of-the-range harvesters from AVR, Dewulf, Grimme and Standen were put through their paces on a specially-grown field. It provided a rare opportunity to watch all the machines in action on one site.

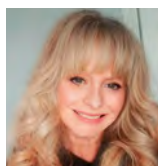
The Potato Partnership is a key example of industry and growers working together to tackle today's challenges and in this issue we detail the new treatments it's identified that have the potential to improve control of a range of pest threats, notably potato cyst nematodes.

Pepsico Europe has joined forces with fertiliser company Yara in a bid to help growers adopt low-carbon practices across the UK and EU, with an initial focus on potatoes, while Albert Bartlett, has formed a partnership with Fera Science Ltd in a bid to control aphid numbers and combat viral infection levels in seed potato crops across Scotland.

In addition to covering the collaborative work above, this issue brings you Andrew Goodinson's top tips for choosing varieties and late lifting, while other features discuss the best approach to take for sprouting control, keeping seed healthy until spring, and managing current issues such as blackgrass and frost.

On top of that, we look at the Government's decision to bring forward new precision breeding technology which could increase UK potato production, reduce costs to growers and allow drought and disease-resistant crops to be grown. This has been largely welcomed by those throughout the potato industry, although there have been a couple of misgivings voiced.

We've got some great machinery introductions covered and will be looking to show videos of some of these on our website if anyone is interested in taking a look. Head to www.britishpotato.co.uk and sign up to our weekly e-letter for alerts.



Stephanie Cornwall
Editor

04 News updates

12 Harvesting demonstrations

14 Seasonal agronomy tips

18 PCN focus

20 Precision breeding

22 Weed control



23 Aphids



24 Storage

28 Seed treatment



30 Fertilisation

34 GB potatoes

36 Legislation

39 Agtech

42 International

48 Machinery

52 Events

53 Appointments



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New collaboration to control and combat



SUPPLIER of fresh, frozen and chilled potatoes, Albert Bartlett, has formed a partnership with Fera Science Ltd in a bid to control aphid numbers and combat viral infection levels in seed potato crops across Scotland.

Turn to page 23 to read more about this project.

CUPGRA conference: Turning problems into opportunities

THE 35th CUPGRA Annual Cambridge Potato Conference will take place on December 10th and 11th at Robinson College.

The theme of the conference is 'Potato Crisis! What Crisis?' and will delve into how members of the potato industry can learn from each other and turn problems into opportunities.

The two-day event, which comprises a conference, lectures, workshop and banquet, is open to all those in potato supply chain. The Eric Allen Memorial Lecture 'Understanding how potatoes grow, determines how to grow potatoes' is open to all, so even those who can't make the conference, can attend this event for free on the first evening.

This year's workshops, held on the Wednesday, are as follows:

1. How to design field trials to answer questions
2. Increasing storage efficiency
3. The challenges for UK seed supply
4. Potato Lite: Updates and learnings into practice
5. PCN – pathotyping understanding varietal characteristics

Those who attend the Potato Barons' Christmas Feast, which takes place in St John's College Dining Hall, will be entertained by after-dinner speaker Judith Batchelar OBE who will reflect on her life's work in retail and how innovation can drive supply chain improvements for all, along with the Gentlemen of London.

BASIS points are available to those who attend the conference. For more details contact admin@cupgra.com.

*For details of more forthcoming events, turn to page 52.



Crisps producer sees 42% sales increase

HAND-COOKED crisps producer Fairfield's Farm has seen a 42% increase in overall sales.

Revealing the statistic at the end of its financial year, the Essex-based company said the Fairfield's Farm brand alone has shown exceptional performance, with growth of 51%.

In the past year the company has expanded its product offerings and production capabilities. This year saw the launch of its new Prawn Cocktail flavour, which has quickly become a consumer favourite and last year's festive special edition, Maple Glazed Ham, which saw outstanding sales during the Christmas season.

A new fryer has also been installed and, once operational, is hoped to boost overall production capacity by up to 90% to meet growing demand and prepare for future expansion.

Among the standout performers in Fairfield's Farm's range this year were the 40g single serve packs, which saw substantial growth, primarily because of expanded distribution in food service and wholesale channels. Fairfield's Farm's bespoke 25g packs available on LNER trains and multiple airlines, have also seen immense success since their launch, according to Co-founder and Managing Director Robert Strathern.

"The significant growth in our sales is a testament to the quality of our products and the hard work of our entire team. We're particularly excited about our new fryer, which positions us perfectly to continue this growth trajectory," he said.



Potato science for a sustainable tomorrow

THE past year has seen many advancements in potato research according to the newly-released annual report by The International Potato Center (CIP).

In the report, entitled 'Future-Focused 2030: Science for a Sustainable Tomorrow', Board Chair Helen Hambly-Odame and General Director Simon Heck say that 2023 was a year of significant milestones for CIP, with key achievements in several areas critical to global food security and sustainability.

In terms of varieties, CIP has made good progress in enhancing genetic diversity to help develop more resilient crop varieties. Its breeding programs successfully introduced several new potato varieties that are more resistant to diseases, pests, and the impacts of climate change, and these are being introduced to smallholder farms in vulnerable regions, the report states.

The report also highlights CIP's role in advancing crop improvement through research in genomics and biotechnology. This has enabled development of potato varieties with enhanced yield potential, reduced input requirements and improved resistance to biotic and abiotic stresses.

The promotion of regenerative growing methods that restore soil health, increase biodiversity and reduce greenhouse gas emissions has also been a key focus over the past year.

CIP's regenerative agriculture initiatives include promoting agroecological practices, such as crop rotation and intercropping, which enhance soil fertility and reduce the need for chemical inputs. These methods are also economically viable for smallholder farmers.

Via targeted capacity-building programs, CIP has provided growers with the tools and knowledge they need to increase productivity and income while helping communities build resilience against challenges posed by climate change and market volatility.

The organisation has also developed storage solutions that reduce food waste and stabilise food supplies.

In the coming year, CIP will be looking to extend these initiatives and forge new partnerships to address the global challenges of food security, climate change, and sustainable development. The report calls for increased research collaboration amongst governments, research institutions and the private sector to ensure findings are used to the benefit of all.



Global chips celebration and competition

A WORLDWIDE celebration of chips and french fries recently took place, attracting participants from Britain, Europe and further afield.

Following the overwhelming success of the first event in October 2023, the second *Championnat du Monde de la Frite* (World French Fries Championships) took place in Arras, Northern France, drawing a crowd of 50,000 people, with chefs and enthusiasts competing to showcase their creations in six different categories.

Potato breeder IPM was amongst those celebrating after its Belami variety was a winner for a team from the the Agro-Environmental Campus. It had been selected by the team because of its taste and flavour characteristics were felt to stand out compared to a range of varieties grown at the agricultural school.

Candidates faced off in six categories: Authentic fries; family fries; creative fries (using an original recipe relating to shape or cooking method); global fries (as eaten in the country of the world they represent); fries of promise (made by hospitality students accompanied by their teacher); and fry sauce of the year (one hot and one cold sauce, made using unprocessed ingredients).

Each candidate prepared 1.5kg of fries or 1.5 litres of sauce in 70 minutes and presented the jury with six small portions in serving trays supplied by the organiser. The jury was made up of professionals and chip lovers with each category winner awarded a trophy and €400 prize.

As well as chips/fries stands, there was a potato sack race.

The area's connection to chips and french fries has been forged since the 16th century when local botanist, Charles de l'Écluse, grew the then little-known plant from Peru in his experimental gardens, hoping to make them popular with European lords. There are now around 1,400 French fry stalls in France and 55% of these can be found in the Hauts-de-France region.

*For our round-up of international events and markets, turn to page 43.

Dutch date for Euro gathering announced

THE date for next year's PotatoEurope, which will take place in the Netherlands, has been announced, as the 2024 event in France came to a close.

PotatoEurope is an international event exclusively dedicated to the entire value chain of potatoes and takes place each year in one of the event's four partner countries. These are the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium and France.

The 2024 French edition of Potato Europe took place in Villers-Saint-Christophe in September. Exhibitors covered an area of 2.5km sq, with grubbing demonstrations taking place in the middle of the grounds. While the majority of the visitors were French, there were international visitors from all continents.

The next edition of PotatoEurope in the Netherlands will be held on September 3rd and 4th 2025 at Wageningen University & Research (WUR), Field crops in Lelystad, The Netherlands. This new location for PotatoEurope is situated in the heart of one of the main potato-growing regions of the Netherlands and close to World Potato City Emmeloord.

Registration is now open.

Organiser DLG Benelux, part of DLG International, is a non-profit organisation based in Frankfurt, Germany. It organised the recent 'Potato Days' machinery demonstrations in Lincolnshire in the UK.

Former DEFRA Secretary of State working with potato research



FORMER Secretary of State at DEFRA, George Eustice, is now working with the senior management team at Emerald Research as a Board Advisor on policy and regulatory affairs in the environment, agri-food and natural capital sectors.

Simon Fox, MD at the company which carries out trial work and owns the OptiYield® brand, said George's background will align well with ERL's work. Emerald looks at ways of improving potato crop yields and reliability while reducing environmental impacts and inputs of fertiliser and pesticides. ERL's OptiYield soil analysis test programme provides detailed findings of the soil's ability

to deliver necessary nutrient conditions for optimum crop establishment, growth and yield.

George has a wealth of knowledge and experience of the legislative process and the importance of balancing food security, maximising yield and the environment

George said: "Improving the precision of nutrient inputs to crops and combining these inputs with microbials and biological stimulants to enhance the efficiency of uptake is going play an important role in reducing nitrogen use and improving farm profitability. Emerald Research have developed some ground-breaking products that have a proven track record in the potato sector and I am delighted to be joining the team."

While in office, George developed the future farming policy that supported growers to improve soil health. Since leaving government two years ago, he has been developing his own business, Penbroath Ltd, and is involved in projects as diverse as supporting methane capture from farms to natural capital markets.

Simon said: "His experience and knowledge will help ERL to improve and focus while navigating the ever-changing regulatory landscape."

● For details of more new appointments, turn to page 50.

Cancer support

THE Farming Community Network (FCN) is working in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support to raise awareness of cancer risks, signs and symptoms, and to encourage early detection, on the basis that growers and farm workers frequently have lower access to cancer services and support. For more information, visit fcn.org.uk/cancersupport

Produce discovery opportunity

POTATO producers and distributors have an opportunity to showcase their products to potential buyers within retail, wholesale, import, export and hospitality sectors. The Fresh Produce Consortium (FPC) will be hosting the Fresh Produce Section at the forthcoming International Food and Drink Event (IFE) ExCel London from March 17th to 19th and is inviting interested parties to get in touch.

NEXT GENERATION

GRIMME SELECT 200

2 Row Trailed Harvester

The GRIMME SELECT 200 really impresses with advanced new features including Active Steering, longer main web with increased sieving capacity and infinitely variable web speeds with reversible VarioDrive. A huge choice of separation systems is possible with combinations of TurboSep, double MultiSep and Vario-RS MultiSep. A transport width that's less than 3 metres is achieved thanks to the NEW sliding axle.



BOTH OF THESE HARVESTERS ARE AVAILABLE FOR DEMO THIS SEASON.



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Spud Man shares recipes in new book



SOCIAL media sensation Ben Newman, aka Spud Man, has launched his first book of potato recipes.

Ben is known for turning the the baked potato into an artform, with customers travelling from across the world to taste the baked potato dishes he serves from his cart in his home town of Tamworth.

With his lavish pink Mohican and cheery personality, he adopted the business name of Spud Man and regularly posts videos on TikTok (@Spudman) where he's built up a huge list of followers. He lives with his wife, Sarah, who he's fondly nicknamed SpudWife, and their nine kids.

Ben has also been awarded Freedom of the Town in Tamworth, in recognition of his entrepreneurship, innovation, and courage.

His newly-released Baked Potato Cookbook features 40 recipes for baked potato combos and various spin-off dishes. Recipes include: Lebanese chicken shawarma, the currywurst jacket, chorizo shakshuka, pizza loaded potato skins, poutine-style cheesy spuds and many more.

The book has been published by Harper Collins and is also available in e-book and audio versions.

Potato supplier and insight companies win FPC titles

ALBERT Bartlett has won The Sustainability Excellence Supply Chain Award in the 2024 Fresh Produce Awards, after judges decided its collaborative practices, managing and monitoring made it a worthy winner.

Judges praised the potato supplier for making changes to achieve its sustainability targets, whilst overcoming complexity and challenges.

"Employees throughout the business have shown a real commitment to reducing the company's environmental impact at every step of the supply chain in order to hit bold science-based targets," they said.

HarvestEye was named the winner of the Agritech Excellence Award for its data insight technology used for crop profiling in the potato market.

The tool provides growers with critical information on crop size, count, and weight.

Judges described it as 'an advanced agritech solution that cleverly allows growers to size crops and mitigate over or under supply in good time'.

"The small team at HarvestEye is working very closely with customers to maximise the exciting potential of this recently upgraded, user-friendly tool," they said.



The Albert Bartlett and HarvestEye teams receiving their awards.



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GRIMME VARITRON 470 – UK SPEC NOW INCLUDES A PICKING OFF TABLE OPTION.



Potato-focussed open days on the increase

23 growers now participating in awareness-raiser while more are urged to join.

THE number of potato growers taking part in 'Open Farm Sunday' is ever-increasing, according to organiser LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming).

This year, 20 farms took part who stated that part of their main farm enterprise is growing potatoes.

These included Trembothick Farm, Cornwall; Cockle Park Farm, Northumberland; Nafferton Farm, Northumberland; Pigsty Farm, Isle of Wight; Stack Field Farm, Cornwall; Canalside Community Food, Warwickshire; Lower Stanway, Shropshire; Old Cullen Farms, Aberdeenshire; Scobbiscombe Farm, Devon; Rice Lane City Farm, Merseyside; Handley Farm, Derbyshire; Overton Farm, Lanarkshire; O.W.Wortley & Sons LTD, Norfolk; Henfaes, Gwynedd; Susan's Farm, Cumbria; Pond Farm, Suffolk; The Jersey Royal Company, Jersey; Bells Farm, Worcestershire; Home Farm – Attingham, Shropshire; Dyson Farming – Nocton, Lincolnshire.

Three additional farms also showcased growing potatoes as part of their OFS event. One of these, Michael Sly at MHS Farms, Thorney, in Cambridgeshire, showcased a vintage tractor turned the soil on a potato plot where visitors were able to 'pick their own' potatoes in return for a donation to charity.

"This year was our 17th open farm and vintage weekend, where we welcomed 12,237 visitors and, more importantly, our 100,000th visitor from when we started," said Michael.

Michael has participated since the first ever Open Farm Sunday in 2006.

He said: "Open Farm Sunday has always been a highlight for us. The enthusiasm and curiosity from visitors, both young and old, affirm the importance of these interactions in fostering a better understanding of farming and food production."

"The enthusiasm and curiosity from visitors, both young and old, affirm the importance of these interactions in fostering a better understanding of farming and food production."

Michael Sly, MHS Farms

Solsgirth Home Farm, Clackmannanshire and Gressenhall Union Farm, Norfolk also demonstrated potato growing on the day.

Visitor numbers for the 23 farms totalled 30,400 visitors. This represented around 17% of Open Farm Sunday's total visitor figure of 180,000.

LEAF Chief Executive, David Webster, said: "Open Farm Sunday is always such a positive and celebratory moment in the farming calendar and this year we were substantially helped by a rare day of glorious summer weather."

He said those who took part had made a valuable contribution to educating the public about the origins of their food and showing how growers are connecting with nature, while encouraging others to follow suit next year.

"The increase in visitor numbers to Open Farm Sunday events and uplift in consumer media engagement this year underscores the public's genuine interest in sustainable farming and desire to form deeper connections with farm businesses in their local community. It really is such a positive day for everyone involved."

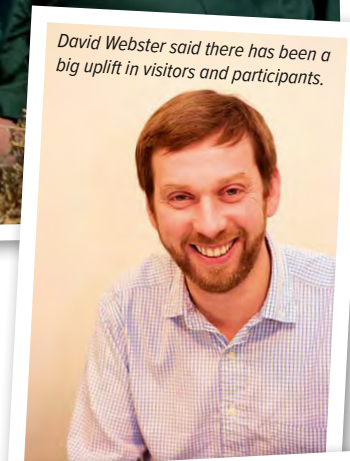
The NFU is a big supporter of Open Farm Sunday and offers incentives for taking part.

The next Open Farm Sunday is set to be held on June 8th. Once registered, a range of free resources is available from LEAF for host growers, including a handbook, activity crib sheets, regular Zoom meetings, template guides for risk assessments and writing a press release, and guidance on using an online ticketing service to manage visitor numbers.

For more information about getting involved in Open Farm Sunday, please email openfarmsunday@leaf.eco.



Michael Sly has participated since the first ever Open Farm Sunday in 2006.



David Webster said there has been a big uplift in visitors and participants.



Home Farm at Attingham in Shropshire was one of the potato-growing farms taking part in 2024.

MHS Farms, Thorney, in Cambridgeshire, showcased a vintage tractor turning the soil on a potato plot where visitors were able to 'pick their own' potatoes in return for a donation to charity. Photo: NFU



Monitoring and caution following resistant strain discovery

THE UK's first case of the EU_46_A1 blight strain found in Lampeter, Wales, has come almost a year after a similar discovery was made in County Carlow in Ireland.

The strain of late blight has multiple resistance to fungicides and the latest finding was detected in a sample collected in the Ceredigion area. It has demonstrated resistance to both the CAA group of fungicides, including mandipropamid, and the OSBPI group that currently consists of oxathiapiprolin.

Independent monitoring by the Fight Against Blight initiative confirmed the finding and DNA analysis of the sample has been undertaken by the James Hutton Institute to investigate whether it will express any resistance to both CAA and OSBPI fungicides. The gene regions determining resistance to the CAA and OXTP resistance have been amplified and sequenced. The sample was matched with other EU46 samples from continental Europe.

In the sample, DNA mutations were present that have been linked to Oxathiapiprolin resistance.

Genetic expression is recessive in CAAs, meaning a homozygous state is needed to confer resistance. The relevant single DNA mutation was found in the heterozygous state of the Lampeter sample, proven to bring about a sensitive reaction to the fungicide Mandipropamid (CAA group of fungicides).

No further instances have currently been found in the UK and the Ceredigion sample was found at a remote ADAS trial site, with little commercial production nearby. The site will be monitored throughout the winter and any volunteers are to be carefully managed to limit any further spread.

Diner-inspired new crisps flavours

CRISPS brand McCoys has a new Epic Eats line inspired by American diners and food stalls. The new Grilled Cheese and Flamin' Fajita flavours are now available throughout the UK.



MPs at opening of research centre

UK Secretary of State for Scotland, the Rt Hon Ian Murray, and First Minister John Swinney attended the official opening of a research centre which will look at different ways to future-proof potato crop production.

The new Crop Innovation Centre (CIC), part of a £62m investment funded by UK and Scottish Governments through the Tay Cities Region Deal, is located at the James Hutton Institute in Invergowrie.

Incorporating the Advanced Plant Growth Centre (APGC), it is powered by the high-performance data 'computer farm' which is the second largest in Scotland and offers a combination of crop and data science, state-of-the-art facilities and technological and digital innovation.



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Is over-protection of consumers bad news for breeders?

‘Future glycoalkaloid legislation must not detract from breeding, say European breeders while awaiting results of current testing programme.

WITH an EU-mandated testing programme still underway into glycoalkaloids, the toxins produced naturally by potato plants as their defence against pests and disease, new European legislation regarding acceptable levels is likely to be announced next year.

At the same time, European potato breeders are warning that any proposed changes must not discount the benefits glycoalkaloids can bring or detract from essential breeding programmes.

In a recent interview with *Snacks* magazine, Europatat’s Technical Affairs Director Roman Vorss said: “We have to be aware that there are also benefits from glycoalkaloids and that when you increase the restrictions on glycoalkaloid content, you make it harder to improve the performance of the varieties on other critical sustainability criteria.

“There is already a lot of public and private monitoring taking place regarding glycoalkaloids in potatoes. Shouldn’t we then avoid an unnecessary additional burden for the breeders and allow them to focus on existential threats to potato production, such as late blight, wireworm, Stobur, drought etc?”

Glycoalkaloids occur in all parts of a potato plant. The highest glycoalkaloid levels are found in flowers and sprouts while the lowest is in potato tubers. The total glycoalkaloid content of commercial cultivars of tubers is believed to vary between 10 and 150 mg/kg fresh weight.

While levels of glycoalkaloids in commercial potato varieties are unlikely to cause adverse health effects, improper storage or damage to the tubers can lead to rapid production of glycoalkaloids. The increased glycoalkaloid content cannot be significantly reduced by cooking because glycoalkaloids are heat stable and only begin to break down between 230degC and 280degC.

Excessive glycoalkaloid consumption can cause vomiting, diarrhoea, headaches and paralysis of the central nervous system, although incidents of such poisoning from potatoes has been rare and there have been no recorded fatalities for at least half a century.

The testing programme was prompted when a German family were poisoned in 2015. They developed tongue numbness and a burning sensation in their mouths immediately after eating cooked potatoes prepared at home.



The European Commission asked the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) for a scientific opinion on the risks for animal and human health related to the presence of glycoalkaloids (GAs) in feed and food in 2020. In humans, no evidence of health problems associated with repeated or long-term intake of GAs via potatoes was identified and no reference point for chronic exposure could be identified from the experimental animal studies.

Nevertheless, in 2022 The EU Commission recommended the monitoring of glycoalkaloids in potato and potato products and the identification of the factors resulting in their high levels, and to gather more information on the effects of processing on the level of glycoalkaloids.

Good agricultural practices, storage, transport and manufacturing methods have been identified as having the ability to reduce glycoalkaloids in potatoes and processed potato products.

FACTFILE

- Glycoalkaloids are a group of nitrogen-containing compounds which are naturally produced by Solanaceae plant family, including potatoes, tomatoes and aubergines.
- The main role of glycoalkaloids are to protect plants against pest attacks and pathogens.
- Potatoes contain the glycoalkaloids α -chaconine and α -solanine.
- Mechanical damage, blighting, sprouting, processing and the storage conditions of a potato can lead to increased levels of α -chaconine and α -solanine.
- Since glycoalkaloid, notably solanine, levels are thought to be higher in green, damaged or sprouting areas of the potato, current FSA advice is to remove these areas before consuming.

“There is already a lot of public and private monitoring taking place regarding glycoalkaloids in potatoes. Shouldn’t we then avoid an unnecessary additional burden for the breeders and allow them to focus on existential threats to potato production, such as late blight, wireworm, Stobur, drought etc?”

Roman Vorss, Technical Affairs Director, Europatat



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Four-fold harvesting

Manufacturers come together to demonstrate machines in field display.

SIX top-of-the-range potato harvesters from manufacturers AVR, Dewulf, Grimme and Standen came to one site to provide a close-up view of action as they tackled 12Ha of specially-grown crops at Dyson Farming's Nocton Farm in Lincolnshire.

The live harvesting demonstrations were part of a 'Potato Days' event held over two days at the beginning of September, and provided a rare opportunity for visitors to watch all the machines in action on one site.

Dyson Farming, which produces 15,000t potatoes per year, along with other crops, provided a field area of around 22Ha, which had previously been used for wheat and maize, to be planted out in May ready for the harvesting demonstration. The ground had been prepared using a Väderstad Top Down high-intensity multipurpose cultivator, bed-formed using a Grimme GF bedformer and destoned using a ScanStone five-webber destoner.

It had then been planted out using a Grimme GB330 belt planter.

The potato harvesters that were demonstrated included: AVR Puma 4.0 (four-row self-propelled with bunker); Dewulf Kwatro Extreme (four-row self-propelled with bunker); Dewulf Enduro (four-row self-propelled with bunker); Grimme Varitron 470 (four-row self-propelled with bunker); Grimme Select 200 (two-row trailed without bunker – constant overloading); Standen T2XS (two-row trailed without bunker – constant overloading).

Chair of GB Potatoes, Mark Taylor, who attended the event, said afterwards: "This is the first time in over 20 years that British farmers and growers have had the opportunity to see a field days event like this and watch different machines in action."

Event Director Greg Smith said the yield from the specially-planted area had been good.

He said: "Potato Days UK is a field event through and through."

As well as the potato harvesting demonstrations, potato handling lines from AVR, Dewulf and Downs showed the newly-harvested crop being cleaned, sorted and loaded then leaving the field for processing by McCain.

In addition to the machinery demonstrations, 10 specially-made crop trial plots enabled visitors to see new potato varieties, agronomy and the latest technology for sustainable potato production.

Dan Hewitt, UK Manager for global brand Restrain, said: "A huge amount of work goes into these plots and we were able to show excellent results."

Andrew Howesman of Howesman Agriculture added it had been a good opportunity to showcase drip irrigation in the field, adding: "It generated lots of interest."

HARVESTING DEMONSTRATIONS



The organiser's Expert Stage featured 25 speakers, including industry leaders, academics and researchers, who spoke about machinery, automation and AI, net zero, water and the impact of policy on sustainable production.

The event was organised by DLG (German Agricultural Society) whose headquarters are in Frankfurt, Germany. It is the organiser of Potato Europe which takes place in one of four countries - Germany, the Netherlands, France and Belgium - each year. It hopes to hold another Potato Days UK event in

September 2026, the year after the British Potato Industry Event, which will take place in November alongside the British Potato Industry Awards, in Harrogate.

Turn to page 48 for the latest machinery news. **PR**

"Potato Days UK is a field event through and through."

Full details of the British Potato Industry Event 2025 can be found at <https://www.britishpotato.co.uk/industry-event/visitors/>

Details of other forthcoming events can be found at <https://www.britishpotato.co.uk/industry-diary/>

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SEASONAL TIPS

Treat the variety as a critical input for maximising profit margins.

Choosing your variety

Andrew Goodinson offers top tips for choosing varieties, preparations for late lifting and reflects on the 2024 potato growing season so far.

When it comes to varietal choice, building dialogue and relationships with both the customer and the seed grower can make a big difference to outcomes, advises Andrew.

This can help overcome the disconnection between growing for a specific market with the agronomic and physical options available to the grower, and, in the case of pre-pack potatoes, the market which is dominated by a few varieties that supermarkets prefer.

“The range of potentially suitable varieties for the pre-pack sector is huge, but in Britain we tend to be limited to growing the same few because of their visual and culinary attributes, rather than using varieties with agronomic and environmental benefits,” Andrew said.

Therefore, work still needs to be done to continue to develop varieties with tolerance and resistance to soil-borne, and foliar pests and diseases, he advised.

“We need to look harder at genetics to find new varieties with tolerance to viruses such

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 17 years and looks after 8,000 ha of farmland, including the Welsh borders, south Shropshire and Worcester. Most of the potato crops he looks after are destined for the crisping or processing markets.



as Potato Leaf Roll Virus (PLRV), which is a persistent virus transmitted by aphids. We also need varieties with tolerance and resistance to pests such as potato cyst nematodes (PCN) and free-living nematodes (FLN).

“The amount of land infested with PCN and/or FLN is increasing, so varietal tolerance and resistance to this is becoming critical. This is even more important in years where crops are planted in less than ideal soil conditions leading to crops not having the root system or biomass to reduce the effect of the pests.”

He draws a comparison between old fashioned large biomass wheat varieties and current semi-dwarf wheats which have smaller roots and less biomass, making them more vulnerable to diseases such as Take-all.

This is because bigger roots are better able to scavenge for nutrients, to help it reach its potential.

Some processors are encouraging their growers to plant particular varieties such as French frying variety King Russet which can be planted earlier, lifted earlier, and are resistant to some strains of PCN genotype *Globodera pallida* compared with other varieties in the sector.



The sector is moving away from on-planter powder dressings, and towards liquid applications, which must be applied on a roller table unit on a grading line.

“If you build links with the seed grower, it is easier to choose the seed that meets the growers’ specifications, plus it provides an opportunity to talk about seed treatments and whether they can be applied before transport.”

There are promising new varieties in the pre-pack sector too, such as early maincrop varieties such as Manhattan and Isabela, and others, he adds.

“New varieties are the future for our industry and some of their traits could help improve grower profitability.”

Convincing growers

Processors appear to be well aware of the agronomic challenges being faced and how growers need to address them and also the need to work towards a lower carbon footprint, he notes.

“We need more discussions between the growers, buyers and the marketers in the fresh sector. At present, packaging information on packs of potatoes is lower than for many other food products on the supermarket shelves.

“Bringing awareness of the potential advantages of other, new varieties with agronomic qualities such as disease resistance and the need to use fewer plant protection products, and therefore helping growers build better conservation practices, should be promoted at the point of sale.” →

King Russet tubers also have more eyes per tuber, meaning that they can potentially be cut in half in a similar way to Shepody which increases seed efficiency.

Another of the newer varieties tipped to become popular is Elland, which has potential to be a dual purpose potato suitable for both processing and pre-pack markets.

“It looks a promising, versatile variety,” said Andrew, noting that the variety has both resistance and tolerance to G. pallida. “Other varieties are also coming forward with these characteristics, too, which will widen the growers’ choice.”

Storage remains an important aspect of the industry, and with high energy costs alongside the need to reduce the carbon footprint, long dormancy has become another important trait.

“However, until now, there have been challenges with some crisping varieties, for example Lady Claire has excellent long term storage characteristics, but has a shorter growing season than other varieties. Newer varieties are being grown to address this challenge, such as the likes of Titan and Cinderella, which are higher yielding but do not have the same long-term storage traits.”

“We need more discussions between the growers, buyers and the marketers in the fresh sector. At present, packaging information on packs of potatoes is lower than for many other food products on the supermarket shelves.”

Desiccation disrupts the water supply within the plant, causing it to dry out and die.



Getting the most from your seed

Andrew recommends visiting the seed supplier/producer to view the crop in-field or in-store.

“If you build links with the seed grower, it is easier to choose the seed that meets the growers’ specifications, plus it provides an opportunity to talk about seed treatments and whether they can be applied before transport,” he said.

The sector is moving away from on-planter powder dressings, and towards liquid applications, which must be applied on a roller table unit on a grading line.

“This is a positive step because even with seed powder applicators, their use is still an imprecise science and the powder is prone to blowing across the field in the wind and can stick to equipment and operators.”

Liquid applications can be done at the seed source or on arrival at the farm, he says.

“Liquid seed treatment is a more accurate way of protecting the seed, but it needs managing. For example, the treatment needs to dry before moving the seed back into store. However, it should be noted that increased handling of the seed can result in bruising or sprouts being knocked off if due care is not taken.

“Also, some products need to be applied before chitting or to dormant tuber, so always apply before dormancy break.”

Tips for Variety Choice

- Consider the attributes and traits demanded by the end market
- Gross margin of the crop
- Assess the variety’s suitability for the particular farm, altitude and aspect of the field which can impact on crop potential
- Assess the variety’s suitability for the pest and disease profile of the land to be used
- Treat the variety as a critical input for maximising profit margins

Lifting greencrop has resulted in some good yields with higher-than-normal dry matter (DM) levels so great care has had to be taken at harvesting to avoid bruising.



“Airflow takes the path of least resistance, so boxes need to be properly stacked with the pallet openings aligned to the airflow, and boxes stacked to the same height to ensure the air passes through the boxes and not over or around them.”

Preparing for late lifting

If conditions are wet at lifting, ventilation becomes key for drying tubers and preventing the development of rots, says Andrew.

“Airflow takes the path of least resistance, so boxes need to be properly stacked with the pallet openings aligned to the airflow, and boxes stacked to the same height to ensure the air passes through the boxes and not over or around them.”

If cooling needs to be done for ware crops, Andrew recommends ensuring the air temperature should be within 3-4 deg.C of the crop temperature, and should not be reduced by more than half a degree per day.

Temperature monitoring to avoid condensation is critical too, he adds. “This needs to be consistent throughout the store, and variations should be less than 1 deg.C.”

Drying is normally more important than cooling, he notes, but where there is a risk of black dot or silver scurf in ware, temperatures may be brought down sooner, however this depends on the individual situation.

Where curing needs to be done, the temperature should be maintained at 10 deg.C for four to five days.

“Lifting greencrop has resulted in some good yields with higher-than-normal dry matter (DM) levels. As a result, harvesting team staff had to take great care to avoid bruising.”



Reflections on the 2024 season

CONSIDERING the long, wet, warm winter and the cool, late spring, there have been many cases of first fields being planted in less-than-ideal soil conditions.

Nevertheless, the crops grew away and although some ran out of steam where the soil had been too wet and had smeared, they still yielded better than those that were planted later, which struggled to make average yields, said Andrew.

“There was plenty of moisture and the early planted crop canopies developed reasonably well, whereas mid-planted ones suffered from insufficient light intensity and the canopies did not close across the rows.”

At the end of June, some crops were infected with aggressive late blight genotype 36_A2.

“By the end of July, it had gone from very wet to dry, with soils hardening and air temperatures of 26-27 deg.C, which dried the blight better than the fungicides, but it slowed crop development too.”

Nonetheless, with seed that was physiologically less mature than that used in

2023, plants appeared to set more tubers than last year, which increased the yield potential of crops. Varieties with the potential of higher tuber numbers are in trials this year.

“We also observed where we were applying foliar crop nutrition during early growth helped with both yield and longevity rather than fire-fighting crop deficiencies later in the season,” Andrew said.

He added that where growers placed fertiliser at planting, this worked well because the developing roots quickly obtain access to the nutrients, helping emergence and vigour.

“A lot of tissue testing identified samples to be low in P, even though the nutrient was present in the soil; in many cases boron was also low. However, N levels were optimal.”

With regard to pest and disease incidence over the season, he points out that using systemic blight-control actives at the rapid canopy phase, helped keep inoculum down throughout the season.

He also reports cases of confusion between outbreaks of *Botrytis* and *Alternaria*.

“Lifting greencrop has resulted in some good yields with higher-than-normal dry matter (DM) levels. As a result, harvesting team staff have had to take great care to avoid bruising.”

Motivating staff

Bringing all the staff together to discuss the farm's aims, and why they operate in a particular way, can help improve teamwork, says Andrew.

“It is also a good idea to ask machinery suppliers to come to the farm for half-day workshops where they talk to staff and explain how to maximise machinery efficiency.”

This can involve learning about getting the most from tractors, but other topics are of interest too, such as how spray nozzles and closed transfer systems work.

In addition, training can motivate and engage employees because it builds understanding of what they are doing and where their work fits in, he notes.

“The better informed your staff, the better equipped they are to enhance the efficiency of their work.” **PR**

Agrii's Don Pendergrast (far left) talks through the treatment combinations in the PCN treatments trial.



PROGRESS ON PCN

Preliminary findings from Potato Partnership's latest trials reveal strong data on measures taken to combat pest's effects.

FIELD trials by the Potato Partnership have identified new treatments with the potential to improve control of a range of pest threats, notably potato cyst nematodes.

The Potato Partnership is a collaborative project involving research-backed agronomy service Agrii, independent agronomist Graham Tomalin, James Wrinch, Managing Director and Agronomist at East Suffolk Produce, and growers James Foscett Farms and Matt Gregory.

The partnership benefits from market development trials performed by Agrii on behalf of manufacturers while sponsorship from other interested partners such as seed breeders/houses and CUPGRA means the trials can be expanded to include novel methods and treatments outside the scope of a standard trial.

Preliminary findings borne from regular crop inspections suggest this year's trials will build on the success of previous years, with an especially strong set of data. For PCN specifically, the trials have identified new varieties and products showing potential.

Wetter improves performance

One of the most rewarding discoveries has been the performance gain seen with Bayer's product, Velum Prime (fluopyram), from the inclusion of SP058, a silicone-based wetter.

The better control delivered by Velum Prime + SP058 in sequence with half-rate Nemathorin

(fosthiazate) has been demonstrated in previous years and was seen again in 2024 with observations suggesting the combination has outperformed full-rate Nemathorin alone.

Agrii Technical Manager Don Pendergrast said it was the third year that the inclusion of SP058 had supported the yield protection of Velum Prime.

"We believe this has been achieved by retaining the product in the topsoil portion for that bit longer. The benefit is seen in higher gross yield and more tubers per hectare. Although not significant, the gain is welcome," he said.

Varieties focus

Varieties with good resistance (primarily to *Globodera pallida*) and tolerance are widely regarded as the most effective means of overcoming the challenge posed by PCN. Unfortunately, such varieties are rare and may not be commercially viable or fail to possess the characteristics desired by the multiple retailers, processors and chippers. In most cases, nematicides are an essential means of protecting yields.

Much of the focus is on identifying and assessing new varieties in comparison with current market standards, Graham explained.

"There are some with evident appeal but understanding how to get the best from them is a central theme of these trials. The better we know a variety and its limitations, the better we can manage it," he said.



James Wrinch of East Suffolk Produce encouraged more growers to identify both the PCN species and pathotype infesting their land.

The new varieties in trial cover all market segments and several have attracted attention although more end-market assessment will be needed before they are promoted to growers. In contrast, others have clearly defined end-markets.

"We have several French-bred salad types in the demonstration plots that we like the look of, but while they claim PCN resistance, they clearly have no tolerance. It is also clear that were it not for the PCN they would still be going well past the 84-98 days we see as the desired growing duration, so this has been a useful insight to see what these varieties might offer and where they fit," James told attendees at the August trials tour.

“The insight into varietal resistance is highly valuable knowledge. We are seeing differences at several levels, be it length of growing season and determinacy group through to PCN resistance and tolerance and site suitability. All of which is valuable to ensure successful commercial production,” he added.

Gathering data of this nature will undoubtedly help support more informed decisions but it is of limited value if the grower has not developed a clear understanding of the pest situation on their farm or the land they rent.

“We’re moving to a point where we will have data at the pathotype level, which is exactly the type of granular detail we need to inform cropping choices, but there are still growers who don’t test their land for PCN ahead of planting let alone post-crop when it provides the greatest value. We need growers to take greater ownership of the challenges we face if we are to make the strides needed to record progress,” James said.

Yield protection combinations

Among the PCN trials are a range of treatments intent on identifying those products that deliver the greatest yield protection in combination with established products such as Velum Prime and Nemathorin. Crop foliage ground cover assessments suggest several biological products may have the potential to make a meaningful contribution to control, explained Don.

“One of the novel treatments we have in trial is a synthesised peptide product that has shown good activity against FLN in other regions. Our observations so far suggest moderate activity (against PCN), but it appears to be a nemastatic, rather than a true nematicide. Nonetheless, this is a useful addition to the available means of control and will have a place as part of an integrated suite of actions,” Don said.

Graham Tomalin of VCS Potatoes described the varieties in the PCN variety trial.



Also in trial is a plant extract based on soap bark that is currently unauthorised. Initial assessments suggest it has true nematocidal activity, but the extent of its potential is still to be determined.

“Both the peptide and plant extract are being investigated in combination or sequence with other treatments which is perhaps where their value lies,” Don said.

The 2024 trials have sought to build on this understanding through the addition of other elements.

“We have seen that half-rate Nemathorin in sequence with Velum Prime has outperformed the majority of treatments. The best performance appears to have come from Velum Prime + the plant extract applied as a surface spray and incorporated ahead of planting with half-rate Nemathorin applied in-furrow. This was then followed by three applications of a synthesised peptide with the first at plant emergence and then every two weeks thereafter,” Don said.

Aphid-borne viruses

In addition to PCN, TPP has trials investigating how crops might be better protected from the threat posed by aphid-borne viruses. There is good evidence to support the benefits of straw mulch but concern over the possible introduction of weed seeds, especially black-grass, means growers are often reluctant to adopt this tactic. For this reason, the TPP trial is focussed on exploring the potential of companion crops.

“We had success with oats as a companion crop last year, especially in reducing the incidence of non-persistent viruses such as PVY, so we hope to build on this result,” Graham said.

“We also have a trial investigating the merits of a soil-applied blue dye. We know virus transmission occurs during the critical rosette stage, so the theory is that the use of a blue dye will make it difficult for the aphids to identify the young plants against the background of the soil,” he added.

In 2023, weekly applications of mineral oil and oats as a companion crop both achieved a similar reduction in the incidence of PVY compared with the untreated. It remains to be seen whether the conditions this season will result in a different outcome. There are also two as-yet unapproved insecticides in trial, which along with the data gathered on mineral oils, will be of value in future seasons.

“These products will be valued by growers given the resistance to lambda-cyhalothrin and the risk of resistance to acetamiprid among the Peach-potato aphid (*Myzus persicae*) population along with the restrictions on Teppeki (flonicamid) in ware crops and Movento (spirotetramat) in flowering varieties all of which means there is a clear gap in efforts to protect crops,” Graham said. PR

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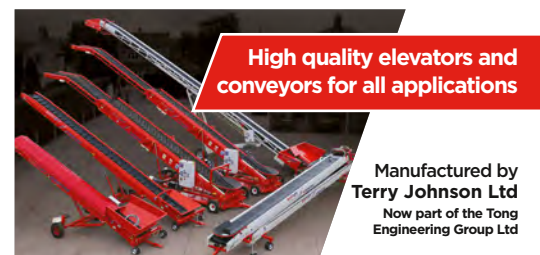
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Fast-tracking breeding tech

Defra announcement welcomed as a boost for potato production.

NEW precision breeding technology which could increase UK potato production, reduce costs to growers and allow drought and disease-resistant crops to be grown will be brought forward under new laws, the Government has announced.

A recent announcement by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) stated: "Using technologies like gene editing on plants, precision breeding will enable the development of crops that are more nutritious, resistant to pests and disease, resilient to climate change and more beneficial to the environment.

"The measures will also reduce the use of pesticides, saving the important pollinators that are so vital to our ecosystem and promoting nature recovery. Additional benefits include boosting investment into the sector, supporting Britain's food security, increasing food production and reducing costs for farmers."

At the World Agri-Tech Innovation Summit in London, Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs Daniel Zeichner announced that the government will pass secondary legislation required to unlock the benefits of the Precision Breeding Act as soon as parliamentary time allows.

The legislation will enable precision-bred potatoes to be rolled out across the country and, Defra claims, enable the UK to become a world-leader in agri-food innovation. To date,

the complex authorisation process required to bring a new product to market, has been difficult for many to navigate and the new legislation will simplify the process, making it more accessible for SMEs and boosting investment, it stated.

"To meet rising challenges in our food system and the environment, further innovation is needed, and precision breeding has the potential to add significant additional value," the statement reveals, adding: "The UK has a thriving science and research sector and by creating an enabling regulatory environment, the government will support investment in precision breeding to ensure our leading scientists and breeders can continue to develop this exciting technology."

Farming Minister Daniel Zeichner said the Government recognises that food security is national security. "That is why today we are introducing legislation to unlock precision breeding to boost Britain's food security, support nature's recovery and protect farmers from climate shocks," he said. "With these measures, our agriculture sector will be at the forefront of innovation across the world."

The Government has said it will go further to restore stability and confidence in the sector, by preventing growers from being undercut in trade deals, making the supply chain work more fairly and preventing shock rises in bills by switching on GB Energy. It is also looking at implementing a new Flood Resilience Taskforce and using the Government's own purchasing power to back British produce.

"Significant opportunities"

The announcement has been welcomed by many in the potato sector, and agriculture generally.

Dr Rob Hancock, Deputy Director of the Advanced Plant Growth Centre at the James Hutton Institute said: "Gene editing and other precision breeding technologies offer unprecedented opportunities to develop crops which are easier to grow, more climate positive, require less use of biocides and fertilisers and potentially more economically viable.

"For example, many potatoes are rejected owing to discolouration or by consumers who are opting for faster cooking alternatives such as rice and pasta. For the industry to survive and grow, we are needing to develop traits which allow potato to thrive in a changing climate but which can be cooked in a way that makes them more appealing to the consumer.

"At the Hutton, we are leading a project called TuberGene, together with B-hive and Branston Ltd, which is using gene editing to explore reducing bruising-related discoloration in potato as well as their ability to cook quicker. It's a project that targets commercially-significant consumer traits but can be equally targeted to resilience traits allowing future potato cultivars to thrive in a changing climate.

"As crops bred through precision breeding are indistinguishable from crops bred conventionally, it will be up to the consumer to weigh up the merit of these different approaches and we will provide the science to help with those decisions."

TuberGene is a ground-breaking initiative funded by UKRI's National Engineering Biology Programme, which is helping to leverage cutting-edge gene editing to address critical challenges in the UK potato industry, such as reducing bruising-related discoloration and improving cooking times. The consortium includes B-hive Innovations Ltd, Branston Ltd and James Hutton Institute.

CEO of B-hive Innovations, Vidyant Gururajan, said: "With the UK potato sector producing around five million tonnes annually, our goal is to enhance potato quality, reduce waste, and meet evolving consumer preferences."

He added: "We at B-hive believe that the precision breeding act will open significant opportunities to use gene editing as a key to unlock precision breeding in crops."

CEO of Branston Ltd, Jim Windle, said too often, consumers don't fully understand what precision breeding involves.

"When talking about 'precision breeding' you need to be exactly that, precise. There is a danger otherwise that the UK consumer can mistake the terminology with more controversial food modification techniques such as genetic modification," he said. "Gene editing and genetic modification are essentially at two opposite ends of the spectrum and should be treated as such."

"At Branston we are very excited about the possibility of using gene editing to breed more consumer-centric traits into future potato varieties."

The NFU was one of the signatories on an open statement of support of the bill, which was published by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Science and Technology in Agriculture ahead of the Bill's second reading on 21 November 2022.

NFU Vice President Rachel Hallo said the NFU was "delighted" with the announcement, adding that the potential benefits of biotechnology in growing and food are significant.

She said: "Companies do need the legal certainty of fit-for-purpose legislation to invest in breeding solutions for British farming, environment and society. We want to see companies developing products that address the specific challenges and opportunities in the UK, whether it's improving resource efficiency, resilience to climate change or tastier, more nutritious foods."

While precision breeding is not a silver bullet, genetic improvement is a vital tool that can help achieve net zero goals by enhancing crop productivity, she said.

Reticence from environmental groups

While others have welcomed the Defra announcement, the Soil Association and



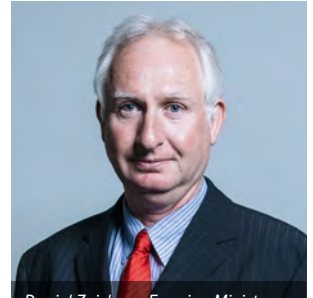
Rachel Hallo, Vice President, NFU.

"Companies do need the legal certainty of fit-for-purpose legislation to invest in breeding solutions."



Jim Windle, CEO of Branston Ltd.

"We are very excited about the possibility of using gene editing to breed more consumer-centric traits into future potato varieties."



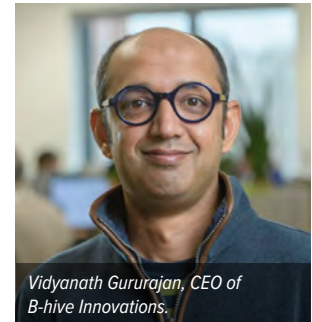
Daniel Zeichner, Farming Minister.

"With these measures, our agriculture sector will be at the forefront of innovation across the world."



Brendan Costelloe, Director of Policy, the Soil Association.

"It is vital to both consumer confidence and the organic sector that the right statutory instruments are now put in place to ensure full transparency of PBOs."



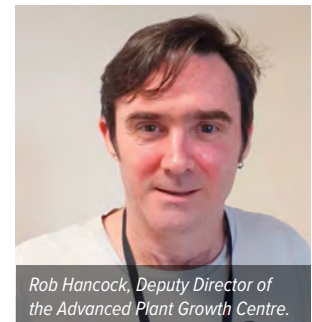
Vidyant Gururajan, CEO of B-hive Innovations.

"The precision breeding act will open significant opportunities to use gene editing as a key to unlock precision breeding in crops."



Roger Kerr, Chief Executive, OFG.

"We are deeply concerned about the consequences of rushing the secondary legislation required to implement the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act in England for plants, without sufficient regulatory safeguards."



Rob Hancock, Deputy Director of the Advanced Plant Growth Centre.

"As crops bred through precision breeding are indistinguishable from crops bred conventionally, it will be up to the consumer to weigh up the merit of these different approaches and we will provide the science to help with those decisions."

OFG (Organic Farmers & Growers) were less enthusiastic. Both have both expressed disappointment at the news, saying it could negatively impact on the country's ability to trade organic produce and calling for reassurances.

Director of Policy at the Soil Association, Brendan Costelloe, said: "It is vital to both consumer confidence and the organic sector that the right statutory instruments are now put in place ensure full transparency of PBOs, with clear labelling to reassure and protect consumer choice, secure the organic and GMO Free sector and protect trade. We are absolutely determined to work with Defra to deliver these reassurances."

"This is critical for the entire organic food sector to maintain the legal standards required and to ensure that the thousands of organic businesses in the UK can trade with Europe and with other countries who have exclusions on Genetically Modified Organisms, including PBOs."

OFG's Chief Executive Roger Kerr added: "We are deeply concerned about the consequences of rushing the secondary legislation required to implement the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act in England for plants, without sufficient regulatory safeguards." **PR**



The general principal is to keep cultivations low disturbance. Deep or aggressive cultivations will only result in large clods.

Harness good soil structure to prevent black-grass

Compaction caused by last season's wet weather will exacerbate black-grass issues unless it is dealt with, warns soil and cultivations expert.

ACROSS the country, independent soil and cultivations expert, Philip Wright is seeing many soils with a solid surface layer, which could make achieving a fine consolidated seedbed tricky this autumn and exacerbate black-grass issues.

"Rain pummelled the soil's surface, loosening small soil particles which have been washed into the soil's profile and accumulated at around 7-10cm - effectively the soil, viewed as a filter, became blocked," he said.

"With the summer's weather drying out the soil surface, many acres now have a layer that's as hard as concrete on top."

Philip describes how heavier soils have shrunk and cracked in the summer's warm weather, and most machinery will break up the 'crazy paving slabs' into large clods.

"When it comes to black-grass control, everything with a cloddy seedbed is wrong - there's poor crop establishment, reduced pre-em performance and protracted emergence of grassweeds," he said.

BASF Business Development Manager, Stuart Kevis agrees: "The better the soil structure is, the happier the seeds are to get up and going. For grassweeds that means better take up of residual chemistry. For crops, it's about robust establishment leading to more competitive plants."

Generally, growers are advised to check for blackgrass in the autumn to confirm whether they are facing a potential issues ahead of planting for the following season's potatoes.

BASF Business Development Manager, Stuart Kevis.



Controlling grassweeds post-emergence of potato crops can be very variable. Industry experts have frequently advised that if problematic grassweeds are expected in a ware crop, it is best to be prepared and have a pre-emergence glyphosate product in stock. The current expiry date for UK use of glyphosate is set to be December 2025 and in a recent study, Rothamsted's Dr Helen Metcalfe said its use is central to no-till farming approaches therefore it needs to be replaced in agricultural systems.

How to best deal with the current soil situation is field dependent, according to Philip, however the general principal is to keep cultivations low disturbance. Deep or aggressive cultivations will only result in large clods.

"A robust tine-based drill might do the job where the layer of compaction is shallow - 5-6cm deep, for example. This would be ideal ahead of a cover crop where there's the opportunity to control germinating black-grass."

Philip says growers also have the option of slightly deeper tine cultivations, followed up by a low-disturbance disc-based drill.

Independent soil and cultivations expert, Philip Wright.



"This approach will work well for covers ahead of spring crops where there is more time to control germinating grassweeds. It could also work for winter crops, though delayed drilling and stale seedbeds will be crucial, and that might not be popular after last season closed in so quickly."

Now conditions are wetting up a little, Philip thinks there's scope for field-by-field decision-making.

"Shallow disc cultivation to create fines is OK provided the soil is not too damp to smear," he says, adding: "Tine openers can work through this zone, provided disturbance levels are not high."

"If there is porosity through the soil profile, there is potential for soils to crumb and there's still a chance for minimum cultivations," he said. "But do check tyre pressures, there's nothing worse than using low-disturbance machinery, only to find high disturbance in the wheelings where eradication is needed." **PR**

New collaboration to control and combat

Joint approach to understand what makes pest tick.

SUPPLIER of fresh, frozen and chilled potatoes, Albert Bartlett, has formed a partnership with Fera Science Ltd in a bid to control aphid numbers and combat viral infection levels in seed potato crops across Scotland.

Aphids can cause stunting of potato plants, reducing yields and impacting tuber quality. Common viruses spread by aphids - such as Potato Leafroll Virus (PLRV) and Potato Virus Y (PVY) - can cause yield losses of 50% in ware crops.

Virus pressure from aphids has increased in recent years because of milder winters, which has seen aphids taking flight earlier and a reduction in approved and effective insecticides available for use in seed crops.

Forty-five growers signed up to the Albert Bartlett-funded monitoring process for the 2024 seed potato growing season, each returning up to 10 sampling traps, for analysis throughout the season. Aphid types will be identified, counted, and reported weekly by Fera, along with the virus transmission risk.

Albert Bartlett's Technical Manager Will Jackson said: "Understanding the presence of the aphid species present is fundamental to determining the risk of virus transmission, allowing seed growers to target the use of the limited number of insecticides available."

Growers can access their aphid results, and those of others taking part in the scheme, via weekly updates on the scheme's website. Fera also provides a variety of text and email alerts which growers can choose to sign up to.

"Investing in the aphid monitoring scheme in 2024 will help safeguard the health status of the potato seed supplied to ware growers across the UK in 2025," Will added.

Aphids are small sap-sucking insects whose common names include greenfly and blackfly. Aphids are among the most destructive insect pests on cultivated plants in temperate regions. As well as weakening plants by sucking sap, they also provide transmission for the growth of plant viruses. Females breed profusely so that the number of these insects multiplies



quickly - while winged females often develop later in the season, allowing colonisation of new plants. Because of their ability to increase their numbers quickly they are highly successful insects from an ecological point of view.

Control of aphids is difficult - in part because aphids often feed on the undersides of leaves. Natural enemies include predatory ladybirds, hoverfly larvae, and parasitic wasps. **PR**



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Estate installs new box store

NORFOLK grower Holkham Emerald has unveiled a state-of-the-art 6,500-tonne potato box store at the estate in Holkham where it grows salad and main crop potatoes.

Emerald grows its own produce in partnership with the Holkham Estate in Norfolk. Three quarters of what it grows is salad potatoes which is supplied to specialist markets in the UK and Europe. The rest is made up of premium main crop potatoes produced for the home retail market, as well as export.

The new potato box store features Farm Electronics' climate units which are designed to create the ideal environment for potato

storage, controlling temperature, humidity, and ventilation. The precise climate control maintains the quality and shelf-life of the potatoes, which are particularly sensitive to storage conditions.

The Farm Electronics system employs advanced sensors and control algorithms to monitor and adjust the internal climate continuously. By doing so, it minimises the risk of spoilage and sprouting, ensuring that the potatoes remain in peak condition from harvest to market.

One of the primary benefits of the new potato box store is its potential to dramatically reduce waste, according to Adam Fryer, Farm Electronics' Commercial Director.



“Traditional storage methods often lead to significant losses owing to improper climate control, leading to spoilage and reduced product quality. The precision of the Farm Electronics climate units addresses these issues head-on, maintaining optimal conditions that significantly extend the storage life of the potatoes,” said Adam.

The new facility's design also allows for efficient handling and storage. Potatoes are stored in large, easily accessible boxes for ease of loading and unloading which, as well as reducing handling time, further minimises the potential for damage.

The climate units are designed with energy efficiency in mind, utilising advanced technologies to minimise energy consumption. This not only reduces the farm's carbon footprint but also lowers operational costs. The insulation used in the building has also been designed to maximise thermal efficiency, reducing the energy required to maintain the desired climate. **PR**



New mobile box filler facilitates multi-store site movement

POTATO handling equipment manufacturer Haith plans to launch a new mobile box filler at Interpom next month.

The latest version of its QuantaFill features an in-feed conveyor that gently layers the crop into a buffer bunker, which is then lowered into the box. Active discharge doors then open to transfer the crop into the box, simultaneously raising as it fills. The process ensures that the weight of the box is never lifted and the machine is not put under pressure, which eliminates fatigue and prevents damage to both the machine and the box.

The additional box-handling functionality allows the operator to place stacks of empty boxes into the machine. The boxes are then automatically de-stacked and transported to the filling module. After being filled, the boxes are re-stacked for the operator to remove from the line.

Haith has now designed a mobile version with a wheeled chassis that can be easily moved around multi-store processing sites by a tractor or forklift.



Haith's Sales Manager and Design Engineer Rob Highfield and Michael Matthias will be talking through the qualities of the new box filler at Interpom.

In addition to the mobile QuantaFill, Haith will promote its new Supa Fill 600 PRO XL. Designed to work across the end of a 2400-wide (eight-foot) grader, the Supa Fill 600 PRO XL removes the need for a cross conveyor and uses one less drop point.

It has a patented three variable speed belt system for gentle crop transition. Haith has also replaced the shaft-mounted motor gearbox units with powered drum motors, and

a positive drive rack and pinion arrangement has been used instead of the traditional chain and sprocket transmission.

The box filler can handle up to 60 boxes per hour, which is achieved as one box filling conveyor can be lowered into position while the opposite side is filling. Single belt machines cannot deliver this.

For full updates on machinery launches and enhancements, turn to page 48. **PR**

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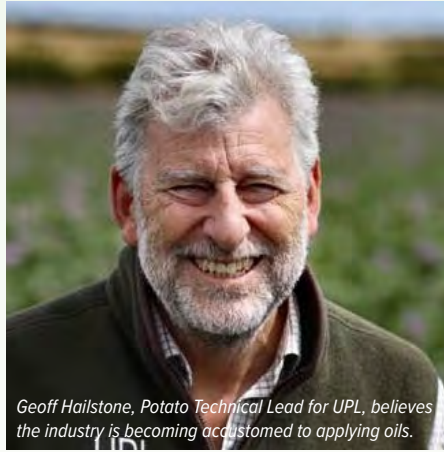
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Storage consultant Adrian Cunningham says if storage is going to be for a longer period, a combination of ethylene, orange oil or mint oil could be used.

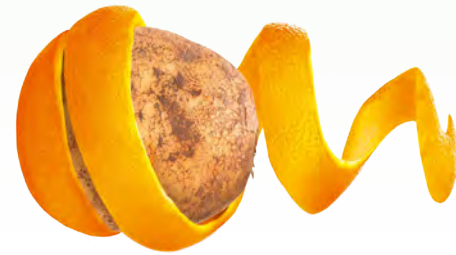


Geoff Hailstone, Potato Technical Lead for UPL, believes the industry is becoming accustomed to applying oils.



Mercian's Jon Kemp said skin set was something to watch for in potatoes coming into store.

Breaking down sprout control by sector



How should store managers approach sprouting control this season? *British Potato Review* seeks advice from two experts.

AFTER an unbelievably difficult potato storage season last year, this season is shaping up to be easier, with, at least initially, harvesting conditions on the dry side.

Following a drier-than-usual August, dry matters are reportedly 10-20% higher than typical, which could lead to higher bruising risk.

Mercian's Jon Kemp said skin set was something to watch for in potatoes coming into store. The storage season had started around a week later than usual after growers delayed lifting to increase yields in later planted crops. "It could be an issue if growers haven't terminated crops early enough while chasing yield," said Jon.

Poor skin set is more likely to be found in crops being harvested from mid-October onwards, which leaves crops more vulnerable to weight loss and infections, Adrian Cunningham from Potato Storage Insight stressed.

"I think there will be some soft rots and fungal rots, such as pink rot, around. They have already been reported, not excessively, in some fields, so store managers will need to keep an eye on crops going into store," he said.

Sprout control had got off to a decent start with the consensus that maleic hydrazide

(MH) applications, which have become the base treatment for most programmes, had gone on in good conditions in July.

"While I haven't seen any residue results yet, I think there was enough green leaf in the crop to take the maleic hydrazide up," Adrian said. "That should give a good foundation for sprout control and for some parts of the fresh sector, they probably don't need to do anything more than that with the combination of MH and cold temperature storage adequate for medium-term storage."

Where varieties in that sector had shorter dormancy or storage was going to be for a longer period, he said a combination of ethylene, orange oil or mint oil could be used.

"I'm not aware of anyone in the fresh sector using dimethylnaphthalene (DMN)."

Used earlier enough as a dormancy enhancer, ethylene gave good control on most varieties, although some were less susceptible to treatment, including Maris Piper and Nectar, Adrian said.

"Ethylene is quite variety-specific, so there's not a one-size-fits-all solution. That means store managers need to be more specific with strategies than they used to be with CIPC, which can be quite difficult when you have stores holding multiple varieties."

The loss of AHDB Potatoes and Sutton Bridge crop storage facility made obtaining that variety-specific information more difficult, and typically only through major supply chains, he noted.

Argos (orange oil) and mint oil had two main uses in the fresh sector – either at the beginning of the season if sprouting was already starting to occur in freshly harvested potatoes or at the end.

"Both products are spot treatments to burn away existing growth. Usually, we would see more oils being used to bring sprouting under control around harvest time, but I don't think that's likely to be as much of a challenge this year as the crops aren't physiologically advanced," Adrian said.

In the crisping sector, variety and length of storage were also key factors in programmes, Jon said. "Some will be varieties grown for short-term storage in what I call tip-up sheds that are not suitable for treatment.

"For delivery in November through to February, we will use the MH and natural dormancy of the variety as much as possible, and if they need a bit of help, they will get an oil."

Typically, that would be Argos in Mercian-managed stores, as it is the cheaper of the two options, and the firm doesn't want to run two different fogging machines, he said.

DMN isn't an option in that situation because of its 30-day harvest interval, so stores cannot be unloaded during that period. "As soon as you use that product, if there is a problem, for example, the potatoes start rotting, you can't move them for a month."

"[Skin set] could be an issue if growers haven't terminated crops early enough while chasing yield."

Jon Kemp, Business Manager, Mercian

For longer-term storage on crops that wouldn't be delivered until after that period, DMN would be used with first applications beginning in November and a follow-up application around six weeks later, regardless of whether there was any sprouting as a top-up, Jon said.

"After that, we will sit back and monitor the store weekly."

Those crops might get an oil as the last application when the harvest interval for DMN again becomes restrictive. "It's what is sometimes called a tidy-up application."

French fry programmes

In the French fry sector, programmes are, to some extent, driven by the supply chain. McCain, for example, committed to using ethylene after CIPC was withdrawn, with adaptations made to its factory process to accommodate any variations in fry colour that result, Adrian said.

Other firms in that sector have widely adopted DMN, again usually after an MH application. "Two or three doses of DMN seem to get most store managers through to April or May.

"Orange oil has a place, alongside mint, in offering options for late applications after DMN, where the 30-day gap before stores can be unloaded is a problem, and gives store managers much more flexibility on when to market or release crops under contract," Adrian said.

Four seasons on since CIPC was withdrawn from use for sprouting control in the UK, potato store management had improved, Jon suggested. "It had to because the newer products are expensive, and store managers understand if you don't manage it correctly, you can have a disaster."

This season, however, will see the first one where processors will not be picking up the bill for the extra costs of sprouting programmes, he noted. "That has led to no attempt to reduce rates and frequency of application as the farmer was not getting penalised for additional applications.

"But with farmers picking up the bill directly this year, that might change behaviour," he said.

Adrian agreed that could happen with store managers pushing boundaries more but suggested it could be counteracted by processors providing advice and making stipulations within contract terms.

"There have been conversations around these sorts of issues. Inevitably, growers might look for cheaper alternatives and DMN is relatively expensive, albeit with more longevity per application compared with the oils."

It could potentially see orange oil as the cheapest of the options, at around £2.75/t applied, being favoured in some circumstances. Especially where flexibility in marketing, for example, in the chip shop trade, is desirable, he noted.

Most growers in that segment were using MH followed by one or two doses of DMN if they were storing long-term or an orange or mint oil route where they were marketing more extensively through the season. However, he wasn't aware of any growers using an entire programme of eight or nine oil applications across a season, as it was a lot of chemicals to apply.

"It's a question of making the strategy work for you," he said. "If you are happy to close up your store and keep it closed, then a product like DMN will work well. If you need access to the stores then oils are probably preferred, and especially if you get any loss of control in store."

Orange oil application advice

With no reported issues with the orange oil product Argos for two years, Geoff Hailstone, Potato Technical Lead for UPL, believes the industry is becoming accustomed to applying oils. Argos is a natural product containing pure, food-grade orange oil as the active ingredient.

Application technique for all sprout suppressants had improved over the past

couple of seasons, as store managers became more familiar with products, Adrian said.

"Ventilating stores meticulously prior to application is crucial. You can get localised areas of moisture in the store, and if the crop is wet going into store, even with a fine film of moisture, it acts like a magnet to the product, and you get overdosing and scorching of skins."

Another key to the effective application of Argos was to leave a good space around the fogging port, Geoff Hailstone said.

This helped the orange oil develop a good quality light, dry fog before it was drawn into the boxes. "It's all about getting a uniform steady air movement around the store. Make sure refrigeration is turned off 24 hours ahead of fogging," he advised.

In addition, fans should run for 24 hours before fogging with relative humidity controls turned off, while steps should be taken to avoid jetting of the airflow or short-circuiting, leading to over or under-dosing.

Using orange oil allowed growers to maximise the activity from MH and the natural dormancy of the variety, with treatments only commencing once dormancy starts to break. In contrast, DMN had to be applied before the break of dormancy, Geoff said.

It could also help store managers save energy costs. "With energy costs so high it might be more efficient to store at a slightly higher temperature and remove sprouts with Argos if and when they appear rather than store at a lower temperature all season."

One potential advantage of Argos is that it doesn't have a strong smell that might linger in-store or on the potatoes. That could contribute to a longer shelf-life following the orange oil applications, with the only requirement being to wait 48 hours after treatment before moving potatoes. "Every extra day saved at the end of storage by using Argos is an extra day of shelf-life and marketing flexibility," Geoff said. **PR**





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Grading shed hygiene is a key consideration when treating and handling seed.

Don't allow disease to establish in high-quality seed

We share advice from experts at SAC Consulting and Certis Belchim on how to manage current risks and keep seed healthy until spring.

THERE are positive reports about British seed crop yields and quality this year, but seasonal factors mean tubers could be threatened by disease.

Seed potato growers are reminded of the importance of timing when using a fungicide seed treatment, with best efficacy achieved when products applied as soon as practically possible after harvest.

In Britain's two key seed growing areas of Yorkshire and Scotland, reported yields are high and quality good, but the season has not been without its challenges.

Certis Belchim's Yorkshire-based Technical Manager David Peach says growers on the Wolds had a straightforward desiccation period this year, with most catching crops with a flail and subsequent sprays at just the right time.

However, dull and damp weather set in soon after, which slowed the process of skin set. More recently, wetter conditions have hampered the task of getting crops lifted and into store in good condition.

"We know how important that is for seed health and long-term storability, so the wet weather during September and October has presented some issues," said David.

"Gangrene and skin spot risk can be heightened by a wet harvest and although these are often thought of as superficial diseases, they can cause big problems in store if they are left untreated."

Varying conditions

Further north, mixed weather across Scotland inevitably resulted in a mixed picture at harvest, with some growers lifting their entire potato area

Damage at harvest will allow disease to get into tubers more readily.



in record time due to warm and dry September conditions in Fife, Perthshire and Angus.

However, above average rainfall in Morayshire and Aberdeenshire made haulm destruction timing tricky, delaying skin set. With wet weather arriving in late September and continuing into October, growers have been tempted to harvest before skins are set.

Gavin Prentice of SAC Consulting says in the warmer and drier areas, it was more difficult to avoid damage at harvest and this will allow disease to get into tubers more readily, with dry rot, watery wound rot, pink rot and bacterial rot risk all increased.

Where growers have rushed to get on with lifting without adequate skin set, the risk of damage is also acute and elevates risk of disease ingress.

"Gangrene and skin spot risk can be heightened by a wet harvest and although these are often thought of as superficial diseases, they can cause big problems in store if they are left untreated."

David Peach, Technical Manager, Certis Belchim



David Peach, Technical Manager, Certis Belchim

“We haven’t received any reports of rots just yet, but where growers suspect there has been some damage to seed tubers, they would be well-advised to hot-box samples for disease, and to monitor stocks closely,” he explains.

Post-harvest management

Post-harvest and store management is key to preventing diseases becoming a significant economic problem, with good airflow and the correct curing, drying and temperature control procedures particularly important for soft rots.

The use of a fungicide seed treatment (none are approved in ware), targeted at the main storage diseases can also be an important part of keeping good seed healthy.

Gavin advises growers to take a risk-based approach to fungicide use, considering factors such as varietal susceptibility to each disease, conditions during the growing season and harvest conditions to gauge potential threat.

He adds that there are two options if risk is identified, which are Gavel (imazalil) and Storite Excel (thiabendazole). Of the two, Gavel has the wider range of target diseases on its product label, and these include dry rot, gangrene, skin spot and silver scurf.

The Storite Excel label specifies that it should be mixed with a fungicide from another FRAC group, which in practice is Gavel.

“The products can be tricky to mix, so plan ahead with measures like constant agitation or use of a twin injection system helping to avoid any issues during application,” he said.

Application timing

Based in Dundee, Cristina Ruiz-Alonso is Certis Belchim’s Technical Account Manager for Scotland. She says timing of application is a critical factor in getting the best out of seed treatments like Gavel.

Cristina sees a fungicide as an essential insurance policy if disease risk is identified, but in order to get the best protection against pathogen spread and/or development in store,



Gavin Prentice, Senior Potato Consultant, SAC Consulting

it needs to be applied as soon as is practically possible post-harvest.

Broadly, there are three ways of applying seed treatments to manage storage diseases.

The first is on the harvester, but coverage can be compromised, and available products cannot be applied to ware so legally, oversized tubers would be unmarketable.

The second opportunity is into store, typically if lifting into bulk containers, with seed and ware fractions split into boxes then stored. This allows for the treatment of the seed fraction only but does involve double handling and increases risk of damage.

Lastly, seed can be harvested into boxes and loaded into store for drying, curing and bringing down to temperature for storage until grading. Growers can then treat as they split size fractions ready for shipping to customers in the spring.

Preventative approach

Cristina says the disadvantage of leaving it until seed grading is that both the available fungicide products are protectant only, so offer no activity on disease that is already established in a stock. She said Gavel is also most effective against both wound and skin diseases when applied before wounds begin to heal.

“Sometimes you aren’t grading seed and thinking about a seed treatment until February or March. By that time, you might already have a significant problem with disease.

“Quality has been very good in 2024, and you may not have issues now, but if you don’t treat early, you risk that quality being reduced before the spring.”

Gavin agrees that delaying treatment does allow pathogens to become established and adds that application quality is another consideration to get the best out of seed treatments.

Based on SAC Consulting trials, applying into store or at grading using a roller table and a hooded applicator with twin rotating nozzles provides the best coverage.



Cristina Ruiz-Alonso, Technical Account Manager for Scotland

“Sometimes you aren’t grading seed and thinking about a seed treatment until February or March. By that time, you might already have a significant problem with disease.”

**Cristina Ruiz-Alonso,
Technical Account Manager
for Scotland**

“Systems such as a spinning disc applicator tend to wear out quickly and performance will deteriorate over time,” said Gavin.

Good hygiene

A final consideration when treating and handling seed is grading shed hygiene, with fungal spores or bacteria lurking on and around the building housing the equipment which can potentially infect otherwise clean stocks.

David acknowledges that at a time when staff are very busy, it is difficult to take the time to clean down grading lines and elsewhere, but it is an important part of getting the whole package right.

He adds that minimising dust in buildings and using a disinfectant like Jet 5 (peroxyacetic acid) to clean down between seed stocks – particularly if there is a known rotting or disease issue – are advised.

“Seed production is all about quality and trying to get those crops grown and harvested in top notch condition, which many have achieved this year,” he said. “Attention to detail in and around the grading shed and store will help ensure seed reaches customers in the best condition.” **PR**

PepsiCo and Yara form fertiliser partnership

PEPSICO Europe has joined forces with fertiliser company Yara in a bid to help growers adopt low-carbon practices across the UK and EU, with an initial focus on potatoes.

Fertiliser use currently makes up most of PepsiCo's carbon footprint and it has set a 40% reduction target by 2030.

As part of the new deal, Yara and PepsiCo will provide growers with lower carbon footprint fertilisers, precision farming digital tools and agronomic advice to help increase nutrient use efficiency.

Yara will deliver up to 165,000 tons of fertiliser per year to PepsiCo, equivalent to around 25% of its fertiliser needs. These will mainly be Yara Climate Choice products.

The partnership's aim is to encourage a move to the climate-friendly fertilisers over time.

PepsiCo's Chief Sustainability Officer Archana Jagannathan said: "Providing our growers with fertilisers that have a lower carbon footprint and supporting them to improve crop nutrition end-to-end will allow us to make a significant step towards our target of achieving net zero by 2040."

Mónica Andrés Enríquez, Executive Vice President for Europe at Yara, said supply chain collaboration was imperative to transform the food system.

"We're excited to work with first movers like PepsiCo to help make this a reality. Decarbonising food production will be critical to delivering," she said.



Hydrogel-based soil improver project

THE UK Agri-Tech Centre has announced the launch of the 'Greener future with GelPonic soil improver: Restoring soil fertility' project, an initiative aiming to develop a circular hydrogel-based soil improver.

The collaborative project brings together the expertise of the UK Agri-Tech Centre and AEH Innovative Hydrogel Ltd, with key support from the Graphene Engineering Innovation Centre (GEIC) and Stockbridge Technology Centre (STC).

Dr Aurélie Bovi, Innovation Lead for Controlled Environment Agriculture at the UK Agri-Tech Centre, has highlighted the growing importance of soil improvers in enhancing soil health and fertility.

"These products play a crucial role in enhancing soil quality by improving soil structure, increasing nutrient levels, enhancing water retention, stimulating microbial activity, regulating pH levels, preventing erosion, and mitigating the impact of compaction," she said.

"The outcome is a healthier more fertile soil environment that supports robust plant growth and promotes ecological balance."

Dr Beenish Siddique, Founder and CEO of AEH Innovative Hydrogel Ltd, said the increasing demand for sustainable agricultural practices has driven interest in hydrogel-based soil improvers.

"This demand is driven primarily by their ability to enhance water management and reduce fertiliser usage," she said.

In response to this rising demand, the 'Greener future with GelPonic soil improver: Restoring soil fertility' project will focus on developing and showcasing an innovative circular hydrogel-based soil improver.

Beenish said: "Our goal is to adopt a circular economy approach by transforming rejects and waste products from our hydrogel sheet and plug production into a sustainable soil improver. Our products are made of natural polymers and biochar, a known soil conditioner, and have high water-retention properties.

"This project will allow us to optimise hydrogel compositions with customised nutrient profiles and conduct commercial-standard trials in greenhouses to assess their effectiveness at reducing watering needs and enhancing crop germination and growth."

Early trials have produced promising results.

"We've observed a 30% reduction in water usage while achieving higher crop yields, and improved survival rates and healthier tree saplings during prolonged heatwave conditions," Beenish said.

Aurélie said the initial results would be significant for the future of agriculture.

"As climate conditions become increasingly unpredictable, technologies that enable crop establishment and growth with reduced resource inputs will be crucial. AEH's hydrogel-based soil improver, created from the byproducts of hydrogel production, offers a non-synthetic, customisable solution that could help restore soil health and sequester carbon. If successful, this technology has the potential to make a substantial impact," she said.

This project is funded by Defra and Innovate UK, through the Farming Innovation Programme: Transforming Food Production Follow-on competition and results will be available in spring 2025. **PR**

Investment in green insecticides

SOLASTA Bio, an agri-biotech company specialising in the next generation of green insecticides, has completed an oversubscribed \$14 million Series A funding round to accelerate the development of its peptide-based, nature-inspired bioinsecticides.

The investment round was led by venture capital firm Forbion via its BioEconomy Fund strategy, with co-lead investment from FMC Ventures (FMC Corporation) and Corteva Inc, through its Corteva Catalyst platform. Participation from existing investors included Cavallo Ventures (Wilbur-Ellis), Rubio Impact Ventures, Scottish Enterprise, UKi2S, SIS Ventures and University of Glasgow, bringing the total raised to date to \$19 million. In the context of this round, Joy Faucher from Forbion will join the company's board of directors.

Series A funding follows a successful 2023 trials season in which SOLASTA Bio's insect control agents demonstrated efficacy on par or better than commercial standards across 20+ field trials on multiple crops in Europe, the UK and US.

Established in 2021, Glasgow-based SOLASTA Bio has developed a technology platform for creating insect control agents that are nature-inspired.

These environmentally-friendly agents target insect pests while protecting beneficial pollinators such as bees. They can be used in field and storage applications.

It is hoped the bioinsecticides can be brought to market as early as 2027.

The company's Co-Founder Shireen Davies said: "The results of our field trials have been hugely encouraging, demonstrating high efficacy of biopeptides against target insect pests, as effective or better than standard insecticides."

Final countdown for grant applications

SEVERN Trent is urging growers in its catchment area to submit their Severn Trent Environmental Protection Scheme (STEPS) grant applications well ahead of the November 30th deadline to ensure all funded projects are completed this year.

Growers and landowners in its priority catchments can apply for funding to invest in solutions to reduce risk of water pollution and protect the environment, while supporting farm efficiencies. This can include a wide range of equipment and land management improvements. The funding options are aimed at reducing the amount of pesticide, nitrate and cryptosporidium entering watercourses.

Some of the most popular options include herbal leys, in-field washdown kits, precision equipment and establishing cover crops.

Unlike previous years, all work funded by 2024 STEPS, must be completed and claimed for by December 31st.

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Frost: The Silent Destroyer

Sam Brown, Technical Director with The Crop Smith, discusses the potential for frost threats to potato crops in coming months and discusses the protective qualities offered by seaweed.



POTATO growers are no strangers to the challenges that frost can pose to their crops. As one of the most cultivated and consumed crops worldwide, potatoes are a vital food source, and yet they are vulnerable to environmental factors like frost, which can severely affect both the quantity and quality of the harvest.

As climate change increases the unpredictability of weather patterns, late spring frosts and early autumn chills are becoming more common. For potato farmers, these conditions are not just an inconvenience, they can lead to catastrophic losses.

Frost occurs when temperatures fall near to 0degC and below, causing ice crystals to freeze the plants' cells, and causing the cells to burst. The initial signs of frost damage in potato plants are often seen as wilting or drooping leaves.

If the frost is mild, the plant may recover, but if the freezing temperatures persist, the damage can be irreversible. The growing points of the plant can be destroyed, halting growth entirely. In extreme cases, frost can wipe out entire sections of a crop, leading to significant financial losses for the grower.

Beyond yield loss, frost-damaged potatoes are less marketable. Tubers affected by frost can develop a variety of quality issues, such as internal browning, poor texture, and even a compromised flavour profile. These factors reduce their desirability for both fresh market sales and processing purposes. In some cases, buyers may reject the crop altogether if the damage is severe enough, leaving growers with no choice but to absorb the financial loss.

Frost damage can also increase the cost of storage. Frost-injured tubers are more susceptible to decay, making them harder to store for extended periods.

In regions prone to frost, growers often seek preventive measures to protect their crops, but traditional methods, such as frost blankets or irrigation, can be expensive, labour-intensive, and not always effective. This is where seaweed extract steps in as a game-changing solution.

A Natural Solution for Frost Protection

In recent years, the agricultural industry has turned to biostimulants as a sustainable approach to improving crop resilience. One such biostimulant gaining popularity among potato growers is seaweed extract.

Derived from various species of marine algae, seaweed extract contains a complex mix of beneficial compounds, including growth hormones, trace minerals, and polysaccharides, which enhance plant health and boost stress tolerance.

For potato plants, seaweed extract has proven particularly effective in improving resistance to frost. UK field trials have demonstrated that plants treated with seaweed extract are better equipped to survive frost conditions. The extract acts by fortifying the plant's natural defence mechanisms,

improving cell structure, and boosting the plant's overall ability to retain water and maintain turgor pressure in freezing conditions. This means that, when frost strikes, the plants are less likely to suffer severe damage, leading to higher survival rates and reduced yield loss.

Application and Usage

Using seaweed extract to protect potato crops from frost is relatively straightforward. Typically applied as a seed treatment, an in-furrow tuber treatment, or as a foliar spray, the extract can be integrated into the grower's regular crop management practices. In most cases, growers can apply the seaweed extract three to five days before a forecasted frost event, allowing the plants to absorb and distribute the beneficial compounds in good time.



Multiple applications throughout the growing season can also help improve overall plant health and yield as the extract enhances the plant's resilience not only to frost but also to other environmental stress such as drought, disease and pests, making it a versatile addition to any crop management plan.

Return on investment (ROI)

One of the major advantages of using seaweed extract is its cost-effectiveness. While the initial investment in purchasing the extract may seem like an added expense, the return on investment is significant when factoring in the potential savings from minimising yield loss.

Generally, the cost of a single seaweed extract application ranges from £10 to £20 per hectare, depending on the brand and formulation. In regions prone to frost, this is a small price to pay compared to the potential loss of an entire crop. The higher survival rates of plants and improved quality of the harvested tubers directly translate into increased revenue.

Furthermore, the use of seaweed extract can also reduce other input costs. Healthier, more resilient plants require fewer chemical interventions to control pests and diseases, leading to additional savings on pesticides and fertilisers. Combined with the reduced



Untreated



Treated

“Frost damage can also increase the cost of storage. Frost-injured tubers are more susceptible to decay, making them harder to store for extended periods.”

risk of yield loss owing to frost, the financial benefits of using seaweed extract are clear.

Sustainable path forward

Frost remains a significant threat to potato growers, but seaweed extract offers a promising, natural solution to protect crops and boost yields. By improving plants' frost tolerance, promoting healthier growth, and

ensuring higher-quality harvests, seaweed extract represents a smart investment for any grower looking to minimise losses and maximise profitability.

With a reasonable cost and proven benefits, this biostimulant is quickly becoming a staple in modern agricultural practices, providing both environmental and economic advantages. **PR**

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The value of good collaboration

Mark Taylor, inaugural Chair of GB Potatoes, reflects on the organisation's journey so far and what the future has to hold.



AS 2024 comes to a close and hopefully the national crop is safely harvested and in store, I look to “hand on the batten” as I step-back from industry activity and a new Chair takes on the leadership of GB Potatoes.

I am delighted to announce that Alex Godfrey has accepted the position of Chair (to be ratified at the AGM) which provides great continuity as Alex and I have worked very closely together for the last year.

My thanks and congratulations go to Alex as he takes up his position and looks to drive the organisation forward.

‘Change as a constant’ has never been a truer statement than now.

Regardless of how you felt about the Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board (AHDB), and how you subsequently voted, the gap it left was vast and our industry has become fragmented and less effective since its demise. I have lost count of the number of discussions I have had over the

past two years where someone has said “I didn’t realise we were going to lose that!”.

Reality today sees the UK potato productive area fall whilst our near EU counterparts are investing and expanding. What’s driving that? Why don’t we have that optimism?

If there was ever a time to come together as an industry, it’s now. Our industry needs a voice to champion its future.

At a recent industry event, I was asked why I remain so positive about our industry. My answer was simple: Why not? To be honest, if we aren’t, who will be?

As GBP we are not, and may never be, perfect, but we are prepared to put ourselves forward to represent our industry on your

behalf. Our sector will not prosper unless there is real engagement to embrace collective interest and support each other.

In 2020, the writing was on the wall regarding support (or lack of it) for the AHDB but this also provided both the need and opportunity to consider what came next.

Impacts of Brexit, COVID and the war in Europe all contributed to a de-stabilised financial situation both on the farm and with consumers. Many of those impacts remain today.

The need to stand up and represent the industry took on even greater significance and, as a group of “interested industry colleagues”, the discussion developed to what GB Potatoes is today. I must at this point thank those early sponsors. They know who they are and it wouldn’t have happened without them.

Discussions developed through 2021. It wasn’t to re-invent the AHDB, far from it, but to create a lean and focussed organisation that embraced the whole industry.

Those early months were not easy. Industry colleagues fell into three groups: Firstly the “Great idea -you have my full support” element; second (and by far the largest) group “let’s see what progress you make?”; lastly - the dissenters!

“Reality today sees the UK potato productive area fall whilst our near EU counterparts are investing and expanding. What’s driving that?”

Personally, I don't have any problem with challenge to our GBP activity, direction or purpose. I'd just ask that any challenges are made in a positive way so we can engage in a discussion to be part of the solution for the future.

I defy anyone to tell me they have all the answers because that's just not possible. Anyone who felt that probably wouldn't be growing potatoes in the first place!

A moment for reflection

I took the Chair's role in 2022 as we formally created the organisation and put the Board in place, and it's been both a challenge and privilege to take the organisation this far. But there's more to do.

Putting a new organisation together from scratch was never going to be easy, and that became clear early in the process. But we have come through that and today we are established with a strong Board and leadership.

Taking a second to reflect on some of our on-going important work, we continue to challenge the new Government's ability to foster a supportive and resilient environment for farmers and their supply chains.

Words are cheap and it will be actions that support food security targets and the implementation of environmental policies that appropriately place the importance on the value

of growing food and retaining our access to our land base. I firmly believe that, to make the progress that's required, food production and the environment need to be in the same conversation, instead of many unconnected discussions.

GBP remains active and very vocal to champion the conversations around Virus, PCN, future access to water and retention of PPP's.

One collective voice reflecting cross-industry needs and working together is far more effective than many individual ones and the industry's focus should now be on rebuilding relationships across the supply chain and making the planning and commitment discussions much more long-term. Far too much of what we see today leaves us lurching from one season to the next. This is not the basis to build a business plan or consider investment. As an industry, we can do better.

GBP received the residual levy funds to spend on your behalf which constitutes a great piece of work landed as the industry could easily have lost those funds. The projects outlined are vitally important to the whole industry.

These funds are not GBP funds. They belong to the industry and will be spent following consultation with industry on the identified specific projects.

Does this mean GBP has sufficient funds or membership? No. But it's critically important

that we see further support to champion industry needs in the coming years.

So, what can you do? If you are interested in making a positive difference to the UK potato industry, we'd encourage you to join us, and anyone facing challenges or needing more information can talk to our Board members, who are always approachable.

To make this plan succeed I believe there are 3 C's which we need to work to: Coordination, Cooperation and Collaboration. We are better working together.

As I approach nearly 40 years in the industry, I have taken the decision to step back from many of my industry roles, but I believe I leave GBP in very good hands and wish the UK Potato industry the very best for the future. **PR**



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Navigating new terrain

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.

IN the ever-evolving world of UK agricultural policy, Defra is pivoting in ways that could redefine the potato industry.

Defra's new direction is focussed on growth and collaboration and I've been tracking its changes and their potential impact on the fresh produce sector with interest.



Steve Reed's appointment as Defra Secretary has marked a turning point, says Alexander.

When Labour took office, Steve Reed's appointment as Defra Secretary marked a turning point. His vision to reposition Defra as a "growth department" reveals a comprehensive strategy that extends beyond policy into practical investments and collaborations. His goals, which I discussed with him recently, focus on several key areas:

- Economic growth: With new investments, sectors like potatoes could see innovative opportunities emerge.
- Collaborative policy-making: Reed is encouraging industry partnerships, giving growers a more direct influence on the regulations shaping their businesses.
- Water infrastructure investment: The planned £88 billion boost for water resources promises to support sustainable irrigation practices, vital for potato growers.

- Streamlined compliance/tighter standards: Simplified processes may ease administrative burdens, but stricter environmental regulations are likely on the horizon.

Defra's Regulatory Review: A shift in focus

The review could reshape the entire landscape of British potato growing, from the fields to the bustling produce markets and retailers in our towns and cities. Reed is on a mission to transform Defra from a department often seen as a roadblock to prosperity into a powerhouse of economic growth.

Now, you might be thinking: "That's all well and good, Alexander, but what's it got to do with my potatoes?"

My answer is simple: Everything.

This is a golden opportunity to have a say in shaping policies that will directly impact your business. Whether you're a potato farmer battling blight in Lincolnshire, a supply chain wizard moving produce across the country, or a chip shop owner serving up the nation's favourite comfort food, your voice matters.

I've seen firsthand how engaged stakeholders can influence policy. Take our recent work with a regenerative farming initiative by a leading supermarket chain, for example. By bringing industry insights to the table, we've helped steer the conversation towards practical, growth-oriented solutions.

There will be some key implications for the potato sector. Here's what you might expect, and how you might want to prepare:

1. Streamlined compliance, but tighter standards: Red tape might be easing, but tighter environmental regulations are coming. While some processes could be simplified, others may demand more rigorous reporting and adaptation.
2. Trade protections on the table: With rising imports, trade protections for UK-grown produce are being considered. Expect enhanced labelling and stricter country-of-origin indicators—great for British potatoes but challenging for global competitors.
3. Increased focus on sustainability: As sustainability takes centre stage, regenerative farming practices like crop



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

rotation and soil preservation could become essential to meeting new standards.

4. The Autumn Budget: Farmers and industry leaders anxiously await, fearing their operations could be sidelined in government priorities. With soaring production costs and mounting environmental challenges, the industry needs a lifeline – but as budget day approaches, the silence from policymakers is deafening.

Making yourself heard

The potato industry isn't just about feeding the nation. It's a vital part of our rural economy, our cultural heritage, and our future food security.

This is a transformative moment – those who act now will lead tomorrow. Make sure your voice is heard, whether through industry bodies, direct engagement, or by partnering with experts like Preston Waldon. In the world of policy-making, if you're not at the table, you might end up on the menu. **PR**



For more information visit www.PrestonWaldon.co.uk

Funding opportunities not being taken up



Henry Clemons says many growers are missing out on SFI funding even though they've converted to more sustainable practices.

A RECENT survey by Knight Frank's Rural Division, which specialises in land management, revealed that fewer than half of the respondents had signed up to the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), even though 87% are farming in a more nature-friendly way and could be benefiting from public funding opportunities.

The survey, which captures the current trends and influences in land management for Knight Frank's annual state-of-the-nation Rural Report, shows that the barriers to uptake are the money involved in change, not wanting to reduce food production and the options being unclear in some cases.

Associate and Agricultural Consultant at Knight Frank, Henry Clemons, said: "From our experience, the full potential of SFI has yet to be realised because many farmers harbour preconceptions from past environmental programmes that discourage them from taking part.

"The expanded SFI however has 102 options to choose from as well as flexibility around which actions to take and how much land to include in the SFI agreement. What's also attractive is that the SFI commitment can be a minimum of three years and has less severe prescriptions than previous schemes so it's an opportunity to try different systems and see what works." →

"There's a real danger that, if the money is not spent, we will be returning another £100m to the Treasury as is currently being proposed."





This creates plenty of opportunity to complement the farming systems and aspirations of most growing businesses, according to Henry, who specialises in private and public sector grant funding solutions for rural businesses across the UK.

“If you combine the SFI with the capital grants available, which can be more complex to apply for but can make a real difference, farmers will be able to replace a significant amount of the BPS. There’s also a real danger that, if the money is not spent, we will be

returning another £100m to the Treasury as is currently being proposed.”

Almost 40% of the survey respondents are looking at adopting regenerative farming techniques. For example, no-till farming and cutting out insecticide use are valuable as they can help de-risk the transition from conventional farming systems.

With 80% saying food production was ‘very important’, Henry is reminding growers that many of the options involve less productive areas such as field margins, headlands, watercourse

buffers and the areas around in-field trees, so the impact of adopting them on overall yields and profit should be minimal - while boosting biodiversity to attract the incentives.

“Although there are still a few niggles for Defra to iron out, we’re urging growers to take advantage as it’s an excellent tool that offers versatility,” said Henry. “Each action contains advice to help the applicant deliver the required actions. There’s not one glove that fits all and it’s a matter of layering the different SFI actions to do what’s right for each individual business.”

With the new Labour government in place and making its own plans and policies, Henry said it’s a good time for potato growing businesses to take stock and ensure they are well placed to cope with the challenges and benefit from the opportunities as they come down the line.

“The environmental problem is not going away, and there’s recognition of the role farming can play in helping mitigate the world’s climate crisis. It’s important to continue to build a business strategy through both an environmental and a financial lens for the next two years at least. The money is there, and growers should seek to maximise it to benefit the future of their business.” **PR**

Three months to register banking complaints

UK POTATO growing and supply sector small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have just a few weeks left to register a business banking complaint with the Business Banking Resolution Service (BBRS), which is set to close to new registrations on December 13th.

The BBRS is a free, independent dispute resolution service for SME customers of Barclays Bank, Danske Bank, HSBC UK, Lloyds Banking Group, NatWest Group, Santander and Virgin Money. Wholly funded by these banks, it was set to close to new registrations in 2023, but was given a temporary extension which is now coming to an end.

To be eligible for the BBRS’ Contemporary Scheme, SMEs must have a turnover of less than £10m, a balance sheet of less than £7.5m and not be eligible for the Financial Ombudsman Service. Complaints must relate to incidents that took place on or after 1 April, 2019 that have not already been subject to an independent review or settled.

The BBRS offers a number of different routes to resolution, from adjudication to conciliation, mediation and direct settlement. It is urging SMEs who are unsure of whether or not they qualify to use its simple online tool on its website or to get in touch.

The BBRS will remain open after December 13th, but only to process the registrations it has received before this deadline.

A spokesperson for the BBRS said: “We want to make sure as many businesses as possible know about this free, independent service so they can resolve any outstanding issues with their banks.

SMEs can register with the BBRS online at:

<https://thebbrs.org/contemporary/>

Significant changes to import regulations

AFTER extensive lobbying efforts by the Fresh Produce Consortium, the UK Government has agreed to significant changes to import regulations which will ease the burden on fresh potato businesses and consumers alike.

Key changes secured by the FPC include:

- Postponement of Import Checks & Fees: Import checks and associated fees on medium-risk fruit and vegetables from the EU have been delayed from January 2025 to July 1st, 2025.
- Reclassification of Products: Several commodity groups, including apples and pears, have been reclassified from medium to low risk, facilitating their free movement from the EU, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein starting 30th January 2025.

FPC’s Chief Executive Nigel Jenney has welcomed the Government response.

He said: “We are thrilled that the new government has heeded the industry’s concerns and proactively implemented many of the changes we proposed. The delay in border checks and the waiver of fees until July 2025 is a particularly significant win, both for the industry and for consumers.”

It’s estimated that the changes will exempt around 80% of all fruit and vegetables from Europe from the new border checks, significantly reducing regulatory hurdles for the industry.

While celebrating the landmark achievement, Nigel emphasised that the FPC’s work is far from over.

“We still have a long way to go,” he said. “We need control points to be fully authorised and available by July 1st and at the same time we need authorised operator status available and effective by the go-live date, which will minimise the cost to industry and to hard-pressed consumers.

New phosphorus decision-making tool

A NEW decision-making tool designed to help optimise phosphorus use efficiency in potato crop production is now available to UK growers.

Developed by Unium Bioscience, 'Phosphate Power' is a free, easy-to-use online tool that helps growers assess the phosphorus biological availability in their soils with a post code entry.

A critical nutrient during germination and establishment phases, phosphorus availability can often be limited by various soil and environmental factors. Phosphate Power offers tailored recommendations depending on the phosphate bioavailability in the soil. By using the phosphorus index, based on peer-reviewed data, it informs farmers whether their soils are biologically optimised to provide what the crop needs.

Managing Director at Unium Bioscience, John Haywood, said it is simple and practical to use.

"It links environmental conditions such as soil moisture, temperature, soil texture, and location to a forecast for the next seven days to help growers with precise, location-specific information. This enables informed decision-making on how best to supply crops with phosphorus at a very critical and sensitive time in the plant's physiology," he said.

If phosphorus availability is limited, the tool provides advice on appropriate actions, such as the application of seed treatments, foliar phosphorus products, or biostimulants, which encourage root growth to enhance phosphorus absorption from the soil.

Growers can access Phosphate Power by visiting uniumbioscience.com/phosphate-calculator/ where they can quickly input their postcode to receive a detailed analysis of the phosphorus content in their soils.

Coollest UK summer revealed by agtech tool

The UK had its coolest summer in nine years during 2024, according to weather insights tool, Sencrop. From the start of June to the end of August, temperatures across the UK were on average around $-0.4^{\circ}\text{C}/-0.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ below normal.



'Major opportunity' for sector

MORE must be done to support the growing role of technology and automation in agriculture, according to 83% of respondents of a recent survey.

With 90% of those surveyed believing automation and AI are a major opportunity for the farming sector, the survey, carried out by the Institute of Agricultural Management (IAgrM), revealed that Labour availability is a considerable problem, with 89% of respondents saying it affects full-time workers and 70% saying that it impacts part-time workers.

Upskilling agricultural labour is a key consideration for the future, with 55% believing technical skills are the most important, 47% saying digital literacy and 37% prioritising health and safety knowledge.

IAgrM Director Victoria Bywater says this reflects a wider change in attitude towards technology.

"It looks like AI is here to stay and we're starting to see more practical applications reaching farms, whether it's targeted crop nutrition, precision pesticide application or weather forecasting," she said.

"But these findings make it clear we need to support the workforce to realise technology's true benefits, like increased efficiency and decision-making ability."



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Data-driven decisions

James Middleton, Customer Success Manager at YAGRO, explains how growers can better use their own experiences to become more successful at growing, both in season and in the future.



WHEN it comes to running a successful potato-growing operation, many factors can seem out of your control, be that the weather, market volatility or the odd machinery breakdown.

But one of the most powerful tools you can control is how you use your farm data (also called farm records) to drive your decisions.

Time and again I've seen how growers benefit from leaning into data-led decision-making, particularly when used to inform key decisions both in-season and over the long term.

This has included using data to improve rotations, input programmes and sales strategies. It really is the surest way to keep your farm one step ahead.

Historical Data: Benchmarking for Better Results

Your farm's historical data is a goldmine for driving long-term efficiency across your operation.

By comparing your current year's performance against previous seasons, you can see how decisions made in the past have impacted your bottom line. Historical data allows you to

benchmark your farm's performance against itself over time, identifying trends, pinpointing areas for improvement, and making sure you never repeat a mistake next season.

It also enables you to benchmark against market averages. This wider comparison gives you context as to where your farm stands more broadly, and what opportunities exist to improve efficiency or profitability.

Whether it's yield, input spend, or profit margins, having these numbers in front of you helps guide better decisions for the future. It's not just about knowing how much you've spent or earned. It's about understanding why certain areas performed better than others and being able to make data-driven adjustments for future seasons.

Every grower should compare the cost of production and gross margins on a year-to-year basis and identify patterns accurately to make informed decisions and manage their whole operation more effectively.

In today's volatile market, the insights hidden within farm data are invaluable.

Staying in control of the season

Now, let's talk about real-time data.

While historical data gives you a broad roadmap, real-time data keeps you on track throughout the season.

As you drill, fertilise, and harvest, tracking your season accurately helps you stay in control of every input and decision. You can then associate costs with each decision and justify or disprove those decisions.

Rather than the season getting away from you, real-time data allows you to monitor exactly how much you're investing in each field and variety, helping to control costs and ensure profitability.

This data isn't just valuable at the end of the season when you're calculating margins - it's crucial in the middle of it when you're adjusting on the go. For example, if a certain

field isn't performing as expected, real-time data helps you react quickly, preventing losses from escalating.

The data can then be used to avoid over-investing in crops or areas that are less likely to return, and avoid under-investing in parts of your farm which would show the best margin.

In the unfortunate event of having to redrill a field, perhaps because of flooding, having accurate data to hand for that field means you know exactly what redrilling will cost you.

The potential benefits are boundless and unique to every farm, but every farm can benefit from having their in-season progress recorded and visualised for them.

Future efficiency

In both cases, whether you're using historical or real-time data, the goal is the same: To become more efficient at growing.

Data-led decision-making isn't just about getting someone to crunch numbers for you. It's about empowering yourself to make the most informed decision possible, each and every time.

Whether it's planning next year's rotation or making mid-season adjustments, with accurate data at your fingertips you can make better decisions, ultimately improving profitability and sustainability. **PR**



If you'd like to familiarise yourself with your farm data, you can book a free consultation with James. Contact him at j.middleton@yagro.com.



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Resistant seed changes lives

Breeder's trials show how Kenyan farms have become more productive.



THE introduction of resistant potato varieties to Kenyan farms has brought about 'profound benefits' for growers, according to breeder Solynta.

Kenyan growers have long experienced shortages of seed tubers and other challenges in obtaining quality materials to grow their crops. During an extensive spray/no spray trial in Limuru, Kenya, more solid evidence emerged relating to better yields and a reduced need for chemical inputs, the seed company stated.

The trial was arranged in Limuru in the spring of 2024 using G1 seed tubers saved from the previous season. These seed tubers were produced from Solynta's disease-free true potato seeds. Three hybrid potato varieties, all with double-stack resistances against late blight, were planted alongside the Kenyan favourite potato variety, Shangi.

With the appearance of late blight in the field after three weeks, the non-sprayed Shangi soon died. The Solynta non-GMO hybrid varieties with double stack genetic resistances, however, showed remarkable resilience, yielding more than double the average Kenyan potato yield of 10 metric tons per hectare.

After 100 days, the inner two rows of a four-row plot of each hybrid variety and Shangi were harvested.

Both SOLHY017 and SOLHY016, advanced experimental hybrids, produced twice the yield of the market standard Shangi under no-spray conditions, a distinct advantage to those growers with limited access to fungicides.

Gerald Mutua, Director at CropCare Technologies in Kenya, an agri-business support service company aimed at establishing sustainable market linkages to support smallholder farmers in Kenya, said it was a vital step forward in helping local growers overcome two of the most significant challenges they face in potato production: Access to high-quality planting material and the devastating effects of Late Blight.

"These twin challenges have long limited yields for Kenyan farmers, but with Solynta's hybrid varieties, growers can now produce more resilient, disease-resistant crops, paving the way for a stronger, more sustainable agricultural sector. This is the kind of progress that will empower local farmers and build a resilient agricultural future," he said.

Charles Miller, Director of Strategic Alliances and Development at Solynta, said making quality

starting material available to Kenyan potato growers will empower them to produce sufficient potatoes, with limited or no need for fungicides.

"Not only will these new hybrids improve their own livelihoods, but they will provide them with strong harvests with which to feed their communities," he said.

Both the SOLHY016 and SOLHY017 varieties are currently undergoing registration with KEPHIS, the Kenyan regulatory authority, and will be commercialised once registration is completed.

Solynta's varieties also performed well when treated with fungicide, despite not needing the treatment to survive late blight.

"Even under fully managed and sprayed conditions, our varieties outperformed the average standard yield in Kenya, with yields more than four times the average. This indicates that Solynta's hybrid technology can be used by all growers, even in challenging environments and in areas under high disease pressure," Charles said.

Solynta recently registered the first three of its hybrid potato varieties in Kenya. These three potato varieties are now available to growers in Kenya. **PR**

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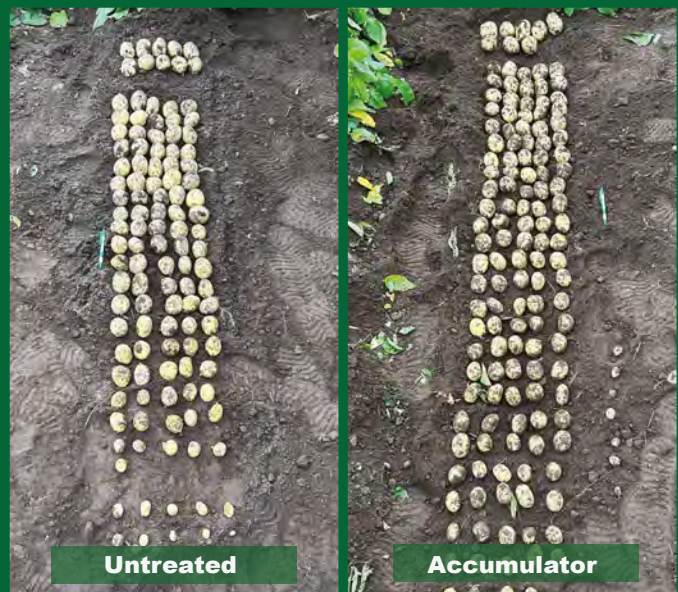


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Big Potato travels that bit further



THE Idaho potato industry descends upon Sun Valley, a resort city in the western United States, every August for the annual Idaho Grower Shipper Association convention.

Many people from across the industry attend and look forward to hearing the annual update from the Idaho Potato Commission, which gives a full recap on that year's efforts to promote the state's potato crop. This year, IPC President Jamey Higham discussed the ongoing success of the Big Idaho Potato Truck campaign at the event.

The 'potato hotel', a 28-foot long, 12-foot wide and 11.5-foot tall structure which can be hired for stays, is sited in a location overlooking the Owyhee Mountains, when not on the road. It is bolted to a flatbed trailer and takes to the road for the rest of the year, promoting the Idaho potato and its mission to help small charities with its Big Helping program.

The truck made its debut in 2012 as part of the IPC's 75th anniversary celebration and has since travelled to almost every corner of the United States. This year it even made it to Hawaii, where people flocked to see it from all over the state.

"One high school even closed early so the students could go see it," Jamey said in an interview with The Produce News. "We also had a traditional lei ceremony for the truck led by Rep Diamond Garcia of Hawaii."

The truck made stops at two Walmarts and two Five Guys locations gave out free chips to mark the truck's visit.

The 2024 truck tour covered 67 cities and more than 22,000 miles, making appearances

at more than 50 public events and raising more than \$10,000 for charity.

Jamey said he'd been bowled over by the success of the Big Idaho Potato Truck campaign, having been a little reticent about it when he joined the IPC two years ago.

The truck will come off the road in September and undergo maintenance before going back on the road in February for the 2025 tour. Current tour plans for 2025 have the truck trekking back to New York City.

"New York is such a great market for Idaho potatoes, and despite the challenges of getting the truck into New York City, it is very worthwhile because of the exposure we receive," said Jamey.

The commission is debating whether or not to continue sponsoring the Idaho Potato Bowl, which pits the Mountain West Conference champion against the Mid American Conference champion, and will next be played on December 23rd on the blue turf at Boise State University. It is considering a new sponsorship for IPC at the South Beach Food & Wine Festival Burger Bash which is held each February in Miami and popular with visitors from around the world.

The latter features a burger challenge and a side dish challenge where entries must feature an Idaho potato.

The IPC is also working on hosting a French fry eating contest, with Major League Eating Champion Joey Chestnut as an invited guest, at a food festival that will take place to coincide with National French Fry Day at Ocean City next July.

Diabetes awareness

Now in its second year, the IPC partnership with the American Diabetes Association is going strong and helping Idaho potatoes shed some of the negative connotations people had about potatoes adversely affecting those with diabetes.

"It's helping us claw back some business we lost when the Atkins diet was so popular years ago," Jamey said, adding that while Idaho is the only potato that received approval to include the ADA seal on packaging, the partnership helps the entire potato category. He said IPC would like to "super charge" its collaboration with the ADA, and part of the plan includes working with nutrition writers more in the future.

IPC has become known for its creative television ad spots, especially recent ones featuring Idaho potato grower Mark Coombs and his beloved bloodhound in search of the Big Idaho Potato Truck, narrowly missing it in each commercial.

A new campaign will focus on the need to verify that potatoes are genuine Idaho potatoes and a clip shown of this revealed seedy street vendors peddling those that weren't genuine. Another previewed advert showed a family at the dinner table, with the authenticity of the mashed potatoes they were eating called into question.

The popular Potato Lovers Month retail display contest continues to grow in popularity, with entries up 21% on last year. **PR**





Supplier gives 40K truckload to families in need

RPE, a Midwest American company which produces, packages, markets and sells potatoes, has delivered a truck-load to help provide meals to Wisconsin families in need.

The company donated 40,000-pounds of potatoes to Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin.

"We're a family-owned farm, and family has and always will come first. We know that in today's world, there are some families who are struggling to make ends meet, and we wanted to give back to our communities to make things a little easier for them during the holiday season," says Bill Wysocki, a co-owner of RPE.

This is not the first time RPE has donated potatoes to help those in need. RPE began its partnership with Feeding America earlier this season and is donating around 8,000-pounds of potatoes each week to help win the fight against hunger.

In November, RPE donated a truckload of potatoes to Hurricane Sandy relief efforts in conjunction with the Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers Association and other potato growers in the state.

High temperatures slow harvests

HIGH temperatures in the Red River Valley in North Dakota have been slowing potato harvests, according to one supplier.

In a recent interview with Fresh Plaza, David Moquist of O.C. Schulz & Sons said: "We're running about 10 degrees warmer than normal for this time of year so the harvest isn't steady. "We've been harvesting a lot of mornings and not afternoons."

He said growers haven't had as many hours to harvest as normal at this time of year. Normally, potato harvests finish around October 5th but at the time of interview, it was envisaged that this year it would be later.

There is a good crop of good-quality potatoes coming from the area, David said, but acreage in the Red River Valley, generally on fresh potatoes, is down by approximately around 2%-3%, with Reds showing a bigger reduction than yellows. Demand for red potatoes is "fairly good", David added, but he said there's limited supply right now.

While pricing was still being determined, Reds prices are expected to be higher than last year, and yellow potatoes may see slightly lower pricing. "The biggest thing with yellows is how many have to ship off the field versus how the supply matches up once we're all in storage," David said.



Combined states' sales hit \$2.63 billion

POTATO sales in Idaho, Oregon and Washington hit \$2.63 billion last year, according to figures released by the United States Department of Agriculture, with Washington and Oregon seeing sold crop increases of 23% and 13% respectively on 2022, while Idaho's was down by 11%.

Production in all three states increased. Washington's production was up the most, seeing a 9% increase on 2022, while Idaho and Oregon each saw a 1% production increase.

The value of all potatoes sold in 2023 in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington was \$2.63 billion.

The final value of Idaho's 2023 potato crop sold was \$1.26 billion and the marketing year average price for potatoes in Idaho was \$9.63 per cwt, down \$2.87 from last year.

In Oregon, the 2023 potato crop sold was valued at \$284 million and the potato price was \$11.60 per cwt, up \$1.30 from last year.

Washington's 2023 potato crop sold was valued at \$1.09 billion and the marketing year average price for potatoes was \$11.20 per cwt, up \$1.32 from the previous year.

In Idaho, potato production for 2023 totaled 143 million cwt, Oregon's production was 26.7 million cwt, and Washington's was 104 million cwt. The combined production for the three states was 62% of US potato production in 2023.

Processors in Idaho used 84.1 million cwt of potatoes for the season. In Oregon, 38.5 million cwt of potatoes had been used by processors for the season. Of the total, 9.87 million cwt had been used in Malheur County and 28.6 million cwt had been used in other counties. In Washington, 64.6 million cwt of potatoes had been used by processors for the season. Processors in the eight States used 232 million cwt of potatoes for the season, up 6% from the previous year.

Quality issues prompted by 'unethical' growers



PROBLEMS with potato quality in Maine in New England, in the United States, have prompted a certification program to be imposed by the State Department of Agriculture.

Maine's production of potatoes has halved in the past 20 years, and many believe the quality problems are partially responsible for this.

The certification program is aimed at preventing poor quality potatoes from reaching the marketplace. The state's commissioner of agriculture, Ed McGlaughlin, said unethical practices by some growers had necessitated the move, as these have led to some potatoes that are unfit for consumers, making their way to supermarket shelves. This includes those intended for seeding or processing.

The programme has been welcomed by retailers in the area, including supermarket chains Hannaford Bros and Stop 'n Shop.

Supplier makes 'fresh' inroads



CLAREBOUT Potatoes, which provides frozen potato products for private labels, is acquiring a minority stake in its fellow Belgian potato supply company, Pomuni.

Clarebout, which operates from two production units and various potato storage facilities in Belgium, supplies to global processors all over the world, and is looking to provide a more diverse offering, according to the Belgian newspaper De Tijd.

Pomuni, which supplies fresh and frozen potatoes, has recently made significant investments in modernisation and sustainability. Clarebout's new stakeholding will give it access access to the fresh potato market.

Pomuni will continue to operate under the leadership of the Muysshondt family.

The size of Clarebout's investment has not been disclosed, and the deal is still pending approval from competition authorities.

The north beats the south and late blight challenges organic growers



THE northern regions of the Netherlands is seeing higher potato yields than the south-west this year, as well as better quality crops, while organic crops have been particularly poor, according to one of the country's wholesalers, Lanjuweel.



In a recent interview, the company's Head of Procurement, Frank Poelman, said: "Although there is still a lot of grubbing to do, yields in our area seem better than in the south-west, although it has to be said that the differences locally are big. It's a similar story when it comes to quality."

He said it's difficult to estimate how big yields will actually be as the season is a lot later and there were plenty of plots that still had potential at the time of *British Potato Review* going to press.

"There are plots where grubbing is only 60% of the average of previous years, but there are also plots with 20% higher yields. But there is still a lot of grubbing to do," he said. "All in all, I expect we will end up with a reasonably average harvest in the EU's big four potato countries."

He said demand for potatoes is good and while supply of large potatoes is still limited, they're in good demand.

"Traditionally, potato sales show a dip in the summer, but this year demand has been less quiet than other years and sales have continued quite well. Also, export figures are certainly not bad at the moment. Early potatoes did not run over in terms of volume, but what is being grubbed up is also sold off reasonably well. Prices fell hard after the old harvest, but we are now seeing a stabilisation in the market."

Organic yields had been poor and growers have faced particular challenges because of pressure from Phytophthora, he said, with some being forced to spray their crops with pesticides and sell them as conventional varieties. As a result, their prices were high.

Harvest challenges and new EU directive in focus at autumn industry gathering



THE 71st International Potato Autumn Fair, organised by the German Potato Trade Association (DKHV), brought together representatives from the entire potato industry in Hamburg.

Seventeen exhibitors and 140 people attended. DKHV President Thomas Herkenrath, Heide Potato Queen Paula I and State Councillor Andreas Rieckhof from the Ministry of Economy and Innovation of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg welcomed them to the event.

In his keynote speech, 'Protecting the Digital Harvest from Pests: Cybersecurity in the Potato Trade', Dr. Christoph Endres, a computer scientist and AI researcher, highlighted that the threat of cyberattacks is significantly increasing in the agricultural and food industries, offering insights into typical threat scenarios for the potato trade, along with practical tips for securing sensitive data and systems.

The new EU directive on ensuring high levels of network and information security (NIS-2), requiring many companies to implement preventive security measures from October 18th, sparked intense discussions and continued to be debated throughout the evening.

The mood was generally positive owing to the forecast large harvest of 12.7 million tons of potatoes, but there are still many potatoes in the ground and uncertainties such as weather influences, disease pressure and quality issues could still reduce the marketable quantity.

DKHV President Herkenrath said: "The conditions for potato cultivation this year were extremely challenging. There was already unusually high rainfall across Germany in the spring. In some places, the soil was so wet for so long that the last plantings could not be completed until mid-June. Nevertheless, many tubers were successfully planted under optimal conditions.

"In some regions, areas were severely damaged by flooding and persistent rainfall. The wet weather in spring, which lasted well into May, led to increased pressure from diseases throughout the country, particularly late blight. We are concerned about the increasingly restrictive political requirements for crop protection, which are making it more and more difficult to combat diseases and pests.

"For a long time, a potato harvest similar to last year's was expected, despite a 9% increase in acreage. However, the yields determined from representatively selected sample areas for the BMEL's Special Harvest and Quality Assessment (BEE) assume a record potato harvest of 12.7 million tons with a calculated yield of around 44 tons per hectare."

At the time of going to press, only 46% of the almost 700 sample areas had been evaluated and the regional differences between yields was enormous.

The focus is now on the International Berlin Potato Evening which will take place on February 4th in Berlin.



Cheaper potatoes



THERE has been a substantial price drop in the price of potatoes in Brazil, according to statistics released by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE).

The -19.04% reduction in August was amongst a number of price drops in the food and beverage sector, which saw a 0.44% reduction overall in prices last month, driven by cheaper food and housing items.

August marked the first month since June 2023 to see a downturn, with the IPCA, Brazil's principal price index, escalating by 4.24% over the past year. This aligns with the government's 2024 inflation ceiling of 4.5%. Economists' predictions that prices would see a 0.02% increase have proved to be wrong, as the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) has instead reported a 0.02% decline.

Temporary approval to help wireworm control



SUSTAINABLE biopesticide developer Eden Research has been given temporary approval for one of its products to be used on potatoes in Greece for the 2024 season.

The biopesticide, named Cedroz, will be distributed in Greece by US firm Eastman Chemical and applied to potatoes to control wireworms.

The wireworm-infected area of potatoes in Greece is around 5,000-6,000 hectares.

Mixed quality and lower prices



MIXED quality potato crops are expected in Prince Edward Island (PEI) this year.

Dwayne Coffin of Vanco Produce Ltd said in a recent interview with Fresh Plaza that some areas will see 'terrific' tuber sizes and yield, while other areas that have not had much rain this year are expecting less-than-average yields.

While crops went in earlier this year, the latter part of August saw hot weather conditions that stayed on the dryer side while in early September, the province received half an inch to an inch of rain.

"It did help but unfortunately a lot of the fields had started to die down already by the time the rain came. Regardless, it still helps with harvesting in terms of bruising and that sort of thing. It has been ideal weather for harvesting," he said, adding that the province's red and yellow potatoes should have received enough moisture to produce an average crop with some good sizing.

"Both of our packing sheds are running, one a little more sporadic than the other. It is a different start to a season and I think a big part of that is that the pipeline is still full of old-crop potatoes. Those are especially from the US, the Western Russets," he said.

This has led to lower prices than are usually seen at this time of year, while demand has been average.

"If prices are lower than what you would like them to be, a lot of growers will focus on finishing the harvest and then see where market prices are," Dwayne said. "Unfortunately a lot of regions have potatoes available right now and I think in the short term, pricing will probably be unstable into the new year. Hopefully, in 2025, prices will stabilise or even rebound a bit by then."

Prices keep rising despite surplus production



DESPITE an excess in potato yield, prices in Bangladesh's domestic market have seen a steady increase, impacting consumers, particularly those from lower-income groups.

The country produced 10.6 million tonnes of potatoes last season, ranking it as the third most consumed agricultural product. However, with a 20% estimated production loss, the market's net supply is approximately 8.48 million tonnes. This, against a national annual requirement of about 8.1 million tonnes, suggests a surplus of around 0.38 million tonnes.

Even with this surplus, retail prices have oscillated between Tk 60 and Tk 70 per kg. A recent reduction to Tk 60 per kg, following a tax cut on imports by the interim government, aimed at stabilising prices amidst inflation exceeding 10 percent.

Dr Md Abu Zafar Al Munsur from the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) emphasised that the current production aligns with the annual demand, based on a per capita daily consumption of 130 grams.

Price fluctuations are apparent, with costs peaking at Tk 56 per kg during the September-December 2023 period, before dropping to Tk 29 per kg by February after the harvest.

The DAE, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), and the Space Research and Remote Sensing Organisation (SPARSO) collaborate to determine production statistics, with the estimated per capita consumption being higher than previous reports owing to industrial and non-human uses.

Md Akter Hasan, a joint director at the BBS, said: "We have observed a gap between potato production and its annual demand. According to production statistics, there should be a surplus, but market conditions suggest otherwise."

Discrepancies in population data have been highlighted as a potential issue affecting these figures. The government's response to the price surge included importing 0.53 million tonnes of potatoes in the past fiscal year, though this had minimal impact on prices. Critiques of BBS data accuracy have prompted a review of data production methods.

Growers have faced a 75% increase in seed prices, affecting production costs. Despite the surplus, high domestic prices have hindered potato exports, leading to losses in foreign currency earnings. The government and related agencies are working to address these challenges and stabilise the potato market in Bangladesh.

Ekramul Hoque, a grower from Rajshahi, said: "I bought potato seeds at Tk 70 per kg last season, compared to Tk 40 previously." He said his production costs are around Tk 22 per kg, while the DAE estimates a national average of Tk 19 per kg, reflecting regional variations.

This year's poor potato export performance, a new diversified product in the export basket, attributed to high domestic prices, has led to losses in foreign currency earnings.

Proprietor of Agrofresh Exports in Dhaka, Ms Afroza Khatoun, said despite receiving numerous orders, she has been unable to meet demand because of limited supply.

"Prices were too high, which is why I couldn't fulfil many orders," she added.



Photo: Agrico

Demo-harvester available to try out

STANDEN Engineering is offering to give live demonstrations of its best-selling T2XS harvester model.

Any UK growers thinking of changing their harvester in 2025 can get in touch with the Ely-based supplier to have the demonstration model brought to their farm so they can put it through its paces.



New cleaning table solutions

NEW cleaning table solutions are now being offered by Spalding-based Standen Engineering, to help optimise potato storage.

The company can manufacture OMEGA, Galaxy Star, Verticam or Dahlman roller tables to fit existing grading line applications. These are built to order so the cleaning roller type, width and length of table can be specified according to the store. Galaxy star cleaners are also available, up to 2.4m wide.

Verticam units consist of a contra-rotating star unit underneath that keeps the stars clean even in very wet conditions.

The company can also manufacture from scratch Roller table, or Dahlman separators up to 28 rollers wide, and from 800mm long to 1175mm long with hydraulic drive.



Processing tech displayed

PROCESSING technology expert Sormac, which trades from a UK base in Bury St Edmunds, has been showcasing its high-precision processing equipment in the US at the Global Produce and Floral Show and Pack Expo.

The company provides technology solutions to potato processors of all sizes. It supplies machines for a number of applications including cutting, grading, inspection, cooling/product treatment, drying, weighing/mixing and transport.



New slice or dice machine for processors

FAM STUMABO, a Belgian manufacturer, has launched a new cutting machine for cutting potatoes into French fries.

The SureTec 240P is specially designed for potato processing and can cut or dice while running at high capacities.

The cutting machine features the SureCut Unit (SCU) which allows the cutting components to be pre-assembled in one piece and with a preset cut size. The manufacturer says this allows even non-technically trained operators to install the cutting tools on the machine in a very fast, uncomplicated and error-free manner, assuring cutting accuracy from the very first moment of every new production run, thereby maximising production uptime.

Further advantages of the machine are the slipper clutch and slip detection system to avoid expensive downtimes and prevent the parts from severe damage or wear owing to foreign objects, while the hinged electrical cabinet guarantees faster access to the drive area.

The SureTec 240P was designed to process both white and sweet potatoes, whether abrasive or steam-peeled. Potatoes can be processed into French fries, small sticks and dice. A variety of cut sizes and shapes are available which include crinkle, deep crinkle and flat French fries.

The 240 mm wide drum is an essential requirement if long potatoes are to be cut at full length. A variety of impellers with a different number of paddles are available to suit different size products and to align them properly.



New sieving harvester makes its debut

A NEW generation four-row sieving harvester made its debut at the 18th edition of Potato Europe, which took place in Villers-Saint-Christophe, Aisne, France recently.

The new generation Enduro from manufacturer DeWulf is configured for a row distance of four x 90cm. The four-row harvester is equipped with a newly-designed ring elevator, which boasts an increased processing capacity.

The combination of larger bag volume, higher running speed and more optimal product distribution have boosted the capacity by around 50%. The external changes to the Generation 2 machine are characterised by a new look and feel, with fewer covers, a redesigned main frame, and a larger, anthracite-coloured fuel tank.

It can be equipped with an Easy-Clean cleaning module, which features a

continuously adjustable inclination angle of between 0 and 12° which is an advantage when working on sloping fields.

Its two-part bunker provides a convenient 12.3 m³ capacity.



New dealer announced

POTATO field machinery manufacturer Standen Engineering Ltd has announced a new dealer for Lancashire and Cheshire.

Clarke and Pulman Ltd, a North West supplier of agricultural, construction and ground-care machinery is already the main dealer for Massey Ferguson, Fendt, JCB, Honda and Kverneland. It will now offer the full range of Standen and Standen Imports machinery and parts from its two depots in Burscough and Garstang.

The Standen ranges were displayed on Clarke and Pulman's stand at the Cheshire Ploughing Match recently.

Four extra large conveyors unveiled

POTATO sorting and handling machinery manufacturer Key Technology (Key), has introduced new high-capacity vibratory conveyors for advanced handling applications.

Conveying up to 100,000 lb (45,359 kg) of product an hour and available in widths of more than 10 feet (3 metres), Key's Iso-Flo®, Impulse®, Zephyr® and Marathon® vibratory conveyors are extra-large, high-capacity machines that can be engineered for grading, aligning, distributing and other specialised handling functions.

Jack Lee, Food Sorting and Handling Solutions President of Key's parent group, Duravant, said: "As demand for processed foods continues to grow, processors are looking to maximize production capacity on existing

lines and install new lines capable of higher-than-ever throughputs. Key's high-capacity conveyors support these objectives while helping processors streamline their operations, reduce labour and maximise profits."

The conveyors are ideal for potato strips and chips.

The conveyor spring arms can be positioned either on the sides of the bed or underneath it. Drives can be positioned outside, inside or even close to the centre of the frame. The design and rigidity of the frame is also customised depending on the application. Each conveyor can be installed in a variety of different ways – suspended from overhead, supported from the floor or mounted to other machinery.





Get into the spirit

Having shown upgraded harvester in full-demo set-up at European show, AVR gives a full breakdown of how it's been tweaking the two-row offset bunker model.

AVR's Spirit 9200i harvester has now been unveiled, revealing a number of upgrades in the area of control, traction, haulm web, pintle belt module, cross-roller module and the Clean & Go hopper.

In 2023, the prototype was extensively tested and received plenty of positive feedback. Seven Spirit 9200i harvesters were subsequently manufactured in a pre-production run in 2024. The Spirit 9200i was recently on display, fully operational, in a demo set-up for the first time at the Potato Europe trade fair in Villers-Saint-Christophe, France.

The AVR Spirit 9200 was a well-established two-row offset bunker harvester and the Spirit 9200i's key features are improved cleaning modules, automated functions and ease of use.

The machine's drive system is compatible with ISOBUS. This means that the machine can be configured via the ISOBUS-compatible display screen of your choice. AVR can offer you a Müller Touch800 or Smart570 screen for this purpose. The machine also comes with an ergonomic AVR joystick as a standard, and thanks to the ISOBUS-AUX system, various functions can also be controlled via your tractor joystick.

Clear icons and intuitive menus, supplemented by the automatic functions of the machine, all serve to optimise the user-friendliness of the Spirit 9200i.

Sieving capacity / drop heights

There are up to four sieving webs for the pintle belt module. Either two short digging webs or one long digging web can be attached to the front of the machine. An additional digging web – and therefore one more drop – significantly increases the machine's sieving capacity. If the soil can be sieved easily and for the gentlest treatment, a single long web is the best option.

A soft sieving web fitted with rubber can be attached directly in front of the pintle belt module, or you can opt for a cross-roller module for additional cleaning capacity. Drop heights are kept to a minimum throughout the machine. Because the haulm and sieving webs are so close to one another, the drop height

from the digging to the sieving web is limited to the greatest extent possible.

The primary haulm separation system is a combination of the sieving web and the haulm web. A set comprising two rows of retainers and another set comprising three rows of retainers mounted above the haulm web ensures the potatoes stay in the machine. These sets are individually adjustable in height, and the rows of retainers have been mounted to ensure an adequate distance in between the rows to optimize the machine's separation capacity. In the event of an accumulation of haulm, the frames of the rows can be folded upwards.

Another three rows can be added at the top of the machine. A closed conveyor is located underneath the haulm web that discharges the haulm and allows any potatoes that have accidentally been carried along with the haulm to roll back into the machine.

Extra haulm separation

The third sieving web or the cross-roller set increases the separation surface (haulm web) for long haulm or weeds from the product flow. This is of crucial importance, considering the current trend which favors high-yield varieties with a lot of sturdy haulm.

The further development of the cross-roller module with a haulm roller makes it easier to process any short stalks that slip through the haulm web.



Additional cleaning capacity

A cross-roller set for the pintle belt unit significantly increases the machine's cleaning capacity – without any need for additional directional changes in the machine. The cross-rollers efficiently remove loose soil, clods, and smaller stones from the product flow, thus relieving the pressure on the pintle belts and allowing them to remove the remaining loose soil and haulm more efficiently. The position, speed and rotating direction of the smooth rollers can be adjusted on the display screen via a handy widget. The last roller of the CR module has also been fitted with rubber and, in combination with a brush bar, serves as an efficient haulm roller.

The cross-roller module's adjustment options allow the digging unit to be used in every situation.

The pintle belt module to the rear of the machine is fully adjustable in terms of incline and guarantees full control over the product flow under all circumstances, regardless of whether you are working on a slope or a flat surface, or on light or heavy soil. The product flow on the in-line pintle belt is guided via the triple retaining roller – which is height adjustable – to the transversal pintle belt

equipped with two two-row rotary combs. This is where stone and clod separation takes place before the final inspection on the picking-off table.

The new, hydraulically collapsible retaining roller on the transversal pintle belt can be operated from the cabin. This means that obstructions can easily be avoided, even in the most difficult sections of your plot.

The large picking-off table offers enough space for six people to perform a final



inspection. All the settings for the cleaning modules can be operated from the picking-off table via the convenient keypad.

The Spirit 9200i is equipped with a bunker with a capacity of just over eight tons. The unloading height can be adjusted up to 4.20 m, for which a hydraulic collapsible shock absorber or crate-filling funnel is available.

A Clean & Go bunker is also an option.

Traction capacity

Hydrostatic wheel drive is available optionally. An additional hydraulic pump drives a 2815cc wheel motor on the right wheel and a 1745cc wheel motor on the left wheel. Consequently, the rear axle is provided with a traction capacity of 120 hp. The traction system can be operated via an intuitive supplementary keypad, while the ISOBUS control automatically detects whether the machine is moving forwards or backwards.

The Spirit 9200i can be fully monitored remotely, online. An AVR Connect account allows you to monitor data in relation to the work you have performed, sensor data, alarms and yield data. Even remote diagnostics are possible for even better support from your dealer or AVR. **PR**



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REAP 2024 explores ag-tech's balancing act

INDUSTRY leaders, farmers, innovators, and researchers will gather at Newmarket Racecourse on November 6th to learn about the latest ag-tech and explore insights from renowned industry leaders at REAP 2024.

The potential applications of artificial intelligence to revolutionise agriculture by delivering bespoke management at scale will be the topic of the keynote address by Dr Elliott Grant, former CEO of Mineral. The firm was an Alphabet company applying breakthroughs in artificial intelligence to the challenges of making agriculture more sustainable before John Deere acquired Mineral's technology earlier this year.

Leaders from three global giants, John Deere, Bayer and Unilever, will discuss how supply chains can collaborate to deliver innovation to farmers. Phil Taylor, Director of ecosystem development for Crop Science R&D, will represent Bayer on the panel.

"As an industry, we have spent the last five years recognising that we need to work together," he said. "The next 10 years will be about how to make the whole system sustainable and self-supporting. To achieve this, we need to find new ways of partnering."

"Across the world, there are these global innovation hotspots. The Agri-TechE ecosystem is clearly one of them, where we see opportunities for Bayer to contribute and become part of the ecosystem."

The conference will close with three sessions that are regular fixtures at REAP.

The Emerging Agri-Tech panel will allow scientists to discuss the progress of grower-focussed projects, the Start-up Showcase will reveal Agri-TechE's top eight picks for the future of farming, and the final fixture will be a review of current farming practices by assorted farmers.

'Energising a potato industry in transition'

INTERPOM, the international indoor trade fair for the entire potato chain, will take place at Kortrijk Xpo in Belgium from November 24th to 26th.

Previous editions of the show have attracted more than 20,000 visitors from 50 countries, including growers, contractors, processors, packers, purchasers and traders of fresh and processed potatoes. This year, the show's theme will be 'Energising a potato industry in transition'.

Organised by Belgapom, the Belgian potato trade and processing industry association, the event's theme is in response to the significant challenges the industry is facing as a result of climate change, stricter regulations, increasing disease pressure, fluctuating energy costs and the increasingly urgent need to make operations more sustainable.

The event is targeted at everyone operating within the potato supply chain, from cultivation to processing and marketing. There will be a range of products, machinery, services and digital technologies for the entire chain exhibited.



Changes to conference programme

CROPTEC, which has been showcasing technical knowledge, products, services and solutions to the growers and agronomists, for the past 11 years, has made significant changes to its conference programme, aligning with evolving agricultural practices and industry trends.

The show will introduce three keynote theatres focusing on innovation, knowledge and profit. The sessions will explore a range of topics including crop varieties, eco-friendly fertilisers, pesticide regulations, diversification, and the role of AI and robotics in arable farming.

The event takes place on November 27th and 28th at the NAEC Stoneleigh.



Conference will examine 'the nuts and bolts' of regenerative growing

LANDALIVE, a new regenerative farming conference, will feature expert talks on climate-friendly farming from practitioners, advisors, soil specialists, policy makers, wildlife organisations and representatives from across the food supply chain.

The event, which will take place at the Bath & West Showground, Somerset, on November 22nd and 23rd, offers two days of talks and an exhibition showcasing innovations, services and support.

LandAlive Programme Director, Graham Harvey, said: "We'll be looking at the nuts and bolts of regenerative farming practice, but also covering what's new in soil science, technology, changing supply chain dynamics and, of course, the shifting subsidy landscape."

Professor Andy Neal, Rothamsted soil scientist, will outline the importance of pore-space connectivity in making soils productive while Martin Lines, CEO of the Nature Friendly Farming Network and farming consultant Tim Williams (Earth Farmer) will show how biodiversity and profitable farming belong together, with Tim looking at ways to increase productivity on regeneratively-managed farms.

There'll also be a focus on how policy needs to shift to better support growers, make good food more accessible and build UK food security in the years ahead. A 'Policy Makers' Forum' and talks by Sue Pritchard, Chief Executive of the Food and Farming Commission, and DEFRA's Helen Coates, will provide updates on developments in farming and food policy reform at both a national and regional level.

The conference is a collaboration between Sustainable Food Somerset and The Royal Bath and West of England Society, supported by DEFRA'S 'Farming in Protected Landscapes' (FIPL) fund through Mendip, Quantocks and Exmoor National Landscapes, with support from Somerset Council.

New CEO for potato breeding group

POTATO breeder Royal HZPC Group has welcomed Hans Huistra as its new CEO.

In a hybrid meeting, broadcast from the Dutch breeder's headquarters in Joure, colleagues from all of Royal HZPC Group's global locations (HZPC, STET and ZOS) had the opportunity to meet the new CEO.

Born in Joure in 1968, Hans has held key positions with Unilever, Friesland Campina, Hero, and Fonterra. He has been on Cosun's supervisory board for the past seven years and his career has spanned several countries, giving him a wide range of experience in the agricultural and food sectors in Europe, Asia, America, and Africa.

He said interaction with growers has always been a crucial aspect of his work.

Former CEO, Gerard Backx, who has worked in the industry for 23 years, has stepped down but will continue to offer his support at HZPC and STET's Potato Days on November 7th and 8th.



Rick appointed to newly-created Greenvale director role

GREENVALE, one of the UK's largest growers and suppliers of fresh, processing and organic potatoes, has appointed Rick Clay to a newly-created role of Agricultural Director.

Rick has more than 25 years of expertise in fresh produce management and farming roles across the UK and Europe. He will work on increasing Greenvale's operations and oversee the procurement of fresh potatoes for Greenvale's two packing sites.

Greenvale MD David Rankin said: "Rick is a great fit for Greenvale. His expertise and understanding of our offering uniquely position him to help, not just with our growth, but our role in the future and sustainability of the potato sector as a whole."

Rick added: "I am looking forward to working with our grower network to navigate the challenges that present themselves in the industry, while seeking to scale operations and provide opportunities for growth."



New general manager for Branston

BRANSTON, one of the UK's leading potato suppliers, has appointed a new general manager at its Lincoln site as part of its growth plans.

Tanya Leonard joins the Branston team with more than 20 years of experience in fresh produce, having taken on her first management role in sports and leisure at the age of 17. After gaining experience in a fresh produce production role during what was intended as a stop gap, Tanya then progressed through a number of operational roles.

Now at the helm of the fresh produce team at Branston, Tanya will seek to help the business to operate more efficiently,

as well as maintaining the engineering function and setting up future development and technology opportunities.

Tanya said: "I love how fast-paced the industry is and there are some very exciting developments taking place within the business, including the success of the mash and protein factories, so I'm looking forward to getting stuck in and learning more."

"Helping people grow within their roles is something I'm passionate about, and I'm keen to act as a mentor for others within the business. Having started out at a young age in the industry, I know it can be challenging to build confidence,

but there is no ceiling for ambitious individuals so I want to do all I can to help young people in the business progress."

Tanya's daughter has also recently joined Branston as HR administrator.

CEO at Branston, Jim Windle, said: "Tanya brings a huge amount of experience in fresh produce and an infectious energy with her leadership style, both of which are going to be a real asset to our Lincoln team, and we're thrilled she has chosen to join the business. We're looking forward to her bringing a fresh outlook on operations and helping us as we enter our next phase of growth." **PR**



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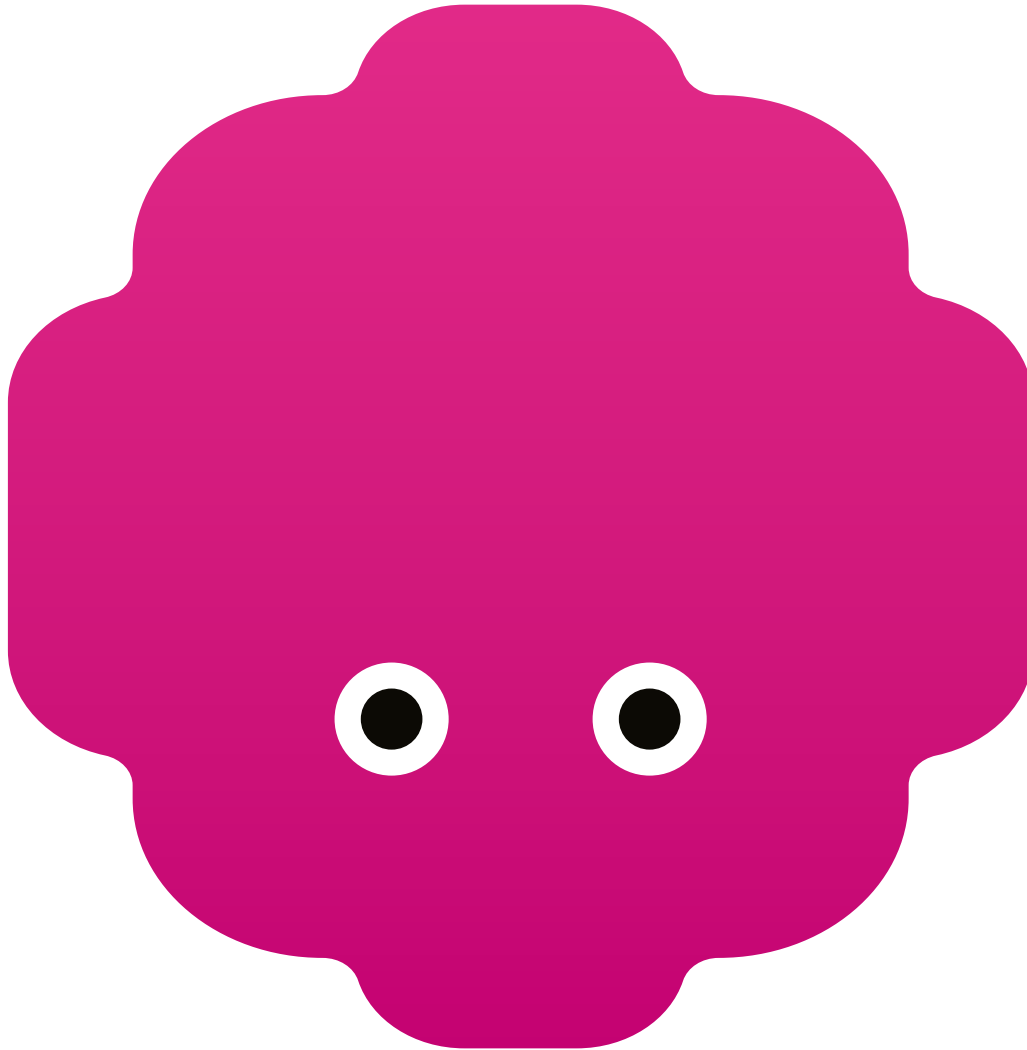
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