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Editor's letter

HAPPY new year to all our readers and followers! 2025 threw plenty of challenges, and also some notable celebrations our way, and we're hoping 2026 will be a productive and rewarding one for all in the potato industry.

The run-up to Christmas was a busy one for us.
Like many of you, we gathered at Harrogate for the biennial British Potato Industry Event (BPI) in November. While I was sadly only able to attend for one day this year, and didn't get much chance to leave our stand to 'go for a wander', it was good that so many of you popped by to say hello and chat about some of the projects you're involved in. I'm looking forward to following up on those, and would encourage anyone with other news or information to share to drop me a line as well, so we can have a belated chat.

The show was one of the most well-received yet. For a recap on all it encompassed, or to catch up with anything you might have missed, turn to our review on page 28. We also share a round-up of the British Potato Industry Awards, which took place on the first night of the show, on page 32, and a special digital awards supplement can be downloaded from the British Potato website at www.britishpotato.co.uk.

Hot on the heels of BPI's announcements and the latest LAMMA launches, we're kicking off the new year with some notable machinery updates which you can read about on page 36. We've also got some good storage tips and seasonal advice on sourcing healthy seed in this issue. Breeding has a strong focus this month with Branston's Martin Stothard discussing the circular approach to seed and Agrico adopting a 'Stronger by Nature' theme at its Variety and Seedling Show.

And of course, how can we see in a new year, without looking back on the old? For our 2025 'Year In Review' feature, turn to page 43.

Stephanie Cornwall

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Three potato growers recognised with Agri Influencer Awards

THREE potato growers have been recognised for their use of social media to increase awareness and share knowledge.

The German Agricultural Society, DLG, recently presented the winners of the DLG Agri Influencer Award. The awards honour individuals who share agricultural topics that engage large audiences across social media, and foster dialogue between agriculture and society. They received their awards during the Young Farmers' Party held at world trade fair Agritechnica recently.

For the first time, the award recognised first, second, and third places in two categories: German-speaking and International.

Franco Speranza, who comes from Bell Ville, Argentina, and currently has 230,000 followers as @franco_speranza gained second place in the international category, while Nina Kleine and Patrick Danuser came first and second respectively in the German-speaking category. Nina Kleine hails from Münster in Westphalia and currently has 41,000 followers as @hof_zur_haskenau, while Patrick Patrick Danuser comes from Bad Ragaz in Switzerland and currently has 48,000 followers as @danuser_hof.

DLG CEO Freya von Czettritz, who presented the awards, said: "Social media has become an integral part of both our professional and personal lives. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok offer tremendous opportunities to reach people, share knowledge about agriculture, and promote dialogue across industry boundaries. This year's award winners have mastered the art of using these channels. With expertise, humor, and a keen eye for detail, they take their followers onto the farm every day, offering authentic insights into modern agriculture and daily life on their operations."

The award ceremony was hosted by Heike Zeller, Managing Director of aHEU and Chair of the Agri Influencer Award jury, who said: "The winners stand out for their quality content and genuine appeal. It's remarkable to see such professional communication alongside the demanding work on the farm."

The DLG Agri influencers take their followers along digitally every day, into the fields, the barn, or the tractor cab. The DLG Agri Influencer Award aims to raise their profile among the wider public and provide targeted support to strengthen their communication efforts. This international award has been presented annually by DLG since 2022.

25th milestone marked

PACKAGING machinery manufacturer, GIC, is celebrating supplying its 25th vertical form fill and seal (VFFS) machine to the UK potato grower Greenvale.

Greenvale, which grows more than 25,000 tonnes of potatoes each year, took delivery of a GIC8000 VFFS machine at its Floods Ferry site in October, where it will be used to pack fresh small potatoes at high speed in finished packs up to 1kg.

GIC first worked with Greenvale in June 2001, when the company decided to automate the packing of baby potatoes using a VFB2000 machine.

The project, which saw the installation of two GIC VFB4000's, trebled Greenvale's packing capabilities at its Floods Ferry site, increasing it from 15 to 45 packs per minute per machine for its 1.5kg, 2.5kg and 5kg packs. The efficiency improvements prompted Greenvale to become the first potato supplier in the UK to automate the packing of maincrop potatoes.

As well as throughput, GIC's machines enabled Greenvale to apply more detailed date coding to its packs, a previously slow, labour-intensive process.

The new VFFS machine replaces an older obsolete bagger supplied by another company.

Speedy roasting spud in demand

A POTATO that shares its name with a much-loved film character is back on supermarket shelves, in response to consumer demand.

The Nemo roast potato, developed by Branston, became popular with consumers who liked its taste and its 25% reduced cooking time. As a result, 87% more stock of its Nemo potato will be delivered this season compared to 2024

This variety has been carefully developed over nine years through crossing Inca Bella and the popular, red-skinned salad variety Franceline. It was named Nemo because its distinctive pink and white toned stripes are reminiscent of the popular fish from Finding Nemo.

Branston has been supporting its growers in selecting the right land to deliver the volume while factory processes have had to accommodate the increased interest, with distribution strategically managed across all three of its sites in Lincoln, Somerset and Perth.

Branston's Sales and Marketing Director Lucia Washbrook said: "Customers lead busy lives and are more focused than ever on saving energy at home. By cutting down cooking times for a staple like potatoes, Nemo helps tackle the challenges that matter most to shoppers."

An Andean phureja has been incorporated into the Nemo variety, with a more uniform cell structure which enables it to cook much more quickly.

Tesco Potato Buying Manager, Lucy Moss, said the Nemo potato has been popular since it first hit shelves four years ago.

"We've worked closely with our supplier Branston and its growers to ensure we can continue to deliver a great quality potato, and this year we'll have more than ever for our customers."

There will be 1.2 million units of the spud favourite available in all large Tesco stores across the UK and online.

Delve into Euro trade disputes

AROUND 100 participants from across the European potato supply chain took part in a recent event delving into how potato trade disputes across Europe can be simplified.

At the event, organised by the European RUCIP Committee, Cristina Pohlmann, European RUCIP Delegate, provided details of the key changes introduced in RUCIP 2025. These changes include a fully revised structure divided into three parts, updated definitions (such as "early potatoes" and "established broker") and clearer contractual clauses that improve legal clarity and enforceability.

Domenico Citterio, Chair of Europatat's RUCIP Commission, explained how expert assessments and arbitration procedures work under RUCIP, emphasising their transparency, neutrality and cost-effectiveness compared to legal proceedings. The session concluded with insights from Gilles Fontaine, Manager Subsidiaries AGRICO, who shared his experience as a long-time RUCIP arbitrator, illustrating how RUCIP helps resolve disputes efficiently in real-world trade situations.

HZPC Group breaks new ground

POTATO breeder and seed potato trading company Royal HZPC Group has closed the financial year with a strong result.

The annual financial statements show that two major milestones have been reached for the first time: Global revenue exceeded €500 million, and total worldwide tonnage passed the 1 million mark.

CEO of Royal HZPC Group, Hans Huistra, said: "Both HZPC and STET had a strong year, achieving growth in all key markets. Higher volumes and prices in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, as well as in Asian and American licensed production, led to a total revenue of €525 million. Gross margin rose to €96.4 million. By keeping a close eye on costs, net profit also increased significantly to €17.1 million."

This figure is before deduction of costs related to the Connecting Growers programme.

In addition to the previously-announced record payout, the dividend per certificate also increased significantly to €10.90.

"The drop in free market prices at the end of last season, combined with challenges in the European table potato markets and several key export regions, show that the current year will be demanding, especially for free varieties," said Hans. "Still, we're very satisfied with the growth of our new varieties. In the French fry segment, we saw strong performance from five newcomers: Quintera, Travolta, Invictus, Cardyma and Castor.

"Norman and several STET varieties are gaining ground in chips. Rashida and Panamera are leading in traditional export markets. And in the fresh segment, Libra and Brianna are emerging alongside European market leader Colomba, which continues to grow."

Hans said investments in R&D are increasingly paying off, and the company will continue to invest.

"Alongside our new varieties, we have a promising pipeline of newcomers that meet our resilience standards. We hope to expand our acreage again this season, both in the Netherlands and internationally. The outlook is positive."

Researchers say Act's implementation will pump new life into sector

THE imminent implementation of the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act 2023 will be a major policy shift that will help UK potato growers produce more resilient, sustainable crops, Rothamsted Research has stated.

The Act, which received Royal Assent last year, allows precision-bred crops – developed through targeted genetic changes equivalent to natural breeding – to move from research into commercial farming. The change will speed up access to improved plant varieties, helping to reduce yield losses from drought, pests and disease, and cut reliance on fertilisers and pesticides.

Rothamsted has previously welcomed the legislation as an important enabler of sustainable innovation in UK farming. The institute's earlier commentary on the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act 2023 can be found here: www.rothamsted.ac.uk/news/precision-breeding-regulations-signed-law-uk-government

"Innovation has been the beating heart of Rothamsted for over 180 years, and this new legislation will help pump new technologies into the UK's agricultural R&D sector."

Prof Patrick Bailey, interim CEO of Rothamsted said: "Innovation has been the beating heart of Rothamsted for over 180 years, and this new legislation will help pump new technologies into the UK's agricultural R&D sector. We are excited by the opportunities it will bring."

Patrick Bailey


Tom Allen-Stevens

Under the new legislation, precision-bred organisms (PBOs) will be regulated separately from genetically modified organisms (GMOs). This will enable growers to access improved varieties sooner.

The Rothamsted team says it will also accelerate the development of resilient crops, reducing yield losses from drought, pests, and disease, while input costs will be lower as crops will needless fertiliser, pesticides and irrigation.

Precision breeding also has potential benefits for everyone who eats potatoes or cares about the environment, the team added.

It said crops can be improved for better nutritional content. By reducing the need for chemicals and water, precision-bred crops support cleaner rivers, healthier soils, and biodiversity, while more resilient crops mean more stable harvests and protection against global supply shocks.

PROBITY, a three-year, multi-partner project led by the British On-Farm Innovation Network (BOFIN) and funded by Defra's Farming Innovation Programme, explores how precision breeding can work effectively on real farming systems for public and environmental good.

Managing Director of BOFIN, Tom Allen-Stevens, has welcomed the implementation of the act, saying it will put growers and food producers "on the front foot".

"The new legislation opens the door for us to trial and eventually adopt crop varieties that are more nutritious, resilient, and environmentally sustainable. By moving these innovations from the laboratory to the field, we are paving the way for a more productive and climate-resilient food system," he said, when discussing the Act earlier this year.

"By moving these innovations from the laboratory to the field, we are paving the way for a more productive and climate-resilient food system"

Tom Allen-Stevens, Managing Director, BOFIN

Could potato waste have a use in cosmetics?

Cross-sector team investigating potential new income stream for Scottish growers.

A PROJECT looking at ways of turning potato waste into high value compounds that can be used for cosmetics, pharmaceutical and nutraceutical products, is under way.

Funded by Innovate UK through the Launchpad: Bio-based Manufacturing - Scotland programme, this project brings together industry expertise from grower-owned co-operative Grampian Growers Ltd, with researchers from the University of Aberdeen and the James Hutton Institute.

The Scottish seed potato industry, worth £24.2 million, generates more than 51,000 tonnes of potato shaws annually. As part of an essential crop management practice to stop further tuber growth and ensure quality, storability, and disease resistance, the shaws are traditionally discarded after harvest.

The project aims to extract solanesol from the discarded shaws, a compound vital for producing coenzyme Q10 and vitamin K2, key ingredients in cosmeceutical, nutraceutical, and pharmaceutical products.

Currently sourced mainly from tobacco, solanesol demand has soared from 4,000 tonnes in the early 2000s to 66,000 tonnes by 2022. It's hoped the current project will povide an ethical, sustainable alternative to tobacco which could create new income streams for Scottish growers, enabling them to make more complete use of the potato biomass.

With 12,800 hectares of seed potatoes grown in Scotland, the industry could yield up to 120 tonnes of solanesol annually.

Supported by Alder BioInsights' strategic consultancy and the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society's (SAOS) cooperative expertise, the consortium is driving new commercial opportunities in sustainable biomanufacturing across Scotland and the UK.

Project Lead at Grampian Growers, Sofia Alexiou, said: "This project is particularly significant for Grampian Growers and the wider potato industry. It offers an opportunity to add value to agricultural by-products while addressing key challenges such as waste reduction and economic resilience. By unlocking new revenue streams, the project supports Scottish farmers and enhances the profitability of cooperative models, demonstrating the potential of innovation to strengthen rural economies."

Honorary Chair at the University of Aberdeen, Professor Giovanna Bermano, who will collaborate on the project said: "This pioneering research lays the foundation for future innovation, ensuring that the UK is at the forefront of developing sustainable, eco-friendly natural products for the cosmeceutical sector.

"By demonstrating how agricultural by products can be transformed into high value compounds, the project sets the stage for subsequent research and commercialisation that will drive innovation, reduce environmental impact, and secure a competitive advantage for UK science and industry."

Professor Heather Wilson, Chair in Immunology at University of Aberdeen, added: "Exploring the quality and yield of solanesol extracted from locally sourced potato shaws - and evaluating its potential applications across the cosmeceutical and related industries - represents an exciting and impactful area of research.

"This work not only supports the transition to ethical, tobacco-free sourcing of high-value compounds, but also advances sustainable innovation showcasing how science can unlock new value from agricultural by-products and strengthen the resilience of rural communities across Scotland and beyond." BPR

Processor puts a spin on retro

NEW research from processor Lamb Weston reveals that 87% of Brits crave nostalgic treats, with the 1980s crowned the UK's favourite foodie decade and Gen Z the most likely to crave retro favourites.

Younger Brits are now giving old school treats a modern twist, such as dunking chips in a milkshake, while the 1980s were voted the most popular decade to revisit (28%).

The research also revealed a growing appetite for playful pairings, with over a quarter (29%) of Gen Z and Millennials choosing sweet-and-savoury combos as their favourite food combination.

In a nod to the '80s revival, and to its own iconic '80s Twister Fry roots, Lamb Weston has teamed up with MasterChef champion Shelina Permalloo to merge two beloved snacks: Chips and milkshake. The resulting creation has been dubbed the Lamb Weston Twister Fryshake.

Marketing Manager at Lamb Weston, Alecia Brown, said: "Fries are one of the nation's favourite foods, and it's clear that Brits like their fries with a twist of fun. Our research shows how many enjoy the sweet and salty combination of dipping fries into a shake.

"With the Lamb Weston Twister Fryshake, we have created the perfect recipe to enjoy this growing retro food trend and indulge in something bold and sharable, because meals are more fun with twister fries."

As the first chip brand to launch the curly fry back in 1983, now fondly known as Lamb Weston Twister Fries, the brand has long been celebrated for bringing a touch of fun to the world of frozen potatoes. The Twister Fryshake features umami-packed potato with a hit of chocolate and spice.

Shelina is featuring the creation on Instagram, which many Brits use for daily recipe inspiration. Lamb Weston has revealed that more than half (54%) of Brits now turn to online videos or recipes more often than cookbooks, and 27% have made a recipe purely because they saw it trending.

Nearly one in five over-50s (18%) use TikTok for inspiration. However the cookbook still has a place on the nation's shelves, with nearly 47% owning at least one.

Readers have an opportunity to win their very own Lamb Weston Twister Fryshake Kit, featuring a branded milkshake glass and accessories, by signing up at **www.forms.gle/Dw7FXzf9Fn42cc2C8**

7,100-plus potato growing kits distributed in schools

THIS year's Grow Your Own Potatoes (GYOP) initiative reached more than 210,000 children, with 7,100 kits distributed to schools in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Since its launch in 2004 GYOP has evolved into one of the UK's largest food education programmes for primary schools. Aimed at educating children about food origins, healthy eating, and sustainable practices through hands-on potato growing, over six million children have participated since its inception.

Each year, GYOP provides free growing kits and curriculum-linked resources to schools and children learn through hands-on activities.

The project's sponsors include Branston, McCain Foods, Tesco, Puffin Produce, and E. Park & Sons. Other supporters include BASF, who provide wildflower seeds, and Wilsons Country, a sponsor for Northern Ireland.

GYOP Project Manager Sue Lawton said: "GYOP opens the door for all children to grow, learn and explore — whatever their starting point. Watching them gain confidence through something as simple as planting and nurturing a potato is incredibly rewarding."

Prizes were awarded for the heaviest yield, with Kingfisher Primary School winning the national prize with a yield of 5000g. This year a new Best Photo Challenge was introduced, showcasing students' gardening experiences and the connection to nature and pollinators.

Processor celebrates anniversary and second opening

PROCESSED potato product manufacturer McCain Foods has celebrated the second anniversary of a community shop it has funded through product donations.

The social enterprise, Community Shop in Eastfield, North Yorkshire opened in 2023 and McCain's product donations have reached a total value of more than £2.3 million since then.

The store provides local residents with access to high-quality, surplus food and household goods at significantly-reduced prices. These items would otherwise have gone to waste. The store also houses a Community Kitchen, offering low-cost wholesome hot meals, with children eating for free every day.

Revenue raised in the store is re-invested back into the local area through the store's Community Hub, which offers personal development programmes tailored to the needs of each member. These programmes range from cookery clubs and home budgeting classes, to interview skills and business courses.

Since its opening, more than 1,600 community members have engaged with the Community Hub and the store has supported more than 7,300 people in the community.

Members have saved £1.8 million-plus on their shopping and the Community Kitchen has served more than 20,000 free kids' meals.

In addition, more than 5,900 hub courses and cookery clubs have been completed by members.

McCain is also marking another important milestone with the strengthening of its Community Shop partnership through the opening of a new store in Hull, which opens on December 11th. The new branch in North Bransholme will feature a Community Hub and a Community Kitchen, including a café serving home-cooked meals where children can eat for free every day. The initiative is set to create 12 new jobs for local people.

More information about the stores is available by visiting **www.companyshopgroup.co.uk/communityshop**.

Call for industry to support future storage capacity

THE CIPC Residues Monitoring Group (CRMG), a cross-industry body, has submitted its second-year draft report with the Health and Safety Executive's Chemical Regulation Division (CRD).

The report provides new evidence on chlorpropham (CIPC) residues in potatoes stored during the 2024/25 season and will inform CRD's annual review of the temporary Maximum Residue Level (tMRL), currently set at 0.35 mg/kg.

The report details residue data submitted by growers, store managers and supply chain partners. In total, 156 sample results were received from potato stores with a known history of CIPC use. Of these, 21 samples (13.5%) contained detectable CIPC residues, all of which were well within the tMRL.

While residue levels continue to decline, the provisional data mirrors Year 1 patterns, reinforcing the need for a temporary MRL. Without it, many stores would exceed the standard detection threshold and be taken out of use, placing significant pressure on the UK's storage infrastructure and supply chain resilience.

Adrian Cunnington, Chair of the CIPC Residues Monitoring Group, said: "It is hard to overstate the challenge if we lost our storage capacity; it would be devastating for the industry. We are watching residues come down year-on-year, but the biggest challenge remains getting enough samples. It is imperative that we continue to collect and submit residue data if we are to maintain our supply base for years to come."

CRMG is now calling on the industry to support a third season of sampling, which will underpin the 2025/26 submission to CRD. Growers and store managers already collecting multi-residue data are urged to submit chlorpropham results from crops stored for at least 60 days. All analysis must be conducted by a UKAS-accredited laboratory.

This evidence is vital to demonstrate the continued need for a temporary MRL. Without sufficient data, stores with a CIPC history remain at risk of being taken out of use.

Adrian added: "We are asking growers to help build an accurate national picture of residue levels across stores with a CIPC history. By contributing their data, growers will help ensure that the industry can continue to use vital storage capacity safely and responsibly."

Growers and store managers willing to submit anonymised CIPC residue data can contact **adrian@potatostorageinsight.com**.

Novel topics at SACAPP conference

DETAILS of a Japanese knowledge exchange to water scarcity and how potato harvest waste can be used to make clothes will be some of the highlights at the annual SAC Association of Potato Producers (SACAPP) conference.

The event, which will take place in Dundee on February 5th, will be the 27th edition of the event.

Hosted by SAC Consulting (part of SRUC), the conference will provide an opportunity for the potato industry to come together to connect with other producers and hear from experts covering all aspects of potato production.

Potato Consultant at SAC Consulting, Dr Kerry Leslie, said: "Innovation and improvement are vital to ensure the industry can adapt and successfully overcome the challenges that it faces. This year's conference programme has insightful speakers and learning opportunities that will help safeguard the future of the sector. It will cover a real variety of topics, explore the latest thinking and bring producers together from all over the UK."

The overarching theme of the conference is 'Driving potato production success with data and innovation'.

Ren Okamura and Hiroto Sugiura of Japanese snack manufacturer, Calbee Potato, are amongst the early speakers lined up for the conference. The pair spent time shadowing SAC Consulting's potato team earlier this year. Their address will outline details of their operation in Japan and what they learned from the trip to Scotland.

The conference will also feature a discussion of the Centre of Expertise for Waters (CREW) water project, which has been considering the challenges presented by water scarcity.

Senior Potato Consultant at SAC Consulting, Gavin Prentice, will give an overview of the work that has been undertaken, around water resilience and irrigation best practice for Scotland.

Improvements in production will also be covered with James Thorburn of Farewell Farms on Orkney on hand to discuss the challenges he's had to overcome as the most northerly commercial potato producer in the UK.

Jacob Smith of pioneering garment manufacturer, Fibe, will explain how they are revolutionising the fashion industry by using potato harvest waste to make clothes.

The conference will be closed by keynote speaker, Dr David Kenyon, who became head of Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA) and chief plant health officer for Scotland in June this year.

The event is free to SACAPP members, but tickets are also available to purchase for non-SACAPP growers and trade. To book tickets, email **sacapp@sac.co.uk**.

Research into potato fry colour

A NEW study conducted by the Chamber of Agriculture has found no statistical difference in fry colour between potatoes stored using DMN, a naturally-occurring compound that acts as a plant growth regulator, and those treated with an ethylene-based sprout suppressant.

Over the past two seasons, Restrain has partnered with the Chambre d'agriculture du Nord-Pas-de-Calais, a French public body that provides services to the agricultural sector, to conduct commissioned independent research on fry colour performance in chips.

Fry colour remains one of the most persistent and costly quality challenges for potato growers and processors. Factors such as temperature fluctuations, CO_2 accumulation, treatment performance, and overall store management can significantly impact final product colour. As the sector continues to rely on a range of sprout-control options including oils, DMN, and ethylene, ensuring consistent storage performance is a priority.

The research program focused on comparing InhibitR™, an ethylene-based sprout suppressant, under real commercial storage conditions across multiple French sites.

It compared two varieties, Fontane and Markies,across four commercial stores in France. Fry colour was assessed three times during storage in February, April and May.Each assessment was based on 20 fries per sample, fried at 180C for three minutes in sunflower oil.

No significant differences were seen between the treatments of both variety during the 2023-2024 season, while in the 2024-2025 season, a short and challenging season where slightly elevated sugar levels were seen in April in some stores, all sites had rebalanced by May and, again, there were no measurable differences in fry colour between the two treatments.

Restrain has now launched 20 additional monitoring sites across Europe, taking in multiple potato varieties.

Solar is 'first step' to a long-term strategy

With energy price hikes making their mark in the supply chain, new strategies are needed if profits are to be protected. We catch up with the team at RS Cockerill to find out how they're endeavouring to stabilise their storage, automation and logistics costs.

POTATO growers across the UK are facing a challenge that has become one of the biggest threats to profitability: Electricity.

Cold stores run nonstop, packhouses are increasingly automated, and every upgrade in efficiency seems to pull more power from the grid.

RS Cockerill in North Yorkshire, one of the country's largest growers, suppliers and packers, has taken a proactive approach to protect its profits and *British Potato Review* recently caught up with Sam Cockerill, who helps manage renewable energy projects for the business.

"Electrical power is one of our significant costs, especially as we've been increasing the automation and mechanisation of our operations. We're always looking for how we can help to reduce the cost of our electrical power," he said.

His words echo sentiments heard across the potato sector. Storage, grading and packing are becoming more demanding, and energy pricing now underpins every tonne of product leaving the yard.

What makes the situation more difficult is that customers, whether retailers, processors or foodservice buyers, still expect value and stability, but stable pricing is hard to guarantee when a major input cost behaves unpredictably.

"Our customers are always looking for the best value and we want to protect them from the possibility of future electrical power price increases and also make that cost more certain," said Sam.

It's a familiar balancing act: Invest in productivity, control costs and maintain quality.

This is the environment in which Cockerill turned to solar power, to stabilise a volatile cost and take control of a critical part of its operation. The company's 612 kWp rooftop system, installed across several buildings of different ages and structures, now generates a significant share of its daytime electricity.

The system installed by Novalux Solar should achieve a 33.6% return on investment and annual CO_2 savings of more than 127 tonnes. For a site with substantial cold storage and continuous handling operations, those gains make a material difference, Sam said.

Like many long-established farm sites, Cockerill's operates from a patchwork of buildings developed over decades, each with its own layout, electrical demands and role in the production flow. Integrating a major infrastructure project around that complexity is no small task.

"The site has been built over the course of several decades, and it's a very busy site," Sam said. "One of the most important aspects was understanding how we could integrate the solar installation in and around the busy operations."

Safe installation on a live packhouse is another hurdle many growers and suppliers worry about and Cockerill's was no different. Sam said it was essential to prevent disruption and he was grateful that Novalux managed the interaction with the operations and maintenance team.

He said Cockerill regards electricity not merely as a cost, but as a foundation for future improvements. Solar isn't its end goal, it's the first stage of a longer-term energy strategy.

"We're looking at this installation as the first step," Sam said. "Electrical power is going to

"Our customers are always looking for the best value and we want to protect them from the possibility of future electrical power price increases and also make that cost more certain."

be a huge enabler of the things we're doing in the near and long-term future. Having more control over how we generate and use that power will open a lot of doors for us."

Those doors include more automation, improved on-site logistics and even potential electrification of certain vehicle movements — all of which depend on stable, affordable power. Cockerill's belief in this business model is proven as it has just signed up to install a further 296kWp Solar PV system with Novalux Solar at its site in Barmby.

Novalux, Managing Director Joe Allcott described Cockerill as a forward-thinking business and said now is a good time for others wanting to replicate its strategy.

"The paybacks for solar are generally around the three to four-year mark and will continue to generate returns for 25-plus years. This, coupled with advancing technology in solar and storage, mean that farms can make sizeable returns. Nova AI, developed by Novalux, will help growers to profit the most from their solar and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) by intelligently tracking market and usage data and continuously optimising between electricity usage and sale for the highest profit."

To counteract the upfront cost, the Annual Investment Allowance allows farms to offset up to 100% of eligible solar expenditure against taxable profit. For energy-heavy operations like cold stores, these mechanisms can significantly reduce payback times.

Cockerill's experience reflects where much of the potato sector now finds itself. Energy is no longer a background cost, it's a defining factor in competitiveness. While solar won't solve every challenge, Joe and Sam say it offers potato suppliers something the grid increasingly cannot - predictability. BPR

‘Hybrid strategy is the way forward’

Mixed approach to nutrition provides a more practical approach during unpredictable weather conditions say experts.

Roger Bacon from Yara’s Crop Nutrition Services team.

A HYBRID fertiliser strategy, combining solid NPK for baseline nutrition with liquid applications for precision timing and accuracy, is being advocated by Yara’s James Willis and Roger Bacon.

The two state that, as weather volatility continues to challenge farming operations, an increasing number of growers are adopting a hybrid approach to potato crop nutrition.

This hybrid approach maximises efficiency, maintains flexibility and offers practical solutions to the unpredictable conditions that have characterised recent growing seasons, they state.

James Willis, Yara’s Area Manager for Norfolk, said: “Solid fertilisers still provide the foundation for most crop nutrition programmes. Spring applications of NPK fertilisers have consistently outperformed the traditional autumn applications of PK fertilisers in independent trials, with yield responses averaging 0.3 tonnes per hectare. By applying these readily available phosphorus and potassium in the spring, you’re matching the application with the peak crop demand and not limiting the crop’s momentum.”

These benefits extend beyond simple yield gains. Spring applications prove particularly valuable following cold and wet winters, when soil nutrient availability is lower and root systems may be compromised owing to anaerobic conditions.

But liquid fertilisers have come a long way since slurry and can also offer distinct advantages in challenging conditions, James said. Applications are less affected by weather compared to solid fertilisers, providing more available working days. Wind and rain don’t stop liquid applications and may even help prevent leaf scorch by improving fertiliser run-off from leaves to soil.

Conversely, during long dry spells like this year, liquid fertilisers don’t need to dissolve into the soil solution to become available, offering immediate accessibility to crop roots.

“Liquid nutrition is more readily available than solid,” Roger added. “In a dry year, there is a little bit of an advantage in that the plant roots can take it up pretty much readily and you don’t have nutrients lying around in the soil, undissolved and not being utilised.”

Whilst research data spanning many years has been analysed to understand the pros and cons of the different types of delivery, sometimes simple practicalities dictate the decision.

Roger Bacon from Yara’s Crop Nutrition Services team said: “Two years ago we had wet springs, and with a big sprayer full of liquid fertiliser, it could be quite difficult to travel. In very wet conditions, some growers may find spreading solid fertiliser easier thanks to a lighter machine. Equally, if there’s an NPK approach, there’s a finite amount of nutrient that can be dissolved in a cubic metre of liquid, so it could also work out more practical to apply that as a solid for the first application.”

Precision advantage

The move towards more sophisticated farming practices has further strengthened the case for hybrid system. Liquid fertilisers integrate seamlessly, with advanced nozzle and dribble bars and precision agriculture technologies offering GPS control and section control capabilities that enable far more accurate application, Roger said.

"Rather than having to spread up to 40 metres, you can apply liquids in section widths across the field," said Roger. "You get more uniform application with liquids. There's no headland effect, less wastage, and it is far more efficient."

The precision advantage addresses in-field fertility variations more effectively than traditional broadcasting methods, allowing growers to target specific areas requiring attention.

The hybrid approach also provides practical solutions to labour and machinery management challenges. During tight weather windows, solid and liquid application can run simultaneously, with the spreader handling baseline nutrition whilst the sprayer remains available for its primary task of crop protection applications, according to James and Roger.

James said: "If it's particularly tight weather windows, you may want to look to have both machines running at the same time. Or if there's volatility in the market, liquid may be more attractive than solid or vice versa. It just gives more options."

For farms operating at maximum sprayer capacity, the ability to distribute workload between different application methods reduces pressure during critical periods and ensures timely nutrient delivery.

Growers considering adopting a hybrid system need to plan ahead, particularly if transitioning from an exclusively solid fertiliser programme. The switch to incorporating liquid fertilisers requires investment in storage tanks, preparation of suitable storage areas, and ensuring sprayers are equipped with appropriate dribble bars or nozzles.

Supply chain challenges in recent years have reinforced the importance of early decision-making and advance ordering. Having product on farm before the critical spring period removes uncertainty and ensures growers can respond immediately when crops begin rapid growth.

Roger said: "It's important just to plan ahead, to make sure that we can advise you on tank installations and get tanks in place on time, and just to make sure that everything's going to work seamlessly from a delivery point of view and the logistics on farm."

New nutrition product launched

A NEW nutrition product suitable for potatoes has been developed and is due to be launched at the LAMMA show this month (January).

The system, developed by Agro-Vital, part of the Agriton group, uses farm-specific data to create adaptable nutrition programmes tailored to crop needs and conditions.

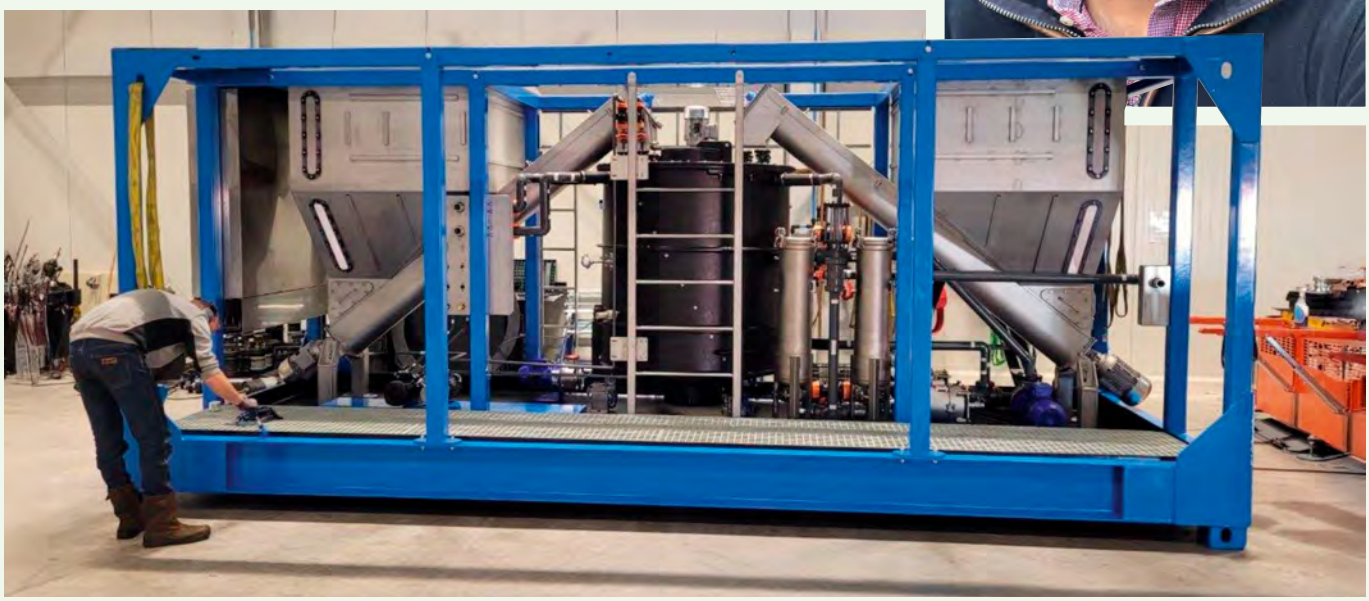
Managing Director at Agriton, Andrew Sincock, said: "Triplex is designed to deliver nutrients precisely where and when they're needed, providing a practical, rapid and, crucially, sustainable solution for."

Following successful prototype development and rapid adoption in the Netherlands, early UK trials of the technology have also yielded promising results ahead of a full operational season in 2026, with growers and industry partners already expressing strong interest.

Andrew said the system is built around nutrient use efficiency, crop performance and environmental protection. It has been selected as Gold Winner in the Arable Crop Care Innovation of the Year category at the LAMMA Innovation Awards 2026, ahead of its official launch at the show.

Agriton has previously conducted trials in Wales exploring the use of liquid fertiliser such as Triplex in potato growing with the aim of providing a cost-effective, environmentally-friendly option to reduce reliance on traditional granular phosphate without negatively impacting crop quality.

Initial observations from these trials indicated the treated potato plots grew robustly while the crop showed no apparent difference in health or development compared to the farm's standard plots.



Getting the right P balance

THERE'S no 'one size fits all' when it comes to phosphorus (P) management, according to NRM's Soil & Crop Nutrition Agronomist, Sajjad Awan.

Phosphorus is vital for potato growth, essential for root and shoot development, tuber formation, and overall yield. Because potatoes have a shallow root system, adequate phosphorus is needed, especially at planting, to ensure sufficient supply for early growth.

Without phosphorus, roots cannot develop, leaves cannot form, and yields collapse, but at the same time, too much phosphorus means increased risk of losses to the environment, Sajjad said.

"Phosphorus imbalances are widespread across the UK. From NRM's extensive database of 170,000 fields analysed over the last five years, we found that nearly 30% of soils were deficient, while over 40% contained more than multiple crops over a rotation realistically need. This is a big problem," said Sajjad.

"What we must remember is that phosphorus rarely acts alone. Crops require a balanced diet, and phosphorus interacts closely with nitrogen, potassium, sulphur, and other key nutrients. P imbalances reduce efficiency and hold back yield potential so it's incredibly important to analyse throughout the year and make full use of your data to make the best decisions for your farm and the environment."

Northeastern arable regions have tended to show deficiencies, he said.

"When pH drifts above or below the optimal range, phosphorus can bind with iron, aluminium, or calcium, reducing availability and preventing crops from achieving optimal yield," Sajjad said.

Many growers may not realise that different tillage methods and required sampling depths may have an effect on P levels. If fields are ploughed, sampling to the traditional 15cm is advised.

"If they are min-tilled, we advise sampling to 23cm to avoid overestimating soil P content, which tends to accumulate nearer the soil service. Sampling to the correct depth prevents inaccuracies in the assumed content of P in the soil, giving farmers a clearer indication if they need to supplement with fertiliser or not."

Nigel Simpson, Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) Agricultural Lead at Natural England, said only around 0.2% of soil phosphorus is immediately available to crops.

"This availability relates to soil pH, but as phosphorus losses to water in soil particles are also a major environmental issue, we can't just apply more fertiliser," he said. "Excess phosphate fuels algal blooms, which strip oxygen from lakes and rivers, threatening biodiversity, fish stocks, and rural livelihoods. In England and Wales, an estimated two million tonnes of soil and organic matter are lost to water each year, much of it carrying phosphorus with it. Losses can be especially severe on sloping clay soils, where runoff and sheetwash erosion risk can be high."

To avoid these issues, Nigel suggested adopting more careful management practices.

Avoiding applications on high-index soils and applying fertiliser when the crop is going to use the nutrients can help limit losses and balance crop productivity with environmental stewardship, he said.

Replacing the traditions

BIOCHAR could replace what expanded clay, perlite or pumice have previously offered for soil conditioning, it has been claimed.

Soil degradation is a persistent challenge for potato growers. Compacted, nutrient-poor or heavily-used soils require powerful soil additives to improve structure, moisture balance and nutrient availability and the industry has largely relied on expanded clay, vermiculite, perlite or pumice but their production is not ecologically sustainable.

By contrast, biochar's production does not involved extracting new raw materials. Instead, it uses what is already available - residual wood, green waste, fruit pits and other organic by-products. These residues are heated without oxygen in a process called pyrolysis. What remains is a highly porous, carbon-rich material.

German climate technology company Novocarbo has been developing biochar solutions for substrate manufacturers, particularly in Scandinavia, for many years.

"Biochar stores carbon long-term. Plants absorb CO_2 from the atmosphere, and pyrolysis locks this carbon into a stable structure for centuries. Biochar effectively enables a circular economy approach by making use of residual biomass," a company spokesman said.

"Thanks to its porosity, it can store two to three times its own weight in water and acts as a nutrient buffer. Minerals and organic compounds accumulate in the pores and are released to plants as needed."

Last Spring, *British Potato Review* detailed how a team of researchers led by Jianwei Hou, CunFang Xing, Jun Zhang, Zuhua Wang, Min Liu, Yu Duan, and Hui Zhao, had studied the combined impact of biochar and organic fertilisers on soil fertility and potato yields, revealing strong results in terms of improved plant health and productivity.

The Novocarbo team said it pays to look beyond initial costs and consider a project's full life cycle.

"More stable and less maintenance-intensive substrates reduce long-term irrigation needs and follow-up work. In this way, biochar not only makes urban projects more environmentally valuable but also more economically robust. To unlock its full potential, biochar must be properly applied. When adding pure biochar to soil, it must be pre-loaded with nutrients. Depending on the application, it can be blended with compost, slurry or manure to biologically "charge" it. In substrate mixes, the proportion of pure biochar typically ranges from three to 10%."

Black Bull Biochar (BBB), a UK start-up, has secured £4 million in a late seed funding round to expand its biochar operations across the North West of England and accelerate its entry into northern Europe. The funding will enable BBB to take biochar innovation to build on projects with Avara Foods, M&S, Ahlstrom, A.W. Jenkinson and Arla Foods, while expanding its production infrastructure to meet growing demand.

POLY4 available through British supplier

FERTILISER manufacturer and supplier Thomas Bell has partnered with Anglo American's Crop Nutrients business and will now provide POLY4 crop solutions alongside its own Diamond Fertilisers brand of crop nutrition products.

Marketing Manager at Thomas Bell, Alison Schofield, said: "Where POLY4 brings the science, Diamond Fertilisers brings the power to deliver it. This partnership ensures UK farmers have access to a proven fertiliser that drives consistent yields and improved nutrient efficiency."

POLY4 is derived from the natural mineral polyhalite and delivers four essential nutrients — potassium, sulphur, magnesium, and calcium — in a single low chloride product. It is compatible with modern spreading equipment and reduces dust in handling.

Lower phosphate applications possible

POTATO growers could cut phosphate applications by up to 40 kg/ha through the simple use of a soil complexing agent that releases reserves held in the soil, according to trials by Agrii.

Phosphorus is an essential macro-nutrient but often occurs at low concentrations in solution, even when applied as a soluble fertiliser owing to its fixation by positively charged minerals in soil. These positively-charged minerals, known as cations, bind with the phosphorus particles rendering them immobile and unavailable to the plant.

A complexing agent, such as that in Agrii-Start Release is specifically formulated to free the phosphorus particles from their entanglement with the major cations, typically calcium (Ca), magnesium (Mg) and potassium (K), and thereby make them available to the crop.

The use of complexing agents in agriculture is not new. Many water conditioners employ the same technology to treat hard water and support the performance of susceptible herbicides, such as glyphosate and clethodim.

Across three seasons and variable soil textures, crops that received Agrii-Start Release pre-emergence, delivered a positive yield response, according to Tom Land, Agrii's National Fertiliser Manager.

"Phosphorus take-up is often influenced by a range of factors such as the soil's calcium content, pH and temperature. Regardless of these, the use of Agrii-Start Release was overwhelmingly positive with increases to the marketable fraction and tuber bulking," Tom said.

The result builds on experience seen in earlier trials with field vegetables and salads where the use of Agrii Start-Release delivered yield increases in a range of crops including spinach, onion, leek, carrot and cabbage.

Agrii's trials targeted sites with both high and low pH levels because pH affects different ions but the effect on phosphate availability is the same. In high pH soils, calcium and magnesium have been shown to interfere with phosphorus availability while on low pH soils it is aluminium and iron ions. Even without any applied phosphate, crops that received Agrii-Start Release delivered a significant yield increase demonstrating its capacity to increase the crop available portion.

"Across variable seasons and soil textures and at sites with varying soil reserves Agrii-Start Release delivered yield increases of 17-30% and improvements in tuber bulking. We conservatively estimate an average saving of 30-40 kg P/ha from a 4-litre/ha application of Agrii-Start Release," Tom said.

"The savings in fertiliser costs, estimated at as much as £123.60/ha for DAP purchased at May 2025 prices of £618/t, alone justify its use while any improvement in the marketable yield fraction arising from increased soil availability will further support the gross margin," he added.

To avoid having to make a standalone spray application Agrii has investigated the tank-mix compatibility of Agrii-Start Release with a range of other products typically applied at this timing.

"It can be applied in-furrow with Rhizoctonia solani treatments such as azoxystrobin or fluxapyroxad or across the ridges with either pre- or post-emergence herbicides or liquid fertilisers. A single application will be active for about 60 days," Tom says.

Soil carbon monitisation scheme

FOLLOWING a detailed review of the soil carbon market, Environmental Farmers Group (EFG) has announced agreements with Regenerate Outcomes and Ecometric, two UK-based soil carbon programme providers.

EFG members manage a variety of farm types and sizes, including those growing potatoes as part of their rotation. The affiliation will enable member growers to access discounted rates and favourable terms to measure, manage and monetise soil carbon on their farms.

The review examined the integrity, methodology and market readiness of multiple providers.

Soil carbon programmes allow growers to track and measure soil carbon over time, building datasets that support informed management decisions and can generate verified carbon credits. These credits can either be retained to offset on-farm emissions, sold to supply chain buyers, or sold on the voluntary carbon market, creating an additional income stream.

EFG will facilitate trading carbon credit sales (where members wish to trade) through its existing network of buyers, leveraging the cooperative's scale to secure competitive pricing.

Any growers who are not EFT members but would like more information can email efg@gwct.org.uk.

Trials on new crop care tech could be heading to UK

TRIALS on a new crop care technology designed to change how UK growers think about crop nutrition are underway in the Netherlands that could ultimately provide a new solution for UK potato growers.

Triplex is a new crop care technology which was unveiled by Agro-Vital earlier this month.

The technology was originally developed in the Netherlands which is carrying out trials in potatoes. While no trials are currently taking place in the UK, the company's Managing Director Andrew Sincock said it is a target market for the technology as it creates bespoke fertiliser for individual fields, which would work perfectly for more high value crops like potatoes.

Already named Gold Winner, Arable Crop Care Innovation of the Year at the LAMMA Innovation Awards, Triplex aims to move fertiliser use away from broad-brush applications towards more precise, data-led decisions.

Waste not, want not

TRIALS by NPHarvest, a Finnish cleantech company turning wastewater into raw materials for fertilisers, have revealed that recycled nutrients can perform on par with traditional synthetic fertilisers.

The field tests, conducted in partnership with the University of Helsinki and verified through Eurofins laboratory analysis, found no measurable difference in yield or nutrient uptake between the company's recycled nitrogen and phosphorus nutrients and commercial products, demonstrating that recovered nutrients can replace virgin materials without compromising productivity.

COO of NPHarvest Sara Ikonen said: "These results show that we can meet agricultural demand without depending on fossil-based or imported inputs, and that circular fertilisers can perform just as well in the field as traditional ones."

The trials used both NPHarvest's recycled nutrients and conventional mineral fertilisers at equivalent nutrient levels, demonstrating comparable yield and nutrient uptake across all fertilised plots.

NPHarvest's chemical process operates at low energy and produces ready-to-use fertilisers directly from wastewater. Building on these results, the company is now preparing for industrial-scale deployment of its modular Nutrient Catcher units.

"These results show that we can meet agricultural demand without depending on fossil-based or imported inputs, and that circular fertilisers can perform just as well in the field as traditional ones."

IPM platform sparks discussions

AS the risk of virus spread by aphids continues to rise in response to climate change, BASF's Integrated Pest Management (IPM) platform has sparked a wider conversation on sustainability and crop protection across the sector.

In 2023, BASF embarked on a journey that led to the creation of an IPM initiative featuring potatoes, sugar beet, peas, and carrots. Each was sown across a 2.5ha plot under three regimes - standard, mid-level, and high-level IPM.

With nearly 650m2 of crop within each regime, it is one of the largest IPM platforms ever established in the UK.

Results – including aphid counts and tissue samples – are not due until early 2026, but the impact it has had on the industry is already evident, with the trial being shortlisted for the British Potato Best Environmental/ Sustainability Initiative Award.

Head of Business and Technical Development at BASF, Steve Dennis, said: "At a time when the risk of virus spread by aphids is rising, it is more important than ever that we work together to find sustainable solutions for crop protection and promote best practices in agriculture."

Steve said the platform has already inspired and challenged thinking among agricultural stakeholders, including Defra, regulators, and members of the food value chain.

"It has brought together growers, agronomists, and experts from organisations such as Scottish Agronomy, BBRO, and PGRO to share knowledge and best practice too."

BASF recognises the role of the platform's co-operator, VCS, who understood the importance of mirroring real-world scenarios and established the crops using farm – not trials – machinery.

"VCS was involved from an early stage in planning the platform," says Steve. "Their expertise enabled the complex multi-crop design, an approach that went far beyond conventional practice, and one that only a handful of contractors could realistically deliver.

"Equally important has been the relationship with the grower who contributed to the preparation of plots and IPM areas."

A 12m wide nectar and pollen mix, established a year in advance of the crop, surrounded both the mid- and high-level IPM plots.

"There are 12 species in the mix, chosen and managed as a habitat for beneficial insects," Steve said. "Where applicable, we also disguised the soil surrounding crops in the 'high IPM' regime using a dye, as aphids are known to use colour differentiation between soil and plant to identify potential hosts."

Crops in this regime were also sprayed with a beneficial insect attractant, and the surrounding nectar and pollen mix was florally enhanced to compensate for the loss of annuals from year one and to maximise its value as a habitat.

The 'standard IPM' regime replicated tactics currently seen on many UK farms: Aphid populations were closely monitored and when they exceeded industry-accepted thresholds, a novel insecticide from BASF (subject to approval) was applied.

Reflecting on the impact of the platform, Steve said: "We're proud to have played a leading role in this initiative, which aims to promote sustainable food production, and are delighted that the success of the platform is already being recognised."

Major move for former university spinout

SOLASTA® Bio, specialising in the next generation of green insecticides, has relocated to purpose-built facilities at the West of Scotland Science Park, marking a major milestone in the company's growth journey since 2021.

The move from the University of Glasgow campus to the Helix Building at Kelvin Campus provides SOLASTA® Bio with its first dedicated standalone facility, occupying more than 4,000 square feet of custom-fitted laboratory and office space. The new premises house specialised facilities for R&D, including a dedicated insectary, plant and tissue culture rooms, as well as expanded office space and collaborative working areas for the company's growing 26-person team.

Originally a University of Glasgow spinout in 2021, the company has evolved from an early-stage research company into a commercially-focused biotech business. Since securing an oversubscribed $14 million Series A funding round in September 2024, the company has achieved significant technical and regulatory milestones, including its first patent grants and a favourable biochemical-like classification from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for its lead peptide candidates.

The enhanced facilities will enable SOLASTA® Bio to accelerate its research and development programmes as it advances toward market entry with its nature-inspired peptide-based bioinsecticides. These environmentally friendly crop protection products target harmful pests while safeguarding crucial pollinators such as bees.

CEO of SOLASTA® Bio, Shireen Davies, said: "Moving into our own dedicated facility is a defining moment for SOLASTA® Bio. This space gives us the capacity and capability to advance our R&D programmes and scale our operations as we progress toward commercialisation. Having left our original home at the University of Glasgow, we now have a place that truly reflects our ambition and the significant growth we've achieved in just four years. The West of Scotland Science Park provides an ideal environment for an innovative biotech company like ours to continue growing."

Scottish Enterprise recently supported the company with a £190k grant towards the fit-out and capital costs of the new premises that have been adapted from office space within the West of Scotland Science Park to provide suitable lab facilities.

Interactive PCN tool launch

A NEW interactive tool that will allow users to see the impact of different potato varieties, cover crops and the use of nematicides on field scenarios has been launched by PCN Action Scotland, a five-year, Scottish Government-funded project that includes partners from The James Hutton Institute, SAC Consulting (SRUC), Scottish Agronomy, SoilEssentials, BIOSS, the Plant Health Centre, and SASA.

Release of the Potato Cyst Nematode (PCN) decision support system (PCN-SP) marks a significant milestone in the fight against one of the most persistent threats to the UK's potato industry. It has been designed using Scottish and UK field data to manage PCN more effectively and sustainably. It is free, accessible, up-to-date, and easy to use, and will help growers make informed decisions about variety selection, nematicide use, and rotation planning.

An estimated 41% of Scottish ware potato land, that is potatoes grown specially for human consumption, as distinct from seed potatoes or those used for industrial processing, is infected with PCN. This infection reduces yield and income for growers, and also poses a threat for further spreading of PCN.

While legislation preventing seed potato cultivation on affected land is in place to reduce further spread of PCN, the threat to the industry is existential if management practices such as a shift to resistant varieties are not taken.

Speaking about PCN-SP, Dr James Price, Plant Nematologist at the Hutton said: "Key to managing PCN infection is choosing a potato variety with resistance. The PCN-SP allows users to carry out digital trials, viewing the effect of varietal choice on PCN populations and the impact on yield. This model represents the most up to date decision support tool for PCN management, allowing growers to see how much their choice in potato variety matters."

Potato Consultant at SAC Consulting, Dr Kerry Leslie, added: "Having access to an in-depth tool like the PCN-SP allows growers, alongside their agronomists and consultants, to quickly and effectively take the PCN scenario they face in a field and assess ways to improve on the problem in an easy, visual way. This is a step forward for PCN management primarily for Scotland but applicable for the whole of the UK."

PCN Action Scotland, now in its final year, was established in response to the growing crisis posed by PCN, microscopic soil-borne pests that drastically reduce potato yields and are notoriously difficult to control.

Previously, growers used the AHDB PCN Calculator, an industry staple for many years, but a new robust decision support system, tailored to Scottish conditions using modern data and incorporating contemporary varieties, was seen as necessary to support the aims of PCN Action Scotland.

As PCN management becomes more complex, growers need a system that reflects current science, local conditions, and economic realities. The new PCN-SP, designed and built by SoilEssentials, addresses these gaps by incorporating field trial data, produced by PCN Action Scotland at Barnyards farm in Angus, with grower feedback and advanced modelling techniques.

The PCN-SP was officially launched at a British Potato 2025 seminar in November.

PCN Action Scotland will be hosting a public project completion meeting following the conclusion of multi-year field trials and policy consultation on March 18th, at the Hutton's Invergowrie campus. To register for the event, visit **https://tinyurl.com/mtfjwxbw**

'A significant step' for bio control

THE International Biocontrol Manufacturers Association (IBMA) has welcomed the publication of an EC proposal which it describes as a significant step forward for pest control.

The European Commission's Proposal for the Simplification Package Omnibus includes targeted amendments of EU Regulation 1107/2009 and will accelerate market access for biocontrol active substances and products.

The proposed changes will enable faster access to the market for biocontrol solutions, reducing administrative burdens and allowing provisional authorisation.

Key Proposed Amendments include:

- Adopt a definition of biocontrol active substances and their products at EU level
- Prioritise the approval and authorisation procedures for biocontrol
- Allow Member States to grant provisional authorisation for plant protection productscontaining new biocontrol active substances
- Enable EFSA to perform the role of Rapporteur of Member States to increase available resources for review
- Establish a single EU zone for biocontrol and low-risk to ensure more equal access to these products in all Member States
- Introduce tacit mutual recognition between Member States when agreed deadlines are exceeded
- Amend the renewal system to provide unlimited approval periods for active substances and product authorisations, excluding candidates for substitution and other special cases.

IBMA President Karel Bolckmans said: "This proposal represents a pivotal moment for the biocontrol industry. By streamlining regulatory processes, we can foster innovation in Europe and provide farmers with the tools they need to embrace sustainable crop protection."

Executive Director Jennifer Lewis added: "The simplification package is a positive step that aligns with the European Commission's Vision for Agriculture. The measures proposed will lead to biocontrol solutions reaching the market faster, supporting farmers to continue to manage pests and diseases effectively amid increasing pressures on productivity from climate change."

Well, that was an odd year!


Graham Bannister

Graham Bannister, Development Manager at GB Potatoes, reflects on the past year and what we have to look forward to.

TYPICALLY in potato growing much is written about the travails of a very tough industry, but I'm going to buck that trend and inject a dose of positivity.

For many reasons, not the least of which was the weather, it genuinely was an odd year.

The weather threw some challenges our way. A very wet winter was followed by a very dry spring and summer. Without the wet winter we would not have survived the dryness we experienced through the season.

Planting, however, was remarkably straightforward, with many growers finishing before they had even started the previous year. Irrigation, where available, was a constant task but paid dividends in the yields achieved, and lifting conditions overall were near perfect.

I'm not naïve enough to suggest it was plain sailing for everyone. Many faced real challenges, particularly where rainfall was limited or irrigation unavailable, but it is worth reflecting on the positives to remind ourselves why we do this.

Now all we need is just the right amount of winter rain to replenish reservoirs, aquifers and rivers in readiness for a perfect planting season in 2026.

At the 2025 *British Potato Event* in November, GB Potatoes had the pleasure of working with the organisers to act as the Knowledge Exchange partners for the show. Pulling together an interesting and engaging seminar programme for the event was a major part of this. We were very pleased with the numbers that attended each session and the positive feedback received by so many. Each seminar tackled an important topic for the potato industry and each managed to impart a positive message.

In the blight seminar we learned that the UK is doing a great job of keeping the new strains of blight at bay by using the tools that are available, including the vital Fight Against Blight tool, still going strong with the support of the partners and an injection of funds from the residual levy funds, managed by GB Potatoes. Mixing the chemistry through a well-constructed programme is showing the way on controlling resistance even with the potential loss of a key component of most programmes, Mancozeb. This demonstrates that using the science provided keeps growers and agronomists well informed on the approach they should be taking.

At the seed seminar, we heard that retailers are now looking at using different varieties and asking the seed houses to produce new varieties that the consumer will buy, and that growers will grow. It was highlighted that this can cause issues for the seed producer, but as ever a resilient and effective seed sector is rising to and accepting the challenge and building those relationships between the ware grower and the end user.

Finally, on day one Dr Food highlighted the importance of the potato to the global food chain and how the requirements of the consumer are changing, describing how the industry is already adapting to those changes. The gen-Zers are a very different consumer, demanding a complete meal on a plate, in very quick order. The industry will have to and is adapting to this change to preserve the potatoes place on the plate. Promoting the health benefits of potatoes will be integral in maintaining and increasing the potatoes share of the carb market and this is an area that GB Potatoes is working very hard on.

The potato industry is great at looking at new ways of doing things and the Transformative Reduced Input Potatoes (TRIP) project is a good example of how using new and innovative products can improve nutrient use efficiency, reduce input costs and give opportunities for reducing fungicide use. In this seminar trials conducted were highlighted showing the success achieved by the project and definitely something to watch out for going forward.

"Many faced real challenges, particularly where rainfall was limited or irrigation unavailable, but it is worth reflecting on the positives to remind ourselves why we do this."

The final session of the event was a rather tongue-in-cheek look at older varieties. The debate centred around Maris Piper and has it now had its day? Both speakers argued passionately for their case and the audience enjoyed the lively discussion. At a show of hands at the end, there was a very narrow win for the argument against Maris Piper, but it is not dead in the water yet and still has a part to play until the entire supply chain can adopt new varieties that satisfy the consumer. Work has already started on this.

If you could not attend these excellent seminars recordings are on the events web site. As I scurried between seminar room and the main halls I sensed a real buzz about the event, with all those I spoke to showing real positivity about the sector that is by far and away the best sector to be involved in. At GB Potatoes we know that we need to gauge if this perceived positivity is genuine, which is why we launched the Potato Industry Confidence survey at the Harrogate event.

Thank you to all those who've taken the time to complete the survey - keep an eye out for it being run again in the future. All the latest news from GB Potatoes is available at **https://www.gb-potatoes.co.uk/**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the speakers and Chairs at the seminars for really getting to grips with the remit of each session and giving of their time so generously to provide such a successful programme.

Roll on the next odd year!

‘Grow for your market, not for one that doesn’t exist’

Tim Rooke, in partnership with his brother and son, grows around 600 acres of processing potatoes for the chipping and crisping markets in North Yorkshire. Here, he explains why aligning crops with market demand is critical for its future strength.

THIS year has reminded us just how unpredictable potato growing can be.

We got off to a great start, with early planting and good soil conditions, but then the rain more or less stopped. Apart from the odd shower, it stayed dry right through to harvest. Only about 30% of our land can be irrigated, and even that was restricted when river levels dropped.

The crop grew fast and finished early. It was good quality, but yields have come in about a tonne, to a tonne and a half, below contract. We were finished lifting by October 18th, which is the earliest we’ve ever seen.

Last year couldn’t have been more different. It was wet from start to finish, and we didn’t start planting until late April. The growing season was shorter and slower. Yet despite being complete opposites, both years ended up producing very similar yields. It shows just how much the weather can swing from one extreme to the other and how little “average” there is any more.

At a national level, that variation has fed straight into the market. In 2024, a tight supply pushed free-buy prices up to £600-£700 a tonne. This year, there’s hardly been any free-buy trade at all. It’s not a disaster, just a reminder of how quickly the balance between supply and demand can shift.

I’m not suggesting anyone should back away from growing potatoes. Quite the opposite. But it’s important that what we put in the ground has a clear market to go to. You should grow for your market, not one that isn’t there. Potatoes are an expensive crop to grow and getting more so. Once you’ve added up the production costs of fertiliser, fuel, power, storage and labour, it’s not unusual to be looking at £2,500 to £3,000 an acre before you sell a single tonne.

Around two-thirds of the national crop is grown on contract, which gives some stability to both growers and processors. The rest is sold on the open market, and that flexibility still matters. It keeps trade moving and allows growers to respond quickly when supply and demand shift.

Whatever route you take, the same rule holds true. It pays to know your market. Understanding who you are growing for, what they need and when they need it will always serve you better than putting in extra acres and hoping demand will catch up. Clear planning and regular communication throughout the supply chain build confidence and make the whole sector stronger.

With cereal prices under pressure and support payments more or less gone, more land is becoming available for potatoes again. For established growers, that opens doors, but expansion needs to be done for the right reasons. Taking on extra ground only makes sense if there’s a secure market for the crop.

That said, the sector itself remains in good shape. British growers are adaptable, technically skilled and resilient. Our processors and packers continue to invest in storage, grading and innovation. There’s steady demand for high-quality British produce, backed by a strong reputation for traceability and consistency.

There are, however, a few practical issues that could make a big difference. Access to water is one of them. A more joined-up approach to irrigation and storage would help growers cope better with the drier seasons we now seem to get more often.

The other is plant protection. We’ve lost several long-standing products in recent years, often without suitable alternatives. Nobody is arguing for anything unsafe, but we do need a balanced, science-based approach that recognises the risks we take and the standards we work to. If the UK wants a strong potato sector, we need the tools to do the job properly.

The future for British potatoes is still bright. We’re seeing progress in efficiency and sustainability, and we continue to deliver a product that consumers trust and value. The challenge now is to keep matching what we grow to what the market actually needs, and to keep that balance right across the supply chain.

So as plans start for 2026, my advice is to grow for your market. Focus on producing the right crop for your customers, manage costs carefully and keep building those long-term relationships. BPR

Getting off to a good start

This month Andrew talks about the importance of sourcing healthy seed potatoes and how to become cleverer with fertiliser applications to get the most efficiency.

Andrew Goodinson

WHILE growers for the fresh-pack sector choose the variety that best suits their conditions and system, allowing them to opt for varieties for different markets, those supplying to the crisp and processing markets often have fewer available options, according to Andrew.

In the processing sector, better dialogue between growers, their agronomists and the processors about which varieties are best suited to their agronomic needs would help optimise output, he says, but all too often discussions are often based around variety and contract tonnage for the following year, rather than seed quality, while growers for the processing sector rarely explore opportunities to inspect the seed crop or even discuss it with the seed grower.

"There is little discussion on aspects such as whether the variety is suitable for lighter or heavier soils, or agronomic characteristics such as PCN tolerance and/or resistance," said Andrew.

There is often a lack of seed quality information available (such as where it was grown, and pest and disease issues) and problems may not be identified until the crops emerge the next year.

"As a result, growers are investing in something that is fundamental to crop health, yield and quality - without having sufficient information about it – and may potentially not be the ideal material," said Andrew.

To try and ameliorate this risk, he emphasises the importance of unloading the seed crop and inspecting it thoroughly as soon as it arrives, as often any concerns need to be raised in the following 48 hours.

"It's worth washing a sample of newly-arrived seed, so it can be inspected more thoroughly as this helps minimise risks, because even when seed is inspected at source, it is not washed, so any disorders may be missed. Also consider sending some tubers for analysis to identify any virus and disease incidence. Results can be back as soon as a week.

"If in any doubt, it is always a good idea to inspect these samples with your agronomist to get a second opinion," he said.

Lessons to be learned

Reflecting on lessons learned from previous seasons, Andrew notes that in Spring 2024, there were some isolated incidents of varieties with PVY, which caused yield and quality issues.

Good potato crop

"If you do have such problems, it is useful to demonstrate that it is the seed potato that is at fault. I'd suggest planting two different seed-lots of the same variety in the field, so it is easier to compare."

Other important criteria for seed choice include physiological age and storage conditions, and whether a fungicide was applied at store loading.

"Before the seed leaves its origin, it is useful to discuss the application of seed treatments before they are transported."

Andrew notes that if seed is transported pre-season, it gives the ware grower more time to grade, treat with a fungicide and control storage. Seed storage needs careful thought and cannot be stored alongside ware, he added, stating that ware needs applications of sprout suppressants. He also advised avoiding older stores which may still have traces of CIPC.

He also reminded us that weather conditions at harvesting affect seed quality.

"For example, in 2025, it was very warm when seed potatoes were harvested and put into store, so the tubers themselves were warm, skinset was variable, and the dry conditions made the tubers more susceptible to bruising. Of course, temperature needs to be brought down slowly, but fans often had to run hard to cool the crop down, and in some cases, they ran for too long, resulting in dehydration and weight loss.

"It is crucial to look at the whole picture so you can develop a well-balanced, tailored diet for the particular crop in a particular field, providing the right nutrients and conditions for optimum development."

"We also saw higher levels of gangrene and dry rot than in previous years, which were exacerbated by the high temperatures."

However, some things have improved over the years, and size grading is better than before, so growers can better manage planting depth and spacing. Some companies provide seed planting charts to aid this.

Because of issues with availability, price and flexibility, many ware growers use home-saved seed when possible. However, this needs to be planned prior to planting and is not risk-free, adds Andrew.

"If you use home-saved seed, it is essentially a second-class seed and is not as pure. It tends to emerge quicker, set fewer tubers and die off more quickly, and, of course, it is crucial to bear in mind that field-applied sprout suppressants such as maleic hydrazide (MH) should never be applied to seed!

"In home-saved seed grown in the west, virus control is all about location, location, location and not spray, spray, spray. Seed crops should be grown on the highest, most westerly point available. However, in the east, growers mainly rely on isolation and barrier crops, and grow them as far east as possible, but isolation the most important point.

"Moreover, as a wider range of insecticides can be applied to seed than ware, once they have been sprayed, growers cannot then change the crop's destination and sell it for ware."

Attention to detail is also crucial, and home-saved seed crops should be inspected for virus, aphids, and blackleg as a minimum, and leaves can be sent for virus testing during the season. However, this gives a partial picture as sometimes the virus is identifiable in the leaves but not in the tubers, or vice versa, thus giving a false reading.

Ideally, when sending a post-harvest tuber sample this is best done from the grading line to ensure a representative sample, because the sampling error is quite high if taken from a stack, said Andrew. ➜

Strip with placement fertiliser

Becoming cleverer with fertiliser strategies

To be clever with fertiliser strategies, it's important to have the right information and the more information you have, the better you can plan rates, applications and logistics, says Andrew.

"This means starting off with a good soil analysis, measuring organic matter as well as reviewing soil structure and the previous crops in the rotation over the past few years."

Andrew uses a 'Gold Soil' test which shows exactly what is going on in the soil, including soil characteristics, nutrient availability and ratios.

"This provides a good starting point as to what is available and what is needed to apply. As the growing season progresses, regular sap or tissue testing helps build understanding of plant efficiency and any deficits can usually be dealt with; if nutrition is not balanced it can inhibit photosynthesis and therefore impact on yield.

"It is important to take samples early in the morning across a range of potato crops to see if there is a trend rather than focusing only on any imbalance in one field."

Creating the best conditions for getting the crop established and the canopy to start photosynthesising as soon as possible, is the most important aim when it comes to planting, he emphasises.

"It is crucial to look at the whole picture so you can develop a well-balanced, tailored diet for the particular crop in a particular field, providing the right nutrients and conditions for optimum development."

At planting, Andrew recommends using placement fertiliser in addition to earlier-applied organic manures and base fertiliser as it can help the crop establish.

"Products such as Primary P, which contains 10% N, 40% P 2% Mg and 2% zinc, can be applied in a granular or liquid form, and can be applied next to the mother tuber. Standard granular fertilisers, however, should not be placed close to the roots as they can cause root damage due to salt concentration."

He goes on to note that potatoes only remove a small amount of phosphate (P).

"For example, if P is Index 3, the crop will only require 50kg of fresh P to grow. What is important is that potatoes need access to the nutrient to be within 1mm of the roots, because phosphate is so immobile in the soil.

"In the 2025 growing season, tissue testing identified plants as being low in phosphate, boron and other nutrients, which may be because the plant biomass had not used up available nutrition due to abiotic stress caused by lack of available water.

"This implies that the root systems were not working well enough, but if placement fertiliser had been used at planting, the risk of this happening can be lower.

"Additionally, we found that N levels left in the soil after harvest in cereals were higher than normal because there was lower uptake, which depressed yields.

"Therefore, if you are planting a cover crop after potatoes this year, there will be higher nutrient retention so you may need to fine-tune N rates this year."

It has been observed that when comparing soil samples taken four years ago with those taken in 2025, where cover crops have been grown, they have taken up previously unavailable phosphate and made it available.

Andrew also reflects that 2025 saw incidence of crops with calcium deficiency, especially in unirrigated crops on light soils.

Calcium helps reduce incidence of rust spot and other disorders.

"The challenge is that calcium needs to be applied to the soil as it is only taken up effectively by the roots, so trying to remedy a shortfall by the application of foliar calcium will only lead to inconsistent results rather than making a real difference at reducing deficiency symptoms.

"If your soils are low in calcium, a pre-planting application of calcium ammonium nitrate is helpful.

"Gypsum is also useful because it contains calcium and sulphur, but does not increase pH levels."

Some soils, including many of those in Herefordshire, have a high magnesium : calcium ratio, which affects the workability and friability and Andrew finds that gypsum helps redress the balance.

Nutrition needs to be balanced, and using too much of a nutrient can also be detrimental, he warns. "Attention to detail when evaluating rates is crucial and growth problems are not always solved by a simple extra application of N.

"If a crop has too much N, it will have a lot of soft growth which makes it more susceptible to pests – such as aphids - and diseases, but also creates more green mass to defoliate at the end of the season."

He recommends tailoring N rates according to variety and end market.

Potato cyst nematodes (PCN)

Fields should be tested for PCN levels prior to making decisions on which fields to use for growing potatoes, but soil sampling still needs to become more accurate, he says.

"We need to sub-divide the field into small plots for testing to get more accurate sampling, and better results, which will reduce the chance of missing hotspots.

"The sooner the testing is done the better, and should ideally be done in the summer/autumn before a potato crop as it gives the grower a chance to undertake some cultural controls before applying a nematicide. It is also more pleasant for the person doing the sampling rather than undertaking it in cold, wet conditions in February," said Andrew.

The amount of land infested with PCN is increasing, so varietal tolerance and resistance to this pathogen needs to considered when deciding which varieties to grow and where to grow, notes Andrew.

"PCN is now one of the major limitations to seed potato growing as you are not allowed to grow seed on infected soils. Moreover, one of the lessons learned in 2025, was that drier soils led to less efficient nematicide control. "This implies that in a dry spring, we should start irrigation earlier to help the nematicide to work."

Controlling volunteers is also key to reducing PCN populations, and weeds such as cleavers, nightshade and chickweed, which can host the pest, should be cleared. Care should also be taken to avoid contamination from machinery by thorough cleaning between fields, or from post-grading soil being placed in different fields, he says.

"Varietal resistance and tolerance are becoming increasingly important to the industry, as breeders are well aware, and the processing sector is up to date on the need to grow varieties with tolerance and/or resistance.

"Moreover, there are some newer varieties with better PCN resistance and tolerance coming through the system, and trials held by Hutchinsons have identified a number of varieties that look very promising. These new varieties will widen the processors' and growers' choices, whether they are destined for processing or fresh markets." BPR

Top tips for short and long term soil strategies

1. Take advantage of the Gold Soil Test to understand what is happening in the soil
2. Discuss rotations with the landlord when taking on rented ground, and build a longer-term agreement which will benefit both parties
3. Review previous crop performance and any deficiencies
4. Discover and discuss previous manure applications
5. Optimise cultivation depth and number of passes according to soil condition and structure
6. Undertake accurate PCN and wireworm testing and take the appropriate decisions
7. If possible, grow a cover crop before planting potatoes (some processors have funding available for this)
8. Look at access and aspects of the field (i.e. a gate onto the road at the bottom of a slope can lead to run-off onto the road)

Early symptoms of PCN

All the right ingredients

BP2026 brings together the right people, the latest innovations and advice or solutions to all the latest industry challenges say show-goers.

'BRINGING together the right sort of people' is how the British Potato 2025 event, held in Harrogate before Christmas, has been described by many who attended.

The event drew a cross section of people from across the industry, including growers, breeders, agronomists, packers, processors, researchers, nutrition specialists and innovators.

Many were there to discover ways to help them address challenges, and made good use of the knowledge offered by expert speakers and those on exhibition stands.

The seminars, organised by GB Potatoes, proved popular, and covered late blight, what has been happening in the markets, securing the potato's place on the plate, Scotland's PCN Decision support, future changes in the UK's supply of seed potatoes and a commercial talk.

One of the big draws was Dr David Hughes, an Emeritus Professor of Food Marketing at Imperial College London, who updated delegates in his seminar on trends in the food retail sector, highlighting that for many consumers, price is still the primary decision-making factor. Known as "Dr Food", David is a much sought-after speaker at international conferences and seminars on global food industry issues, particularly consumer and retail trends. He has lived and worked in Europe, North America, the Caribbean, Africa and South East Asia.

Seminars on late blight also grew particular interest, with Dr David Cooke of the James Hutton Institute, who manages Fight Against Blight (FAB) focusing on cultivar resistance and the troublesome EU46 clone.

Consumers and their concerns

PROF David Hughes updated delegates in his seminar on trends in the food retail sector, highlighting that for many consumers, price is still the primary decision-making factor.

"For many families, filling stomachs with tasty but cheap food is key, and frozen fries are high on the list of affordable calories," he said. "Concerns are not so much about year-on-year difference but pre-Covid vs today, and price rises compared to wage rises."

However, in general, these price increases have not filtered down to the the growers themselves, which is happening worldwide and is not just a British problem, he added.

David went on to observe that food markets are somewhat chaotic, partly because of uncertainty around Trump's tariffs, which is leading to low levels of confidence and less investment. Moreover, as agricultural production inflation is higher than food price inflation, margins are being squeezed.

Drawing on information from World Economic Forum and the Davos meetings, which look at big business risks over the next ten years, he said: "In 2025, the top four were related to the environment, and there is much concern about food security, not only in Britain but across the world."

Food self-sufficiency in the UK is currently around 60 percent, and in potatoes, it's 63 percent. Most of our food imports come from EU countries, not least frozen fries from prolific producers and processors in The Netherlands and Belgium. "If you take out produce that cannot be grown here (for example, bananas!), this increases our self-sufficiency to about 75 percent."

He added that surveys reveal farmers to be well-considered by the public, particularly those consumers under 40, yet transferring that into purchasing of GB produced food is more difficult.

"Potatoes are important to us, but becoming less so. As diets become more international, traditional carbohydrate options such as potatoes may be squeezed, and replaced by rice, noodles and pasta."

Moreover, retail purchases of fresh produce are declining as demand for 'meal solutions' and immediate convenience increases and this trend is likely to continue. This is not all bad news for the potato sector, as foods such as ready-made mashed potato continue to be very popular, and follow well-developed USA trends, he said.

"We need to be better at 'food theatre' to encourage consumers, and if you have a bona fide health attribute, why not shout about it?" he said.

Storm Amy and EU46

CULTIVAR resistance needs to play an increasing role in future late blight management, Dr David Cooke of the James Hutton Institute, who manages Fight Against Blight (FAB) told those gathered. The initiative tracks the emergence and spread of the Phytophthora infestans (late blight pathogen) clones.

Reflecting on the strange 2025 potato growing season, he noted that incidence of the EU46 clone shot up to 23% in the 300 late blight samples processed. Despite this figure, he said it was only found in seven locations, of which only two were conventional commercial potato crops. Others were trial sites and organic crops.

These outbreaks caused by EU46 began in Wales with later spread to the Midlands and Derbyshire in England. One of the drivers could have been Storm Amy, he said.

The fact that most of the outbreaks reported in Wales were caused by EU46 shows that this clone has established itself in that region and is likely to re-emerge in 2026.

"This strain has a known resistance to the fungicide active oxathiapiprolin, and all the FAB strains tested in 2025 were found to have the mutation that confers resistance to this active. However, unlike on the continent, management failures were not reported which implies that growers are following industry and FRAC guidelines correctly when implementing their blight programmes."

The absence of EU43, in which resistance to mandipropamid has been widely reported, was good news for the British industry. However, the prevalence of EU41 at multiple sites in Scotland is a potential cause for concern given last year's reports of it having a lower sensitivity to low doses of cyazofamid.

"Despite the doses in question being well below field rate, it does flag the potential for selection pressure as the effective dose in the crop reduces in the intervals between applications. Growers need to be careful not to use consecutive applications of any product, particularly those with only a single active ingredient.

At over 40%, the aggressive clone of EU36 was again the most prevalent blight strain in the 2025 FAB testing. It has been linked to breakdown of host resistance, and there are also reports of oxathiapiprolin resistance to this clone on the Continent.

"In the past, this clone was more prevalent in the East but this year its range spread to crops across the UK," said David.

Fluazinam resistant EU37 has almost disappeared, being found on just two sites in 2025. "This is a real success story for growers, and is thanks to their judicious anti-resistance strategies such as alternating and mixing actives," David said.

Outbreaks caused by EU13, which is resistant to metalaxyl, also decreased with only two outbreaks on volunteers reported, pointed out David.

He warns against complacency, especially after the dry summer with low blight pressure.

"Nonetheless, it remains crucial that growers continue to alternate the actives in their spray programmes to reduce the threat of resistance developing; there is no place for block spraying.

"Cultivar resistance has become increasingly important to complement fungicides, and care should still be taken by using rotations to manage oospore risk and to manage cull piles and potato volunteers."

In 2025 there were 81 blight outbreaks sampled, with 47 of these being on volunteer plants from September onwards. The first outbreak was in Ceredigion in mid-May, then in mid to late June, there were outbreaks in Cornwall, Pembroke, Perth and Kinross, and Aberdeenshire.

In the spring, the exceptionally-dry weather in April and May suppressed sources of primary infection of P. infestans, and the continuing dry weather over the summer resulted in very few blight outbreaks. Remarkably, in some potato growing regions in the east of England the BlightSpy service showed there were no full Hutton Criteria in 2025 until mid-July.

"In such cases, even when Hutton Criteria conditions were later reached, the severe checking of primary inoculum sources early in the year meant blight did not establish and this demonstrates the benefits of primary inoculum management," said David.

Fungicide Resistance Testing

THIS year oxathiapiprolin, mandipropamid, amisulbrom, propamocarb, and fluopicolide came under the spotlight with detached leaf testing of contemporary UK isolates of EU36, EU46 and EU41.

"We selected amisulbrom because it is in the same FRAC group as cyazofamid and we were keen to see whether last year's trends with EU41 were observed," said David.

Results of oxathiapiprolin testing showed that UK samples of EU36 and EU41 remain sensitive to the fungicide, although EU46 isolates were resistant. Reference strains of EU43 from the Netherlands were also resistant.

All UK isolates were sensitive to mandipropamid in comparison to past testing of EU43 strains from the continent that have proved resistant. All isolates were sensitive to amisulbrom, propamocarb, and fluopicolide. It was interesting that despite the shift in sensitivity at low doses we observed to cyazofamid in 2024 the same isolates were fully sensitive to amisulbrom which is in the same FRAC group. The Hutton team is consulting with industry to understand the basis of this result.

The use of DNA-based marker testing for mandipropamid and oxathiapiprolin groups has expanded to 80 samples in 2025. Such in-season testing of blight samples has allowed Hutton's FAB team to report any resistance issues and allowing timely responses to optimise Integrated Pest Management (IPM) of late blight in line with the new UK Pesticides National Action Plan for 2025.

David said: "Care must be taken in 2026 to ensure that industry continue to follow FRAC guidelines on mixing and alternating active ingredients, in particular considering the loss of multi-site mancozeb products."

In this context, the industry would also benefit from a greater use of more late blight resistant varieties, in combination with fungicide applications, to provide more sustainable future IPM approaches, he added.

Joined up agricultural research key to solutions

IT has never been more crucial for the different scientific research institutes to work together address the challenges threatening the potato industry, said Prof Ian Toth of the James Hutton Institute.

The PCN research project undertaken in Scotland is coming to an end, and GB Potatoes and CUPGRA will be taking up the mantle to explore control in the rest of the UK.

"We need to make sure we work together to maximise the limited research resources in both science and industry," said Ian.

Ian, who is the director of the National Potato Innovation Centre (NPIC), Scotland's Plant Health Centre, and president of the European Association for Potato Research (EAPR), said that work currently being undertaken at the NPIC is covering many fronts.

"We are seeking to help growers address the challenges, which include the loss of plant protection products, regulatory constraints (particularly post-Brexit), profit and economic stability, and climate change.

"Opportunities and solutions we are exploring include innovations for pest control and monitoring, new varieties with useful traits to reduce plant protection product use, decision support tools, integrated farm management and improved water use efficiency."

He also drew attention to the upcoming EAPR meeting in 2027, which will be hosted by the NIPC in Edinburgh.

"Our industry's strengths include its reputation, certification scheme, high health potatoes, and the ability of industry, science and government to interact and work together for the good of the sector."

Finding funding for research studies in potato crops, however, is another challenge, as there is a dearth of funding for near-market studies.

"It is unlikely that funders such as BBSRC will support field trials as they normally support blue-sky research, although we are seeing a welcome shift towards industry-relevant research. As a result, with all these things, we need to combine efforts and work together to ensure a strong future."

Early application of sprout suppressant recommended

BECAUSE of the stressful growing season and warm autumnal weather in 2025, crops came in more active from the fields, with low dormancy and the threat of early sprouting, said Ajay Jina of DormFresh.

There have been particular difficulties with ambient stores, as it was difficult to bring the temperatures down, due to lack of optimum conditions for cooling.

Speaking on the busy stand at BP2025, Ajay reported that many growers have been seeking advice and showing interest in 1,4SIGHT (DMN) because of its ability to help them combat the challenging conditions.

"Temperatures are crucial when it comes to potato storage because a lower temperature slows the crop's respiration rate and physiological activity," he said.

"However, when weather conditions are as mild as they have been this autumn, in certain stores/varieties sprout management takes priority, so the best to combat this is to make an early application of a sprout suppressant, and DMN is ideal for coping with such a situation."

This is because one of the important characteristics of DMN is that it not only works on preventing sprouting but also stopping any further growth of existing sprouts. Once the first application has been made, tubers need to remain under close observation, especially if temperatures remain warm, he advised, noting that in the second half of November they had dropped considerably.

Reflecting on preharvest field applications of maleic hydrazide (MH), he remarked that results have been varied.

"Many crops received MH but, owing to growing conditions applications were more unpredictable. Where growers were able to apply it, it generally went on well, but because of its variability in efficacy, some incidences of early sprouting have been observed, so opting for an early application of 1.4 SIGHT is still the best way forward to get optimum results."

TRV and PLRV updates

TOBACCO rattle virus (TVR), which can cause spraing, may well be a bigger problem than many in the industry envisage, but pre-planting testing often gives inconclusive results.

This may be about to change.

Fera senior plant virologist Dr Adrian Fox and his team have devised a Fera ENIGMA Project – which is effectively crowd-funding – to develop predictive diagnostics for Tobacco Rattle Virus (TRV) in the potato sector.

TRV is a virus transmitted by some, but not all, free living nematode vectors which favour light, sandy soils. The virus has more than 400 hosts, including cover crops and many weed species such as chickweed, fat hen, mayweed and groundsel. Some of these, for example, chickweed, are symptomless, which makes detection very difficult.

In potatoes, TRV is a major cause of spraing (corky ring spot). Symptoms include unsightly corky circles, rings of healthy tissue with brown flecks throughout the tuber. As a result, affected tubers are usually rejected by processors and packers, which can prove costly to growers.

The virus is an ungradable defect, and Adrian emphasised the need to evaluate how big a hazard it is for the crop.

"The problem is that current identification methods for pre-planting detection are not very accurate. Our idea would be to move towards spraing bait testing, effectively providing an in-field identification of TRV.

"Growers would collect a certain number of leaves per hectare (20, 50, or 100) and the diagnostic would be able to analyse at a better speed than currently available. The results would also build a mapping service across the rotation, so that decisions could be taken two to three years in advance rather than leaving them until the last minute."

Potato leaf roll virus has also become a major concern in the potato industry, but results in England and Wales may not been as bad as feared, said Adrian.

As aphid pressure was very high in 2025, many growers have invested in post-harvest tuber testing, meaning the laboratory is at full capacity for the 'long' test but the direct test is still available, and results are comparable, Adrian added.

Making irrigation scheduling decisions on the move

MAKING correct use of soil moisture probes remains key to good irrigation scheduling, as they can be used to track where moisture is most needed, said Peter White of Soil Moisture Sense.

Probes can be placed to measure every 10cm down through the soil profile so growers have access to information about the actual rooting depth and therefore soil moisture deficit and when the crop really needs irrigating.

For example, if the soil moisture deficit (SMD) is 70mm and irrigation applies only 30mm, many roots remain in dry soil and the stomata can close, which can cause a loss of yield.

Peter said: "First you need to identify how much water is in the soil and then when you irrigate you need to ensure the water infiltrates through the profile and down to where the roots are, and not just wet the top."

He added that care needs to be taken to ensure the chosen irrigation method is properly set up to ensure even application without water

pooling in some areas and others remaining dry.

"Soils can vary greatly, so soil moisture needs to be measured correctly and the data interpreted to help growers put together the jigsaw puzzle to help them fine-tune how they grow their crops.

"We run a complete service to install properly calibrated probes, collect the data, analyse it and provide decision support to help growers assess the information. This creates a permanent log which can help inform irrigation decisions and allowing an end of season review.

"It also helps detect where irrigation overlaps occurred, but also areas where more water could have been applied."

All the information collected can be communicated to the grower via iPad, smart phone or computer and daily emails in near real time.

Increasing adoption of biostimulant

TOUGH growing conditions in 2025 led to increasing numbers of growers exploring the potential benefits of using biostimulants, and business at MJP Supplies' stand at the show was brisk.

Founder Marcus Palmer, who is a third generation grower, said: "This year, many growers increased their usage of biostimulants to help the crops cope with the different stress factors, including flooding, drought and high temperatures.

"Algifol is made from brown algae collected from the ocean, and provides trace elements, vitamins, enzymes, amino acids, carbohydrates, polyuronides as well as growth-regulating plant hormones. We have been using this biostimulant on our own farm for over 20 years to provide nutrients for our crops, and it can be used alongside most plant protection products.

"At BP2025, we received a lot of interest on the stand, and were able to network with many of our existing customers as well as signing up new ones, too."

"We need to be better at 'food theatre' to encourage consumers, and if you have a bona fide health attribute, why not shout about it?"

Dr David Hughes, Imperial College London

Molecular tools accelerate breeding

A CUTTING-edge molecular toolbox is helping accelerate the development of potato varieties equipped to meet the industry's most pressing challenges. According to Vanessa Young, Head of Molecular Diagnostics/Potato Breeder at James Hutton Ltd (the commercial arm of the James Hutton Institute), a deep understanding of the genetics behind key traits is now essential for making smarter, more targeted breeding decisions.

Speaking after the event, Vanessa explained that a major advancement to the award-winning diagnostic platform dRenSeq is now entering its pilot phase. The technology, which earned the prestigious Hescott-Meredith Science Award, emerged from a collaborative BBSRC-funded project involving McCain Foods, Greenvale, the University of Dundee, and the James Hutton Institute.

Vanessa and her team currently screen potato varieties and breeding populations for known sources of resistance to potato cyst nematode, foliage late blight, and viruses, with molecular markers.

"dRenSeq allows us to pinpoint disease-resistance genes directly within breeding lines and varieties, helping us identify stronger parents and improved commercial varieties," she said.

However, while marker-assisted screening is far more cost-effective than conventional phenotyping (exposure/field-based), it remains too costly to apply at the vast scale required for early-stage seedling screening — a critical stage for breeding success.

To overcome this bottleneck, researchers at the James Hutton Institute, spearheaded by Dr Xinwei Chen, are developing a powerful new high-throughput platform known as MAXY-ID. Building on dRenSeq, this technology promises to drastically cut the cost and time required for large-scale screening.

Early results are highly encouraging, signalling the potential for a transformative shift in how potato varieties are bred for resilience, sustainability, and commercial performance.

The 2025 British Potato Awards

A returning hero and long-term contributor among category winners of latest industry awards.

DAVID Nelson was the recipient of this year's individual British Potato Industry Award, one of 10 award categories presented in Harrogate on the first night of the British Potato Industry Event recently.

The British Potato Industry Award is an award presented to individuals who have made a significant contribution to the potato sector. It recognises long-term dedication and has been presented to many notable figures from research, agronomy, growing and seed production over the years.

The award was historically administered by AHDB Potatoes, but is now part of the National Potato Industry Awards run by British Potato.

Through his commitment to innovation, collaboration, and the advancement of best practices, David was felt to have made a meaningful and lasting impact on the industry and the many people who rely on it.

A consortium comprising The James Hutton Institute, the University of Dundee, Greenvale and McCain Foods received the Hescott-Meredith Memorial Award which recognises cutting-edge scientific or research excellence in the industry. It was awarded for the development and application of dRenSeq, a genome-reduction technology that informs researchers and breeders of the presence or absence of functional genes controlling diseases in potato.

The technology was developed as part of a Biotechnology and Biological Science Research Council Industrial Partnership Awards (BBSRC-IPA) project involving all partners. It was validated and implemented by Hutton Scientific Services, the commercial arm of the Hutton and has supported the development of several new potato varieties.

Returning hero Tayfusion won the Agtech and App Innovation Award – its second BP win in the past three years.

The Dundee innovator developed DIG (Data Intelligence for Growers) in collaboration with merchants, growers, agronomists and processors to deliver a centralised data and operations hub designed to replace paperwork-heavy, fragmented systems with automated, real-time processes.

DIG, which tracks crops end-to-end, from planting and harvest through to sales, allocation, logistics, and invoicing, providing full visibility, improved forecasting, and reduced administrative burden, received the award in 2023 and the platform's new DIG Trade Platformis now used by some of the UK's leading merchants. It supports real-time stock control, automated contract management, potato passporting and fully integrated logistics scheduling.

Other winners and Highly Commended included:

- Agtech and App Innovation: Highly Commended - Crop Systems Ltd
- Best Environmental/Sustainability Initiative: Winner - Puffin Produce; Highly Commended -BASF
- Best Marketing Campaign B2B: Winner - Agrico UK Ltd; Highly Commended - IPM Potato Group
- Best Marketing Campaign B2C: Winner - Albert Bartlett's Minecraft Movie; Highly Commended - A mash made in heaven (Isuzu dealer Chorley Group and SpudBros)
- Machinery or Implement Innovation: Winner - Crop.Zone GMBH; Highly Commended - GRIMME UK Ltd
- Consultant/Advisor Contribution: Winner - Andrew Goodison, Hutchinsons; Highly Commended - Keith Chappel, Greenvale
- Best Young Achiever: Winner - Tom Eyles
- Storage Innovation: Winner – Restrain

Full coverage of the awards, with details of the winners and some of the highlights, can be found in the digital awards supplement on the British Potato website - **https://britishpotato.co.uk/**

Far-reaching possibilities

Breakthrough in hybrid potatoes opens doors for African growers.

THE far-reaching possibilities presented by hybrid potato breeding took centre stage at Royal HZPC Group's Potato Days, an annual event held by the seed potato company at its headquarters in Joure, Netherlands, recently

Under the name NOVA, Royal HZPC Group will introduce its hybrid potato varieties in the coming years. In Kenya, the first variety has already been submitted for registration.

CEO Hans Huistra said this is a major milestone. "Although we cannot export to Kenya, farmers there will soon have access to certified, clean, and strong seed material," he said.

"A hybrid potato tastes and looks just like the potato we all know. The difference lies in the breeding technique. With the right genetics, hybrid breeding allows us to develop new varieties faster. For example, when a new disease emerges, resistance can lead to a new hybrid variety up to twice as fast as with classical breeding. Hybrid potatoes can also be grown from seed—an innovation that opens new markets."

Program Leader Hybrid Breeding at Royal HZPC Group, Ad Vrolijk, said that while hybrid breeding has been successful for decades in crops like maize and tomato, it was initially thought to be impossible for potatoes because of genetic limitations around self-pollination. But in 1999, Japanese scientist Hosaka published a discovery of a gene in a wild potato that enables self-pollination.

"Eventually, we succeeded in crossing this gene into existing varieties. Since 2011, our research team has invested heavily in hybrid breeding. And now, it's paying off," he said.

Hybrid breeding offers the greatest short-term potential in regions where growers lack access to high-quality seed potatoes. For example, in Kenya, only 10% of the 800,000 small-scale potato growers have access to clean and strong seed material.

Ad Vrolijk said: "In Kenya, late blight is a year-round problem. Crop protection products are hard to obtain, expensive, or misused. Many farmers spray little or not at all. That's why we also test without crop protection. Our hybrid variety, codename D23HY2515, matches the yield of Kenya's leading variety and is the only one that maintains its performance under high late blight pressure, thanks to its dual resistance."

Seed potatoes remain essential

"Hybrid breeding is advancing rapidly, but seed potatoes remain essential," said Hans. "Even with hybrid varieties, tubers are still the most reliable method for high yields."

In Kenya, farmers using hybrid potatoes still follow the traditional process, most notably because plants from seed need more time to form large tubers and growers want to reuse their land after 100 days for another crop, he added.

According to Royal HZPC Group, it will take time before hybrid potatoes are introduced in Europe.

Ad said: "Creating pure parent lines—a crucial part of hybrid breeding—is an intensive and long-term process, and the standards in Europe and North America are higher. Here, we've worked with high-quality seed material for decades. At Royal HZPC Group, we've been breeding for over 125 years—you don't catch up with that overnight."

"In Kenya, we're making a difference because access to quality seed material is limited. But it's only logical that hybrid potatoes will eventually play a role in Europe too."

Digging deep: The evolution of varieties

Martin Stothard, Head of seed development at Branston, discusses the circular approach in the bid to produce potatoes that are fit for the future.

VARIETY development is a painstaking process, taking up to 10 years before a new variety is transformed from a promising seed to a winner on the supermarket shelves.

Along the way, there is extensive work and tough decisions over which varieties to proceed with - and which to ditch.

Developing a fully circular supply chain is key to this. Building close working relationships with growers and customers right from the start enables them to be part of the entire process.

Finding the right varieties from which to start a seed multiplication programme is crucial, with decisions driven by commercial viability, field agronomics and market demands. We trial close to 100 varieties each year across the UK to identify potential candidates. Categories include salads, maincrop whites, reds, dual purpose and niche lines.

Working at small plot level, we plant and assess each variety throughout the growing season before they are harvested and assessed for yield, quality, sensory and storage traits.

This process takes up to five years. The ensuing results guide our decisions on whether to progress a variety, with successful candidates moving on to broad acre field and factory trials before inclusion on retailer approved lists.

Firstly, we need to understand what consumers want, guided by flavour, taste, consistency and texture. We hold regular taste panels to determine sensory acceptance from harvest through to late storage. We believe this to be the foundation of any variety programme.

Yield is also a key determinant of success. Any new variety must deliver the same or better financial return to growers if it is to be successful. Our trials therefore focus on fine-tuning planting densities and agronomy practices to optimise tuber number and yield for any new variety.

We must also evaluate all varieties for resistance to pests, diseases and viruses - all issues affected by stricter regulations, a diminishing spray armoury and new emerging strains, such as blight and virus.

Finally, there is the pressure to find varieties that can cope with our changing climate. With potatoes being a temperate crop, yields can be significantly impacted by rising temperatures, so heat stress tolerance along with drought tolerance are key traits we assess in our trials programme.

Ensuring quality and reliability:

Managing the potato journey, from seed selection to consumer, has been key to delivering both quality and reliability. This encompasses breeding, seed multiplication, seed sales, ware production, factory packing, distribution and retail sales.

A unique part of what we do is stress testing late-stage varieties through our mash, prepack and ready-to-cook factories. This gives our teams first-hand exposure to new varieties in operational environments before they are approved for use.

Sampling for disease control:

All commercial seed crops within our programme FG3 and older are sent for testing. We look for leafroll virus (PLRV) and all strains of virus Y (PVY), with results made available to our seed and ware growers.

Samples are also obtained for harvest assessments. We pass samples through our smart grader to determine tuber number, size and weight, calculating tuber counts and size splits. They are then washed and assessed for disease before being photographed and reported.

We show all samples to our contracted ware growers to help their purchasing decisions. Having this information early allows us to understand our stocks better, placing the right seed with the right grower to strengthen our commercial position.

Communication is key:

Our aim is to be transparent and collaborative, engaging with all partners within our supply chain through:

- Annual meetings with seed growers to plan and review
- Regular in-season crop walking to gather data on quality and yield
- Seed conference covering business, technical and innovation updates
- Technical newsletters covering seed industry challenges, developments, trial results, agrochemicals and machinery
- The Branston 'portal' gives our seed growers access to crop data and resources

A highlight of the year is our field variety day for ware growers and retail customers to discover new and upcoming seed varieties and developments.

Keeping ahead

Branston undertakes variety-specific agronomy (VSA) trials to meet the challenges faced by our seed and ware growers. This year our focus was increasing marketable yield on two salad varieties. We explored using ethylene to encourage more stems and tubers, additional nutrition to promote canopy longevity and planting depth to maximise light interception. These will be repeated next year as we look to build on this piece of work.

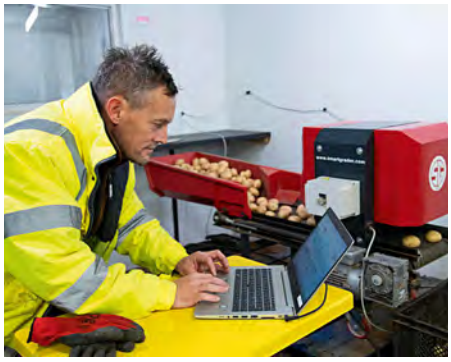
Knowledge sharing is also a key part of our collaborative approach to working. We provide our growers with access to technical help-guides and variety-specific agronomy data, including nutrition advice, variety traits and optimum seed rates.

Breeding programme

Underpinning this work is our own breeding programme run in conjunction with James Hutton Institute, using both traditional breeding and gene marker assisted selection techniques.

This programme was established back in the late 1990s and has had several successes, namely the award-winning Inca Bella phureja hybrid. This variety is now the parent of the extremely successful premium roasting variety 'Nemo'. More recently Branston listed a new salad variety this year; with Exquisa and Piccolo Star parentage. It produces high tuber numbers and has excellent culinary qualities with a firm, waxy golden texture. We are busy building seed stocks and expect to launch commercially in 2029.

It's a wonderful process to be involved in and highly satisfying to take our growers and customers on this journey with us. It's important that we manage the entire process from start to finish to produce the best possible potatoes.



Stronger by nature

AGRICO recently showcased its latest breeding results and new potato varieties to breeders, growers, buyers and processing companies from around the world.

The theme of this year's Variety and Seedling Show was 'Stronger by Nature', with varieties that were naturally bred and equipped to thrive in a changing world. Visitors from all over Europe were introduced to the latest developments in potato breeding and discovered promising new varieties and seedlings.

Once again this year, the BioSelect and Semagri brands were prominently featured, along with two new Agrico varieties that have been added to the Dutch Variety List.

The event took place at Agrico's base in Bant in the Netherlands.

Fifth generation of self-propelled harvester

THE fifth generation focuses on user-friendly modernisation and an increase in capacity thanks to the optimised haulm processing modules, sieving path, cleaning unit and bunker.

AVR Product Director Pieter Galle said: "The very first AVR Puma came off the production line in 2006. Up till then, four-row self-propelled harvesters were either cumbersome oversized machines, or they lacked the necessary sieving capacity to achieve a four-row harvest. The AVR Puma was a real game changer.

"The conditions in the field have never been more challenging. Climate change, an increasing potato acreage, periods of drought and floods, hard clods and stones, and a shortage of workers lead to increasingly stringent requirements for the harvesters, but these challenges have inspired us."

Speed, maneuverability and force have been further developed with a sharper rotation angle, a 551 HP engine power and an upgraded hydraulic system.

All the strong characteristics that make the Puma so versatile, have been preserved - including the Varioweb combination of cleaning modules, the lightweight construction, low fuel consumption, large tires, optimal weight distribution, user-friendliness and the option to work on caterpillar tracks – while the fifth generation offers more capacity, more control - high-level cleaning, according to the manufacturer.

The cleaning modules allow for the cleaning surface to be increased by 20%. Thanks to the reduced drop height at the haulm roller units, product transfer is smooth and potato-friendly. All sieving webs have been given more available power and are individually reversible for maximum flexibility in every working condition.

The Varioweb system offers maximum flexibility for using the axial rollers. Depending on the circumstances, you can choose to use the rollers fully, partially or not use them at all. The Varioweb system has been further optimised with inclination control. It is now possible to set the Varioweb cleaning unit between -2.5° and 7.5° directly from the cabin, so you can respond perfectly to the cleaning needs in the field.

The surface of the pintle belt has been extended by 10% to allow a higher sieving capacity and better functioning pintle belt.

The bunker of the AVR Puma has 25% extra volume (up to 10 tons) thanks to the redesigned fixed part and the new raising plates which automatically fold out when in Field Mode.

To quickly unload this larger volume, the full bunker is raised 40 cm using a parallelogram construction. The unloading arm can unload across four rows – even in high dumpers – which is extremely useful when opening plots.

The haulm topper has been given a serious upgrade: 40% more rotor power for tough or abundant haulm, a standard integrated haulm spreader as well as the option to easily change ejection sides, which is useful when opening fields and plot edges.

The haulm roller units have also been upgraded. By connecting the haulm roller to the nose roller of the subsequent sieving web, drop heights are reduced. The position of each haulm roller can be easily adjusted from the side of the machine or directly from the cabin. The haulm rakes that guide the haulm towards the haulm roller at the first haulm roller unit cover the entire width and can be adjusted from the cabin.

Tracker gains momentum

BERTHOUD has expanded its Tracker range with a new 4,000-litre version offering compact design and well-balanced weight distribution.

The trailed sprayer can be used by potato growers. It is a versatile machine which can be used in potato production, for applying herbicides or fungicides.

To ensure uniform spraying performance across the entire plot, the Tracker 4000 now offers an optional pneumatic nozzle-by-nozzle shutoff system — a direct response to feedback from the field.

By eliminating overdosed and underdosed areas, this system improves treatment efficiency while reducing the consumption of plant protection products

Automatically eliminating overlaps at headlands or when resuming work, this technology allows each nozzle to be individually controlled by a compressed-air system that instantly opens or closes spraying as required.

Connected to a GPS or ISOBUS terminal, the system activates only the nozzles needed at each moment of the pass.

The Tracker 4000 benefits from this technology on a selection of Axiale and Axiale B3 booms, with two or three-fold folding options, available in widths from 24 to 33 meters.

For enhanced stability and steering precision, particularly on headlands, the Tracker 4000 also offers an optional gyroscope-controlled steering axle.

This intelligent guidance system analyses trajectory variations in real time and automatically adjusts the orientation of the rear wheels according to tractor movements.

The steering axle can also be activated to limit boom sway and drift, especially on uneven or sloping terrain.

To meet intensive application needs requiring high flow rates — particularly for nitrogen fertilization — the 4,000-litre Tracker version offers a dedicated configuration equipped with the Hardi 330 l/min pump.

This self-priming diaphragm pump is designed for high-volume applications (300 to 350 l/ha), for example with liquid nitrogen.

Robust and easy to maintain, the pump's moving parts are completely isolated from the circulating liquid, ensuring that no chemicals ever come into contact with mechanical components.

Fully grease-lubricated, it eliminates any risk of oil leakage, guaranteeing higher reliability and simplified maintenance. It can even run dry without damage in the event of diaphragm failure.

For everyday crop protection applications, the Tracker range continues to feature the proven and reliable BP 280 pump as standard, suitable for all routine spraying operations.

The new hoods of the Tracker 4000 have been designed to provide easier access and maintenance. An innovative system allows the rinsing tank to be lifted, giving safe and convenient access to the pump for servicing. During operation, the valves and pump assembly located behind the rinsing tank is protected from spray and mud projections.

In terms of styling, the Tracker 4000 adopts a new chassis and boom colour scheme with a more modern and distinctive look, while preserving its DNA through the iconic tank colour that makes it instantly recognisable.

Irrigation

A NEW Rainmaster clean water reel irrigator and new features for slurry tankers was unveiled on Bauer's stand at the LAMMA show.

The Rainmaster A4 series neatly enters the range between the current compact A series and larger T series, and was shown alongside a latest-generation Rainstar E300 110/490.

Catering for use in smaller potato fields, the Rainstar A4 is available with Bauer's own polyethylene (PE) hose in diameters up to 75mm and in lengths up to 250m.

Flow rates of between 12 and 48cu m per hour help users fine-tune their irrigation schedules, and Bauer's wide-angle SR101 sprinkler delivers uniform water distribution across runs up to 70m wide, with boom systems available as an alternative to provide gentle irrigation of delicate crops.

The SmartRain irrigation app for mobile devices provides alerts, reports and control functions for remote irrigator management, and easy access to an online documentation and reporting platform. The SmartRain package enables users of Bauer Rainstar reel and Centerstar pivot irrigators – as well as Bauer diesel irrigation pumps – to keep track of just one or several irrigation systems via an office computer, an Apple or Android mobile phone, or a tablet computer.

Demo facility opens

PETERBOROUGH-based Flo-Mech, which offers processing and packaging services to the potato industry, has officially opened a new demonstration facility.

The purpose-built area showcases multiple machines and serves as a hub for testing, development, and product trials.

The company plans to expand the demonstration area further with additional equipment from both its own product range and partner technologies.

The demonstration units are fully mobile so can be easily transported to customer locations.

New portable solution for processors

PPM Technologies has introduced the third generation of its FlavorWright All-in-One™ seasoning system.

The compact, portable solution combines liquid and dry seasoning in a single plug-and-play unit for continuously coating fresh and frozen potatoes and potato snacks. The Gen 3 model features enhanced drum magnets, an optional stainless-steel drum and additional advancements that support operator safety, expand application flexibility and increase production capacity.

Duravant Group President - Food Sorting and Handling said: "Many of the enhancements in the Gen 3 came directly from processors in the field who told us what would make their systems reliable, efficient and easy to operate. These are practical updates that bring real value."

The FlavorWright All-in-One is aimed at processors with small to medium production requirements, as well as for larger operations that need a flexible R&D or multi-line solution.

This latest model introduces several new design features. A programmable light alarm beacon provides customisable visual alerts for system status, product levels and process conditions. Wiring routed through the frame supports safe operation and streamlines washdown. An extended Mini VF infeed conveyor with new side guards helps maintain product flow and reduces spillage. New optional forklift mounts facilitate safe transport around the plant.

A new angle indicator helps operators quickly and consistently set the drum position. A bolt-on, stainless-steel drum option provides robust durability and accommodates customisable flight configurations for high-temperature products, frozen foods or operations requiring metal-detectable components in product contact zones.

The FlavorWright All-in-One offers IP65-rated washdown capability and food-grade materials throughout. Quick-release components on both the seasoning hopper and plastic drum enable changeover in as little as five minutes, depending on the application.

Processors can select between volumetric or gravimetric metering, with the gravimetric option incorporating load cells for enhanced accuracy when greater precision is required. This flexibility allows processors to match control complexity to their operational needs and workforce capabilities. When desired, it can be configured to monitor and control connected systems directly through the All-in-One's HMI.

Separator's milestone celebrated

LINCOLNSHIRE-based Scotts Precision Manufacturing has sold its 1,000th Evolution Separator.

First launched in 2005, the Evolution Separator has grown to become a trusted machine used by potato growers and processors across the world.

Since its launch, the Evolution has continued to develop. Now in its second generation, the latest model uses direct drive motors in place of the original chain drive, bringing improved performance, reduced maintenance and greater reliability.

The landmark 1,000th machine has been delivered to a British grower.

Demand for the machine has seen the factory size double in recent years, and expansion plans are already underway.

Managing Director Derek Scott said: "When we launched the Evolution Separator in 2005, we wanted to give growers something that genuinely made their lives easier, their crops cleaner, and their businesses more efficient. To see 1,000 machines now out in the world, helping farmers and processors every day, is humbling. None of this would have been possible without the trust of our customers, who put their faith in us, and the dedication of our team here at Scotts, who pour their energy and expertise into every machine we build. I'm incredibly proud of what we've achieved together."

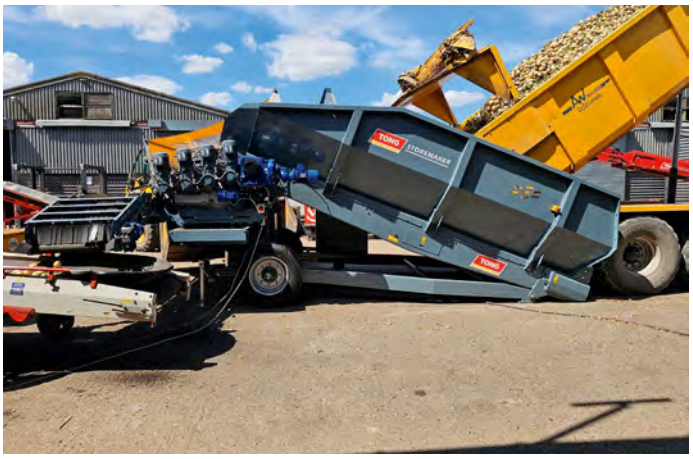
New elevator and mobile hopper cleaner displayed

TONG'S conveyor and elevator manufacturing division, Tong SwiftLift, showcased its new Extendo II mobile elevator at LAMMA.

Available in two models, with a 600mm or a 900mm wide belt, the Tong Swift Lift Extendo elevator features a gentle 'safedown' attachment that lowers into the bulker lorry, reducing the drop during the early stages of loading.

Fully extended, the Tong Swift Lift Extendo elevator reaches 14.1m long and retracts to only 9.1m, making it easily transportable and convenient to store.

Tong also exhibited its new, compact Storemaker, featuring the company's well-known EasyClean separator. The Storemaker is an effective potato and vegetable hopper cleaner which is easily transportable and ideal for cleaning crop going into store, or prior to direct loading into bulker lorries.



Data-driven concept for harvesters

DEWULF has launched the Level X, a smart, data-driven concept for potato harvesters that uses IoT and AI to boost performance, efficiency, and ease of use.

The platform, which is already available on multiple Dewulf harvesters, offers levels of tech from basic monitoring to full automation with camera systems and AI adjustments for soil/potato ratios.

Available in three levels (Bronze, Silver, Gold), Level X combines intelligent data with AI-driven automation.

The Bronze version is standard on Dewulf's self-propelled potato harvesters. This system monitors GPS location, fuel and AdBlue consumption, machine speed and modes (harvesting, transport, turning), field-specific data such as harvested area and productivity (ha/h).

The silver package includes a new camera system with state-of-the-art functionalities and gives users greater control over the quality of the harvesting process. Its additional features include: Operation personalisation, remote viewing, slow motion feedback and casting integration for seamless communication with smartphones and in-cab navigation systems.

With the gold package, the machine actively makes decisions based on sensors, data and AI-driven analysis. The optimal settings are applied automatically, adapted to the crop, soil and prevailing conditions.

The development was first tested and implemented on the flagship Enduro, and is now also available on the facelifted R3060, soon to be followed by the Kwatro.

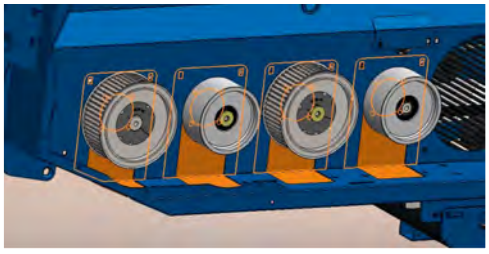
Design tweak means easier maintenance

STANDEN Engineering has announced a key design improvement to its popular UniPlus de-stoner, making maintenance faster and easier for operators in the field.

From the 2026 season onwards, all new UniPlus machines will feature a redesigned star shaft system, allowing the first four rows of star shafts to drop out from the bottom of the machine. Previously, the shafts were removed from the side — a process that, while effective, required more time and effort. The new bottom-drop configuration will significantly reduce maintenance time, simplifying access and speeding up the process for operators.

When components require replacement, the new feature will make the process far simpler.

Sales Director Edward Gilbert said: "Our focus is always on improving usability and lowering total cost of ownership for our customers. By redesigning the way the star shafts can be removed, we've made essential maintenance quicker, easier, and safer."



"Asset restructuring no longer needed"

THE Chancellor's recent announcement that the cap on 100% business relief (BR) and agricultural relief (AR) will be transferable between spouses has been hailed as a step in the right direction but many will still need to exercise caution according to agricultural property and financial advisors. The Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE) said in practice a couple could combine allowances and pass on up to £2 million of farmland to the next generation free of inheritance tax while Paul Fairbairn, Head of Private Wealth at law firm Cripps said the changes will spare many families from unnecessary asset restructuring as it will allow them to pass up to £3.3 million of business or farming assets to the next generation.

"It corrects what many viewed as an unfair anomaly and marks a rare instance of the government listening to public outcry and diluting a legislative change," said Paul. "However, it will not undo the fact that many such businesses will now be subject to inheritance tax for the first time ever, which in turn will have a significant impact on their ability to grow and generate wider economic activity."

Clive Pointon from law firm Aaron & Partners warned growers not to be complacent.

"The increased £2.5 million threshold will offer some protection to smaller farming businesses, however this should not be seen as an all-clear," he said. "Many farming estates will still fall within scope of the changes, often without owners realising it. Land and property values have risen sharply in recent years, meaning assets can exceed the new threshold far more easily than expected."

He advised growers to carry out a full review of their assets and estate structure. "Without a proper audit, there is a real risk that families could face an unexpected tax liability at an already difficult time. Planning now is essential to avoid unpleasant surprises later."

James Farrell, Head of Rural Consultancy at property firm Knight Frank, said allowing 100% relief to be transferred between spouses will be helpful for some families but said many farms and estates still face significant succession pressures while the scope for the Treasury to address unintended consequences continues to narrow.

"There will be four price bands and consultation on reliefs, exemptions and deferrals will be critical, as will the valuation exercise. Further compounding matters, the planned increase in property income tax rates by two percentage points from April 2027 will reduce returns for farms and estates with rental portfolios," he said, going on to add that the latest announcements have done nothing to provide confidence or stability to support long term investment in rural economy.

Key reforms for 2026 SFI return

THE Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) is returning in 2026 with key reforms, including two application windows (June for smaller farms/new entrants, September for all), aiming for a simpler, fairer system to replace the abrupt 2025 closure.

Environment Secretary Emma Reynolds announced June and September dates for the reopening of the SFI, ahead of her speech at the Oxford Farming Conference. Defra has promised clearer budgets and timelines to support environmentally-friendly growing practices for the refreshed SFI, which is part of the broader Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes.

James Bradley, a partner with property consultancy and estate agency Carter Jonas, said: "News that the SFI is reopening will be welcomed by farm and estate owners, but its structure raises a number of questions which will cause uncertainty among those who want to plan.

"Having two application windows is helpful in some respects, but if each window has a fixed budget, the scheme becomes effectively competitive again," he said.

While it is good to see SFI coming back and to have some indication of direction, the scheme's success will depend on whether options genuinely work for farm businesses in practice and over the long term, he said.

Country Land and Business Association (CLA) believes making the next round of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) scheme focus on small farms is a mistake.

President Gavin Lane said: "Smaller farms need support with advice, training, skills and facilitation, but this should be more nuanced than simple size designations which risk undermining the scheme's ability to deliver environmental improvements at scale."

He said Defra should focus on rewarding environmental outcomes rather than imposing "arbitrary caps based on farm size" and incentives should remain proportionate to the scale of delivery.

The Soil Association has said the SFI needs to include more backing for organic.

Policy Director Brendan Costelloe said: "It's good to finally get confirmation that the Sustainable Farming Incentive will reopen after an uncertain wait over the last year but we are concerned that there remains a long wait for many growers when we need all farms, big and small, to be adopting nature-friendly practices right now. We also desperately need the government to provide reassurance that they will back organic in both SFI windows."

Revised standards for AGW certification

NON-PROFIT certifier A Greener World (AGW) has launched a major update to its Certified Regenerative by AGW standards.

First introduced in 2020, the Certified Regenerative by AGW programme provides measurable outcomes, third-party auditing, and real transparency for growers, food businesses, retailers, and consumers. The revised standards are now consolidated, clearer, and more user-friendly.

The certification programme focuses on the potato growing system, including soil health, biodiversity, and climate resilience while helping growers implement and verify regenerative practices. This is then reviewed by a panel of experts and audited annually.

New finance option

LLOYDS has launched a new Agricultural Transition Finance loan which could help UK potato growers overcome the financial barriers of transitioning to more sustainable and regenerative farming systems.

The product is open to new and existing customers, with a minimum loan value of £25,001. BPR

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The year that was ...

As we enter another year and all the challenges and opportunities 2026 has to offer, we take a look back on the past 12 months in the potato industry

JANUARY-FEBRUARY

In January's issue, we learned how legumes could pave the way for better pest control and soil health in potato growing. Legislation had a big presence, experts in the legal, financial and recruitment sectors sharing insights on how to handle the inheritance tax storm and Alex Preston giving insights on the repurposing of the potato levy funds. Potato growers in Jersey were rewarded for their efforts using trap crops and Scotts near Boston opened their doors to show how their family business was growing and evolving, with the next generation making their mark in the industry.

Aldi's beef dripping roast potatoes were crowned top choice and legumes were being hailed as a solution to better pest control and soil health in potato growing in January.

MARCH-APRIL

The future of mancozeb hung in the balance following a recent EU ruling, while experts looked at other methods of keeping blight strains at bay. Growers were advised to keep wild-growing Italian rygrass on their radar and advised on control strategies. The positive effects of using silicon biostimulants in trials, how microbials were making the big difference in a TRIP project, how biology was adapting and why there was potential for improving seed potato production through strategic tweaks to production systems were all in the spotlight. Tom Harrison at HDF Farming Ltd shared his experiences of managing potato cyst nematode (PCN) as part of an IPM system, the CIPC Residues Monitoring Group (CRMG) shared its latest updates and tips on avoiding supply chain disruption and how to prepare for The Great Potato Revolution were shared.

MAY-JUNE

Some of those pesky little visitors none of us want to see – wireworm, aphids and spider mites – were the topic of many different conversations, while late blight warranted an extensive feature focus. We discovered how potatoes were helping boost the proteins and plans were hotting up for the British Potato Industry Awards and British Potato Industry Show, with seminar speakers, judges and a celebrity speaker introduced.

JULY-AUGUST

We faced one of our hottest summers in history. Andrew Goodinson advised on some of the ways growers could enhance their water use efficiency. Specialists called for a new approach on fertilisation and potato leaves and tubers were boosted during Yorkshire trials. Pioneering work by SEAD Artists was set to unblock the bottlenecks impeding the use of drones in weed control, and latest innovations in integrated pest management to support potato growers against the ever-present challenge of PCN were highlighted. The global mancozeb summit events were shared and the 2025 blight campaign kicked off, with a call going out for more scouts. The Perfecting Potatoes Together tour brought together a group of growers, agronomists, and industry experts and highlighted some of the potato practices being undertaken in eastern Scotland. Potatoes In Practice took a blustery turn, with Storm Floris disrupting travel and almost putting paid to the event. The editorial team visited a number

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER

The judging panel for the 2025 British Potato Industry Awards met up to pick out the 2025 winners and Highly Commended. Lower slug numbers had been predicted owing to an increase in natural predators, but a lack of significant frost in winter, rising temperatures and showery conditions had created perfect conditions for slugs in potato fields. The CIPC Residues Monitoring Group made an appeal for samples to help with monitoring and setting the maximum residue level in stores. GB Potatoes, in association with the British Potato Trade Association, launched a new knowledge development programme. Grimme's Adam Johnson returned from tackling the Three Peaks to raise money for RABI. More than 100 international participants gathered to discuss potato breeding in the era of pan genomes and advanced genetics and a new potato AI initiative was piloted in the UK.

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER

The British Potato Industry event, took place in Harrogate. The event drew a cross section of people from across the industry, as growers, breeders, agronomists, packers, processors, researchers, nutrition specialists and innovators converged in Harrogate to network, discover the latest innovations and listen to some expert seminars. The Potato Storage Handbook was launched. McCain celebrated donating the equivalent of three million meals via charity FareShare, HZPC announced its intention to acquire Irish breeder and exporter IPM, CUPGRA held its 36th conference and banquet and chippy prices were revealed to have doubled. At the same time, SpudBros launched their first Express shop and potatoes going into storage were at risk of early dormancy, experts warned.

Virtual summit held

THE Canadian Potato Summit 2026 took place on January 13th.

The free virtual event featured live presentations, practical technical sessions, and in-depth discussions on emerging trends in potato production and processing.

Global summit takes place

THE Global Potato Summit 2025 took place at India Expo Mart, Greater Noida, recently, with live farm demonstrations and field visits.

The summit brought together global stakeholders across the potato ecosystem—spanning seed, farming, storage, processing, packaging, and international trade. The Global Potato Summit 2025 highlights South Asia's pivotal role in the potato industry.

International potato centre funding

NBCC India Ltd, which is known for developing major infrastructure projects like government buildings, hospitals, and smart cities, has received a project valued at INR 42.37 crore (USD 5.08 million) from the National Horticulture Board for the development of the proposed International Potato Centre.

The centre, which will be based in Agra, Uttar Pradesh, aims to support India's growing potato industry, promoting research, innovation, and higher yields.

Officials said the centre is expected to play a key role in capacity building, research collaborations, germplasm conservation, processing innovation, and farmer training. Uttar Pradesh, especially western UP, is among the country's largest potato-producing regions, making Agra a strategic location for such a research hub.

This initiative is a significant step for India's agri-infrastructure, building on the country's large potato production and exports.

Under the contract, NBCC will take up comprehensive planning, architectural design, engineering, and execution of the centre, along with several ancillary works assigned by NHB. The project has been conceived as a world-class facility to promote advanced potato research, strengthen value chains, and support India's rapidly expanding horticulture sector.

Processor plans expansion

PROCESSING company Simplot plans to expand potato production in Mendoza and recently met with officials to address energy shortages that will affect farms.

The Idaho company has significant operations in Argentina, including the major french fry processing plant in Mendoza, which opened in 2018 and serves South America. The Argentinian branch is a key part of Simplot's global network, focusing on supplying local and regional markets like Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay with potato products.

Satellite technology will monitor and support growing

BEIRUT Erbil Potato Products Company has adopted satellite-based technology to monitor and support the fields of the company's contracted growers.

The Hydrosat platform uses high-resolution satellite data to track crop growth, measure soil moisture, and detect early signs of water stress and common plant diseases. These insights enable the company to accurately determine irrigation and fertilisation needs for each field.

The platform also provides actionable recommendations to growers, such as ideal irrigation timing, required water and fertiliser quantities, and measures to protect against agricultural risks.

New store loader launched

A NEW store loader has been developed by Dewulf for those operating in the North American potato market.

The MP 18-110 offers growers and processors a solution for filling storage sheds and trailers, with intelligent functions such as proportionally-adaptive pivoting and automatic filling programs.

Potato expo in Dallas

THE Potato Expo 2026, North America's largest annual potato trade show and conference, took place recently at the Gaylord Texan Resort & Convention Center in Dallas, Texas.

Organised by the National Potato Council (NPC), the event brought together growers, processors, suppliers, researchers, policymakers, and international partners from across the potato supply chain.

McCain acquires McCrum

INTERNATIONAL processing group McCain has acquired Washburn-based processor McCrum in Aroostook County.

Based in Washburn McCrum has a long history in potato processing. A US$32 million investment was made in 2020 to reopen and modernise a previously-closed plant, creating additional processing capacity alongside the existing facility in Easton.

The acquisition means most of Aroostook County's potato processing capacity is handled by McCain, which has led to some growers voicing concerns about redcued competition for processing potatoes.

Fries launch into retail

LAMB Weston has launched restaurant-quality fries at FairPrice, FairPrice Xtra, and FairPrice Finest in Singapore, marking its first retail foray in Southeast Asia.

Iran land route exports allowed

PAKISTAN has allowed the export of potatoes to the Commonwealth of Independent States through the Iran land route, following the approval of a one-time exemption from the requirement to submit financial instruments.

The Commonwealth of Independent States includes Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, and Tajikistan.

The decision applies to the current export season only.

Earlies planting begins

EARLY potato planting has begun in the Khatlon region.

Eight thousand hectares of potatoes must be sown within the established timeframe.

Khatlon Region Governor Davlatali Said inspected the progress of agricultural work in the region during a working visit.

Potato storage facilities expanded

THE Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) has announced the establishment of around 525 storage facilities for potatoes and onions across multiple regions of Afghanistan.

The storage units have been implemented in the central, northern, southern, and western parts of the country. Absence of adequate storage and warehousing systems has taken its toll on potato growers' marketing window previously and the new facility means they will be able to better manage supply and reduce spoilage.

Wholesale sales drop

WHOLESALE sales of potatoes and other key vegetables, often referred to as the 'borscht set', declined by roughly 25–30% in Moldova this autumn, despite stable or falling prices, according to Logos Press, the country's independent economic news source.

Record-breaking yields

GROWERS are recording record-breaking yields this year.

Yields are around 10% higher than last year, while waste has also been around 10% lower.

There was a 13% increase in acreage in Bavaria from 2024 to 2025 according to Germany's federal statistics office, Destatis.

HUTCHINSONS CAREERS IN AGRONOMY

Looking for your next career move?

Hutchinsons is a leading agricultural and horticultural input advice and supply company. To support its market-leading potato team and continue delivering value to growers and the wider industry, it is looking for a Potato Technical Manager who's passionate about agronomy and ready to help shape the future of UK potato production.

Founded in 1938, Hutchinsons remains a family business and employs over 550 staff nationwide, with more than half directly involved with client-facing agronomic relationships. This exciting new role builds on strong foundations. You'll work closely with our agronomists, growers, and supply chain partners to share knowledge, guide strategy, and bring fresh thinking to our potato agronomy specialists. You'll also help develop new ideas, technologies, and products that make a real difference in the field.

We're looking for someone who knows potatoes inside out, communicates clearly, and enjoys working with others to solve problems and drive progress. If you've got a strategic mindset, a collaborative approach, and a genuine interest in helping growers, please get in touch: **https://bit.ly/4pZHVly** Call Kelly Earl on 07796 508490 for a confidential discussion.

Optical sorter for chips

Designed for potato chips, tortilla chips and similar snack foods, the belt-fed COMPASS® optical sorter identifies and removes product defects and foreign material (FM) to protect food safety and product quality.

COMPASS improves routine operation with recipe-driven programming and a user interface designed to mimic smartphone app navigation. Operators can easily create and adjust sort recipes. A new operator without any technical skills can learn how to operate the system in production in 30 minutes. Intelligent belt control automatically maintains proper tracking, including compensating for belts that have either stretched or shrunk.

Powered by Key's NEXT sort engine, COMPASS detects and rejects product defects such as dark spots, green discoloration and white knot bruises, along with FM-like fryer debris. Equipped with customisable camera options and up to eight channels of multispectral sensor data, the sorter can detect the colour, size, shape and structural properties of every object to identify more, smaller defects than systems with conventional three-channel cameras.

Every COMPASS is equipped with Key Discovery™, a powerful data analytics and reporting software that turns the sorter into an IIoT-connected device and information centre. COMPASS is available in multiple configurations to meet individual application and capacity requirements. **www.key.net**

Ware production increasing

FOR the 2025/2026 season, the French potato sector is seeing a record increase in ware potato acreage and production, driven by strong demand from processors, according to the interprofessional body CNIPT.

This is leading to market pressure but also signaling a significant turning point with potential for future growth, despite challenges like faster sprouting requiring new storage strategies.

Key Takeaways from CNIPT reports for 2025 include:

- **Area Expansion:** Acreage for ware potatoes grew substantially (+25% since 2023, +15% from 2024) to more than 197,000 hectares.
- **Record Production:** National potato output is projected to hit over 8.5 million tons, a nearly 15% jump from 2024.
- **Market Impact:** This historic volume, coupled with increased production elsewhere, is causing economic pressure on both fresh and processed potato markets in Europe.
- **Processing Focus:** The growth is largely encouraged by European manufacturers, with processing accounting for a large share of the increase.
- **Organic Market Rebound:** The organic sector also saw a moderate increase in planted areas, driven by a significant surge in organic processing potatoes.
- **Emerging Challenge:** Faster sprouting in harvested potatoes requires earlier use of sprout suppressants, a new concern for storage management.

Strong harvest and oversupply

UKRAINE'S potato harvest was particularly strong in 2025, according to Dutch company Van Dijk Technics which specialises in agricultural storage and processing solutions and has offices in Ukraine.

Commercial Director Andrii Marushchak said that market prices in Ukraine fell to near cost levels as a result of the bumper harvests and oversupply, while quality was also an issue.

Exceeding national demand

BANGLADESH produced 1.12 crore tons of potatoes this year, around 22 lakh tons more than national demand.

Production costs in 2025 ranged from BDT 14 to 17 per kilogram, or US$0.13 to US$0.15, rising to BDT 20 to 25 per kilogram, or US$0.18 to US$0.23. Growers are seeing losses.

The government has asked cold storage operators to hold older potatoes for longer to support farm gate prices. Two per cent of potatoes are processed in Bangladesh, compared with 7% in other countries, and Agriculture Adviser Jahangir Alam Chowdhury has called for a greater focus on processing capacity and suitable varieties.

Restriction on imports

BOTSWANA has announced a temporary restriction on imports of 16 vegetable types, including potatoes.

The Ministry of Lands and Agriculture has brought in the restriction so that local supply can be aligned with domestic need, after local growers reported financial losses resulting from oversupply, with unsold crops – some of which had been left to rot in fields.

16% rise in American exports

AMERICAN potato exports to Taiwan increased during the marketing year running from July 2024 to June 2025 marketing year, despite increased competition from other supplying countries.

According to trade data, US potato exports to Taiwan rose 16% in value, from US$99.1 million to US$114.5 million, and 9% in volume, from 75,136 metric tons to 82,172 metric tons. Frozen potato products accounted for 78% of total shipments, remaining the main export category.

Producer improves inspection processes

ONE of Saudi Arabia's largest potato producers Aljouf (JADCO) has entered into a strategic partnership with Polysense, a Belgian technology firm specialising in AI and hardware systems for quality inspection and process optimisation.

JADCO grows potato crops for the French fries and crisps markets across 60,000 hectares. Its goal is to improve product quality, reduce waste, and enable data-driven decision-making.

Under the partnership, Polysense will implement Polysense Qualify, an in-line, vision-based quality control system that measures length distribution and quantifies surface defect levels on French fries at production speed. The system provides automated inspection with objective, repeatable results and actionable insights for the quality control team, reducing manual sampling and transforming QC into a more automated, data-driven workflow.

Automated, real-time measurement ensures precise and repeatable inspection for every fry, removing the subjectivity of manual checks and supporting consistent product quality in each batch. AI-driven insights provide early detection of process drift and raw material variation, enabling faster, data-based decisions that reduce downtime. With rapid defect detection improving efficiency, throughput, and first-pass yield, the system also strengthens traceability by time-stamping all results and linking them to batch and SKU data (product identification) for full audit readiness. Ultimately, this enhanced control and reliability reinforce customer confidence and strengthen brand trust.

CEO of Polysense, Yarne De Munck, said: "For Polysense, this partnership is an important milestone as we expand our technology into the Middle East."

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