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Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes
Thirty-second session, 4-6 March 2002, Geneva

Item 9 of the Provisional Agenda

CONCERNS OF SEED BUYERS

Submitted by the United Kingdom

Note: In 2001 the British Potato Council (BPC) conducted a 2nd Seed Customer Satisfaction Survey following their previous survey in 1999. The aim is to understand the components of seed quality, their relative importance and satisfaction levels. A postal, self completion questionnaire was sent to all growers who pay a levy to the BPC and was also distributed to seed customers via the seed trade and the BPC quarterly magazine. The number of returns was 381 which was less than in 1999.

UK Potato Industry

Table 1 summaries the size of the potato enterprises with which the respondents were involved and the markets for which they produce potatoes. The area represented by the 2001 response was just over 15% of the national UK area of 138,326ha. The proportion of growers with more than 100 ha of potatoes had increased by 62% from 1999.

Table 1 Area of potatoes grown and Markets supplied by UK Potato Growers

Area (ha) of potatoes grown	% growers	Market	% growers
< 10	21	Pre pack/bakers	59
10 – 25	28	Processing – chips	47
26 – 50	21	Processing – French fries	9
51 – 100	14	Unwashed potatoes	14
> 100	13	Seed	8

As expected, the washed supermarket trade and processing sales dominate the UK market.

VARIETIES AND SEED ORIGIN

The main varieties grown were Maris Piper (48%), Estima (35%), Désirée (22%), Cara and Marfona (18%), and Nadine (16%). In UK 68% of seed was Scottish, 9% English or Welsh, 7% Dutch and 7% farm saved with 69% of growers planting officially classified seed to produce 81% - 100% of their crop.

FACTORS CONSIDERED IMPORTANT BY PURCHASES OF SEED

As expected, freedom from viruses, blight and blackleg were considered important by 84% of growers and the risk of introducing brown rot or ring rot was regarded as important by 75% of growers. Service elements such as delivery, responsiveness to problems, were still ranked as very important. Among the factors which had increased in importance since 1999 were ability to source premium grade seed (61%), ability to specify split grade seed (58%), ability to specify field generation (47%) and ability to specify physiologically aged seed (33%).

SATISFACTION WITH SEED

96% of growers were satisfied with freedom from viruses. There was increased satisfaction with some of the service elements eg accommodating last minute requests, provision of timely and correct order paperwork, packaging requirements. Of the diseases, 17% and 15% of growers were dissatisfied with freedom from silver scurf and blackleg respectively. 18% of growers were not content with the uniformity of size grading. In addition growers were asked if they had been dissatisfied in the last 5 years with Classified or Certified Seed and 64% responded yes. The main causes of dissatisfaction were rots (26%), poor size grading (25%), powdery scab (18%), blackleg (14%), damage (12%), silver scurf/black scurf (8%) and delivery problems (5%).

DISCUSSION

While the above highlights some of the important issues in seed production, only some of these can be controlled within a certification scheme. Although physiological age of the seed tubers is regarded as a very important quality affecting the performance of seed potatoes, the conclusion of previous expert and rapporteur discussions within the UNECE forum was that this characteristic could not be a certification requirement as it was not inspectable. Other factors, e.g. field generation, are within the remit of a certification authority and, as such, information can be delivered within the scope of the certification process.