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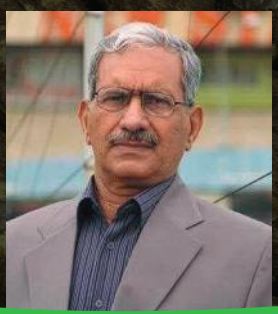

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Editor's letter

I recently joined agronomists and technical specialists on Norfolk field briefings focused on disease management strategies, picking up some feedback on blight, scab handling, and insights into how actives are working together.

Bayer's 'Crop Doctor' field briefing for potatoes gave us an opportunity to listen to in-field discussions around potato blight, including disease prospects for the 2026 season, blight programmes, resistance management, and stewardship – we share details of this in our special disease feature on page 10.

In Lincolnshire, The Strategic Potato Storage Day, an industry event hosted at Dyson Farming site and jointly organised by Potato Storage Insight and SDF Agriculture, also provided an opportunity to gain some interesting insights from a number of industry professionals on the latest field and storage trial results, sprout suppression, and store refurbishment. It was great to see this event so well attended, with some key questions being posed by members of the audience. We'll provide full details in the September issue.

Away from the downpours that seemed to follow me around on recent events, we check out some sunnier climes, where earlies are lifted, in our special feature on page 8. Have a read to hear what three growers in different areas have to say about this year's crops.

We've got a number of updates from manufacturers and consultants in both Fertilisation & Nutrition, and Disease sections in this issue, and some key insights to share in our desiccation feature.

Overseas, we've been in touch with industry professionals in India and Pakistan who share some of their thoughts on how their respective countries' potato industries are developing, and what this could mean for the UK.

Meanwhile, at a workshop in Aberdeenshire, agronomists and growers discussed tuber disease threats, the importance of store hygiene and the role seed tuber treatments should play.

Editor

Stephanie Cornwall

British POTATO REVIEW

Editor
Stephanie Cornwall 07841037065
stephanie.cornwall@warnersgroup.co.uk

Sales Manager
Tara Corona 07824 743247
tara.corona@warnersgroup.co.uk

Design
Dean Cole
deanc@warnersgroup.co.uk

Subscriptions
01778 392464
subscriptions@warnersgroup.co.uk

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

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Interactive knowledge trail

VISITORS to Potatoes in Practice 2026, who are members of BASIS or NroSO, can earn up to six CPD points at the event on Thursday, August 13th, at The James Hutton Institute's Balruddery Farm in Invergowrie, near Dundee.

An interactive knowledge trail, designed to engage visitors while reinforcing key agronomic insights, will run across a number of participating exhibitors stands. There will be 10 questions per exhibitor, each focused on the technical and practical information on display.

Professor Ian Toth, Director of NPIC, said: "Potatoes in Practice is designed not only to showcase innovation, but also to equip professionals with the expertise they need to drive the industry forward. By combining the knowledge trail with seminars, demonstrations and expert-led discussions, the event offers a comprehensive learning experience that will help to drive the industry forward."

BASIS, a charitable organisation founded by the pesticide industry in 1978, is dedicated to raising professional standards in land management and food production while NRoSO (National Register of Sprayer Operators) has evolved to offer many benefits to its members, including training events, industry information, technical updates and networking opportunities.

Gene-edited commercialisation on hold

THE commercialisation of gene-edited potato varieties - such as those bred for blight resistance - is paused or subject to immediate reconsideration while Defra works out how to respond to a recent High Court ruling.

In a legal challenge brought by advocacy group Beyond GM, the High Court has ruled that the Government failed to understand the significant consequences of removing transparency and labelling for gene-edited crops and foods.

The judgment found that government advisors gave the Farming Minister incorrect advice about his own legal powers. This led to a failure to investigate the real consequences of removing safeguards on gene-edited organisms. Passing the regulations on this basis was found to be unlawful.

The judgment highlighted that lack of mandatory labelling and traceability requirements imposes substantial burdens on both organic and non-organic supply chains. This increases the difficulty and cost for growers who seek to avoid genetically-modified crops, as well as those exporting potatoes to the EU.

The current regulatory framework will now need to be reconsidered.

Silver recognition for supplier

Greenvale has been awarded a silver rating by EcoVadis, the globally recognised sustainability ratings platform, following its first submission.

EcoVadis assesses companies on their environmental, social and governance (ESG) performance, providing independent, third-party verification of sustainability credentials. The platform evaluates businesses across four core pillars: Environment, labour and human rights, ethics, and sustainable procurement, benchmarking results against more than 150,000 organisations worldwide across over 250 industries.

International potato gathering

THE international potato community will gather in Madrid on October 5th for the first International Symposium of Potato, a new event organised by FEPEX in partnership with Fruit Attraction and Europatat.

Taking place at IFEMA Madrid on the eve of Fruit Attraction 2026, which has selected the potato as its Star Product, the symposium aims to provide a high-level platform for discussion, knowledge exchange and collaboration across the entire potato value chain.

More than 400 professionals from Spain, Europe and beyond are expected to attend the event, including growers, traders, seed potato specialists, researchers, processors, retailers, service providers and institutional representatives.

Grower optimism for future, says survey

A NEW survey of British potato growers reveals a sector facing significant short-term pressure, with confidence low for the coming season as growers contend with rising costs, policy uncertainty, labour challenges and threats from pests and disease.

However, the survey also shows that growers retain greater confidence in the longer-term future of the industry, provided the right policy, market and investment conditions are created.

Around 43% of respondents were pessimistic or very pessimistic about prospects over the next 12 months, compared to just 26% who expressed confidence. However, the picture improves when growers look further ahead, with 37% saying they are confident or very confident about the sector's five-year outlook, compared with 24% who were pessimistic.

The survey, conducted by GB Potatoes and analysed by Pareto Consulting, was carried out in late 2025 – before the onset of the conflict in Iran and before this season's crop went in the ground. Even then, growers were already reporting rising costs and a notable lack of confidence about the season ahead. Subsequent events are likely to have intensified those concerns further.

Notably, short term pessimism increased with experience in the sector, rising from 14% among growers with five or fewer years in the industry to 45% among those with more than 20 years' experience. Those who know the sector best are most concerned about what lies immediately ahead.

Production costs rises between 2024 and 2025 were reported by 94% of respondents, while 58% said rising costs were already undermining investment in future production.

CEO of GB Potatoes, Scott Walke,r said: "These results reflect what we are hearing from growers on the ground. Confidence is clearly low for the coming season, and the pressure on margins is very real. Growers are having to make difficult decisions about planting, investment and the scale of their operations.

"But the survey also shows that growers have not lost faith in the future of British potato production. Confidence improves when they look beyond the immediate season. That tells us there is still belief in the sector - but it depends on the right conditions being created."

Confidence in government policy was strikingly low, with 83% of growers saying they lacked confidence in the relevance of policy to their needs. While the sector has previously welcomed engagement from the current administration, growers are calling for that dialogue to translate into meaningful action on the biggest challenges facing potato production.

More than 80% of growers cited the availability of crop protection products, water availability and the impact of environmental regulations as moderate or extreme challenges. Recruitment difficulties were also widespread, with 68% of respondents reporting difficulty or extreme difficulty in finding staff.

The survey captures a broad cross-section of British potato production, with 95% of respondents growing ware potatoes and 26% growing seed potatoes (and 20% producing both). In 2025, mean yields were 32 t/ha for seed and 47 t/ha for ware, with output split roughly evenly between the fresh and processing markets - 50% of ware production went to fresh and 46% to processing.

Despite that productive base, growers were pulling back on their planting intentions for the current season. While planted area grew between 2024 and 2025 - with 58% of ware growers expanding their area - the picture for 2026 is markedly different. Only 12% of ware growers intended to increase their planted area, while 33% planned to reduce it and 56% to hold steady. The trend is similar for seed growers, where 30% intended to reduce their area and just 12% were looking to increase.

The link between confidence and planting decisions is clear. Those intending to reduce their area in 2026 were significantly more likely to hold pessimistic views and to be dissatisfied with their contractual arrangements - 43% of pessimistic ware growers planned to cut their area, compared to 23% of those who are more confident. The challenge for the sector, and for policymakers, is to create the conditions that rebuild confidence for future seasons.

Despite the difficult outlook for the coming season, there are strong signs of ambition within the sector, with 38% of respondents reporting that they are already investing in mechanisation or automation, with a further 29% considering doing so - together representing a significant majority who see technology as part of their future. It is a reminder that, despite the current pressures, British potato growers remain progressive and committed to building a more productive and resilient sector, given the right conditions to do so.

M&S gets its Jerseys in first

M&S was the first UK retailer to launch its Jersey Royal potatoes this year, thanks to its longstanding 10-year relationship with the Le Maistre family.

The family has been farming the soil on Jersey since 1841 and is led by sixth-generation farmer Philip Le Maistre, who works alongside son Phil Jnr and brother Peter, as well as a team of local experts.

Philip Le Maistre Jnr said: "It's a real tradition for us to get the first harvest of the season onto M&S shelves. While my dad, uncle and I have never seen a planting season with such continuous rain, we've taken great care, planting more by hand and using the same traditional methods my great-grandfather did, to ensure the potatoes get the best possible start. Our team works incredibly hard to deliver the very best taste, and we're proud that families across the UK will be able to enjoy a product that is as fresh as it can possibly be."

The Le Maistre farm is part of M&S' Plan A Farming for the Future programme and are LEAF Marque certified growers, combining traditional and modern methods to grow potatoes more sustainably.

Farmfest food highlight

POTATOES were the food highlight of the Great British Farm-Fest held at NAEC Stoneleigh recently.

The main highlight was social media sensation Spudman (Ben Newman), who brought his famous Tamworth-based jacket potato van to the event.

Despite extreme, hot weather making hearty jacket potatoes less of an obvious choice, his pitch generated consistent queues.

Spudman had shared various potato-related tips and fun content surrounding the event. Festival-goers and caterers discussed air fryer methods (cooking at 180°C for 45 minutes, then crisping) and various loaded topping combinations (e.g., pulled pork, chili con carne) with Ben at the event, and he recorded personal shout-outs and messages for fans.

The Greedy Cow food vendor also served up chimichurri and beef fat potatoes, while other stalls offered classic festival chips.

Live machinery demonstrations at Euro expo

POTATOEUROPE 2026 returns to Germany on September 9th and 10th, taking place at Springe near Hanover and featuring a technical programme of trial fields, live machinery demonstrations and expert presentations

Professional growers will be able to experience advanced developments in crop production, as well as machinery in live field operation. DLG Spotlights and the DLG Expert Stage will offer opportunities for direct exchange with experts. The open air exhibition will focus on the entire value chain, from breeding through to processing.

Chip Martini launched to celebrate cocktail day

PAIRING a martini with chips has become a cult favourite and McCains has celebrated this with a special event to mark World Martini Day, which took place on June 20th.

Ahead of the event, it launched Chip Martini, a playful twist on the classic cocktail, at Nightjar, a prohibition-style speakeasy venue in London, famed for its lavish vintage cocktails, garnishes, and live jazz, blues, and swing music.

The Chip Martini is crafted with potato vodka made from British Maris Piper potatoes (the same variety used in McCain chips) and finished with a signature French fry garnish.

World Martini Day is an annual global celebration of the iconic martini cocktail. Taking place on the third Saturday in June, it encourages mixology enthusiasts and cocktail bars worldwide to honor the classic mix of gin (or vodka) and vermouth, whether shaken, stirred, dirty, or dry.

The Chip Martini was available from June 17th to 21st, mixing potato vodka with dry vermouth, finished with a French fry garnish and served alongside a portion of McCain Crispy French Fries.

Consumers lack understanding on food production

BRITISH consumers continue to place strong trust in UK food and growers, but most admit they do not fully understand how food is produced, according to latest YouGov research commissioned by food and farm assurance scheme, Red Tractor.

The latest Trust in Food Index found 94% of consumers trust UK food, while 80% trust British growers. Consumers also remain cautious around imports, with 37% saying they are not confident it meets UK standards.

The research also found trust in UK food to be higher than confidence in a range of other highly-regulated institutions, including the NHS, tap water, utilities and local government. Of these, UK food was the only category to see trust increase since 2024.

Household budgets continue to shape purchasing decisions for many.

Red Tractor's recent Farmer Sentiment Survey found 55% of farmers believe assurance schemes play an important role in building consumer confidence, with many of them asking if the organisation could do more to champion assured British food and strengthen understanding of the standards behind it.

This year, Red Tractor's consumer campaign will focus on educating shoppers about food labelling and what assured standards mean in practice. To bring that work to life, the organisation is partnering with young farmers.

"We can't do it alone"

A NEW report from cross-party think tank Demos, supported by McCain Foods, reveals that the UK's food system is under unprecedented pressure and calls for urgent government action to support the transition to sustainable farming, making it clear that growers need more support.

VP of Agriculture at McCain GB&I, James Young, said: "The Sustainable Farming Dividend report shows that sustainable practices strengthen the resiliency of our food system and protect farmers and their businesses. The findings reflect what we are seeing and hearing from our 250 British growers who are feeling the pressures of climate volatility and know the transition to a more sustainable system is essential.

"At McCain, we're already investing in this transition in a number of ways including our commitment to implementing regenerative agriculture practices, but what is clear is that farmers cannot be expected to make this transition alone. We need all parts of the value chain, from policymakers to farmers to producers, working together to support it. Farmers are ready to lead this change, but they need long term policy certainty and the right incentives to invest with confidence."

Global recognition for potato scientist

DOCTOR Gabriela Burgos, Senior Scientist at the International Potato Center (CIP), has been recogniSed by the World Food Prize Foundation as one of its Top Agri-food Pioneers (TAP) a prestigious recognition celebrating innovators advancing global food security and nutrition.

Jonathan's achievements recognised as retirement beckons

SUPPLIER Branston has paid tribute to the former general manager of its South West site in Ilminster, Somerset.

Jonathan Taylor recently retired and was succeeded by Simon Jones, who was promoted to general manager at the start of the year, after more than 10 years with the business.

Jonathan joined Branston in September 2017 and oversaw the development of the South West site, which produces and packs new and salad potatoes. During his tenure, site turnover more than doubled, and the business implemented a US$9 million investment programme starting in 2019 to upgrade facilities and introduce automation.

Chief executive officer Jim Windle said: "Jonathan has made an outstanding contribution to Branston and to the success of our South West operation. Under his leadership, the site has grown significantly, embraced innovation, and consistently delivered exceptional standards for our customers. We are incredibly grateful for his dedication and wish him a very happy retirement."

Jonathan said: "From growing the business to investing in automation and seeing the site become such a modern, efficient operation, it's been a fantastic journey. One of the most satisfying parts has been watching the operational numbers improve week after week and, of course, dealing with the incredibly busy Christmas period each year, when volumes more than double, requiring the team to plan months in advance."

Simon joined the Branston South West team in January 2012 as a night shift supervisor before progressing through roles including shift manager, production manager, and operations manager. Following a three-month handover period, he will assume responsibility for the site.

'Buy British to help combat hidden costs of war'

'BUY British' is one of the most important lessons to emerge from the impact the Middle East conflict has on household budgets and the cost of living, according to the CEO of Foodbuy UK&I, one of the UK's largest group purchasing organisations (GPOs) and a leading procurement specialist for the foodservice sector.

Alex Demetriou said: "As we saw during the pandemic and at the start of the war in Ukraine, the immediate impact is often felt in areas such as fuel costs but the knock-on effects across wider supply chains can linger for months, and in some cases more than a year, before pricing stabilises.

"However, we have to believe that the UK can adapt and recover over the long term. A key part of that recovery must involve better use of nation's own resources and strengthening domestic production and supply chains.

"Many consumers avoid buying British produce because it can be more expensive. But without consistent demand, British farmers and growers struggle to achieve the volumes and scale needed to bring prices down."

Action is required on three fronts, he said. First, government must do more to support growers and encourage the right long-term behaviours; secondly consumers should be encouraged to buy British; Thirdly industry leaders need to provide growers with greater certainty through long-term contracts and investment support.

"If we get that balance right, Britain will be far better prepared for future global shocks, and the impact on household budgets will be far less severe."

Potato community gathers in Madrid

THE international potato community will gather in Madrid on October 5th for the first International Symposium of Potato, a new event organised by FEPEX in partnership with Fruit Attraction and Europatat.

Taking place at IFEMA Madrid on the eve of Fruit Attraction 2026, which has selected the potato as its Star Product, the symposium aims to provide a high-level platform for discussion, knowledge exchange and collaboration across the entire potato value chain.

More than 400 professionals from Spain, Europe and beyond are expected to attend the event, including growers, traders, seed potato specialists, researchers, processors, retailers, service providers and institutional representatives.

International Day of Potato celebrated

THE United Nations' International Day of Potato was actively celebrated by many in the UK potato industry, including McCain, GB Potatoes, The James Hutton and HarvestEye.

Organized globally by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (FAO), the event aims to highlight security and sustainability in the potato sector.

The James Hutton Institute hosted specialised UK webinars such as The Changing World of Potatoes alongside the National Potato Innovation Centre to discuss science, pest management, and precision breeding.

McCain used the week to publish its inaugural Spud Report and highlight its North Yorkshire Farm of the Future, while UK-based agritech firm HarvestEye took part in global spotlights highlighting precision agriculture and crop intelligence.

Additional UK-based supply chain actors, including processors, storage providers (such as Restrain and Dormfresh), and seed developers, participated in the wider European agricultural trade celebrations alongside the European Potato Processors' Association (EUPPA).

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‘Doctor’ diagnosis on crop walks

We join agronomists and technical specialists on field briefings focused on disease management strategies, picking up some feedback on blight, scab handling, and insights into how actives are working together.

A ‘CROP Doctor’ briefing for potatoes recently featured an informal in-field discussion around potato blight, including disease prospects for the 2026 season, blight programmes, resistance management, and stewardship.

Independent experts, distributor agronomists and members of the Bayer CropScience UK technical team met in fields in Norfolk and Suffolk, with some interesting discussions taking place following the first UK identification, late last year, of the EU43 blight strain.

The Crop Doctor is a field-day series from Bayer CropScience UK that provides agronomic advice and disease management strategies for British potato growers.

In regions like Norfolk and Suffolk, where warm, humid weather creates ideal environments for potato late blight, where the program focuses heavily on anti-resistance management and applying systemic fungicides that are applied to the top of the leaves, the topic is never far from agronomists’ minds.

The ‘doctors’ recently embarked on their late spring field tours, focusing heavily on fungicide decisions and crop protection for potatoes. The field doctor team highlighted the need for broad-spectrum disease control to protect yield potential.

Out in Norfolk, at Banningham near Aylsham, Frontier agronomist Emily Harrod and Agrii agronomist Ed Maule, surveyed the potato crops growing there and offered their feedback, while in Pickenham, near Swaffham, VCS agronomist Graham Tomalin joined the Bayer technical team and media members including *British Potato Review’s* Stephanie Cornwall to survey and give his diagnosis.

During the Aylsham visit, the agronomists said this was the first season where the growing industry would be able to see what repercussions there would be from the withdrawal of mancozeb and how this would impact on blight control as the season progressed. Graham held a similar view, when he spoke at the Pickenham site.

“We’ll pick up on varieties and what sort of tolerance they really have,” he said. “With most, it has been shrouded pretty well by mancozeb at seven days on a lot of crops.”

Approach to scab

Graham specialises in potato agronomy, predominantly in East Anglia, but works further afield when he is needed.

The Maris Piper crop growing in the Pickenham field was destined for pre-pack, to be sold by a whole range of supermarkets in the UK and had been planted four weeks prior to the visit. Graham said the soil it was growing in was “pretty light sand”.

Considering the recent frost, the crop, which had been planted four weeks prior, was developing well, he said, adding that the biggest challenge was trying to wet the soil up for the scab control and growth development stage. The crop was not quite at tuber initiation stage and conditions in the area had been predominantly dry and warn, despite heavy rain that day.

When asked how he would approach this sort of light risk scab scenario, Graham said he’d began a program around the end of April, using cheaper chemistry for the very first spray, then bringing in chemical or biological crop protection agents (systemics) as the canopy was extending quickly. Anti-resistance would also need to form part of the strategy, he said.

Blight control intervals

Asked what intervals he’d be looking at starting with for blight control treatments, he said: “On this farm, initially it might be slightly wider intervals because it’s been low risk, so probably eight to nine days. At different times, we’d use a different process, for example we might stop irrigation and spray the crop on the same day.”

With the withdrawal of mancozeb, historically relied upon to control *Alternaria* (early blight), made things ‘interesting’ he said.

“There is no doubt the risk of Alternaria will increase. Previously, mancozeb was always just in the background so there is always the potential for Alternaria to develop without it. It’ll be interesting to see where we get the disease and how it progresses.

“Alternaria is quite an interesting subject in terms of the different types. There is

Irrigation was taking place at this field in Norfolk.

"We've got to use the chemistry that's there, but use it with the right partners so we've got an anti-resistant strategy over the whole program."

Graham Tomalin, Agronomist

Graham Tomalin said the best anti-resistance program involves existing chemistry with the right partners.

Tom Astill discussed how actives' combination helps prevent the blight pathogen from developing chemical resistance.

disagreement between various people regarding the significance, or not, of Alternata compared to Solani. I'm in the camp that thinks that Solani is the main threat.

"Alternata is a live-on sort of affected bore dying tissue, but and it's in the atmosphere everywhere, and it's much less significant in my opinion than Solani, which actually can take green foliage out quite quickly."

Mixing chemistry

The EU 43 blight strain had recently put in an appearance nearby at Framingham – a factor that was affecting the blight control approach this season.

"I think the key to our blight program will be to make sure we're covering different chemical groups, really. We've just got to make sure we cover them for anti-resistance," said Graham.

"We've got away from all this 'There's a resistance to this - don't use it' mantra which happened first with Metalaxyl and then Fluazinam. We can't do that anymore. We've got to use the chemistry that's there, but use it with the right partners so we've got an anti-resistant strategy over the whole program, and make sure we're not going with the same chemistry again and again, but mixing the chemistry both within an application and over the program." ➜

Asked whether he thought there was enough chemistry out there currently to help growers stay on top of things, Graham said: "To be within the guidelines that we've got, I think it would be challenging if we had an outbreak. Up to having outbreaks in crops, it will be fine. However, if you get an outbreak and you've got to try and cure that outbreak, then we will find it more difficult and will quite quickly run out of options."

Water challenges

The season had included some varied strange weather conditions, with fluctuations in temperature, being very dry in places, but Graham was keen to share that the outlook was good.

"I think there's a lot of promise in the crops. They were ahead. I think there are still some crops that are ahead - but there's not many of them. There are a lot of crops that have not grown much over 10 days since it went colder, so there's that variation, but the potential is still there," he said

"Soil conditions were very good at planting, bar the very first 10 days in my area that were a bit tricky. Beyond that, conditions got better and better, and if plants are able to root well, then they normally perform, as long as they get enough water. That is going to be a challenge, whether that's enough water in rainfall or enough water in irrigation, carrying on all season."

Planted acreage had decreased this year, he said.

"It's a bit varied between growers, but overall it's gone down a little bit. I would say probably 5% as an average. They're leaving out fields that are a bit more difficult, and corners of fields where they're straightening them up for irrigation. It's bits and pieces rather than whole-scale changes at the moment."

Current weather conditions also meant the prospects of scab development were high, he said. The bacteria thrives in dry, light soils with a pH above 5.5 and primarily attacks young, expanding tubers three to six weeks after tuber initiation.

"The growers that know scab control, and can irrigate frequently – that's more than once a week because once a week just isn't enough no matter what weather we get – are in a reasonable place, and they'll do what they do most years.

"They'll be fine, provided it doesn't take too much water resource from later in the season - that's the real challenge."

How actives collaborate

Tom Astill, a Technical Specialist at Bayer Crop Science, said his team is continuing to monitor resistance to blight strains and spoke about how to get the best out of the product portfolio.

"Be prepared to start protection as early as possible. You can't chase your tail with disease - it's all down to preventative applications with appropriate intervals - ideally seven days or less," said Tom.

"Be aware of what genotypes are in the area and which pose a risk. Use the Fight Against Blight program to track outbreaks, and report any outbreaks, and really ensure you properly plan your control program, using current guidelines which do account for some of the new genotypes in the UK."

To stop resistant late blight strains from taking over and destroying the crop, Tom advises holding back some modes of action for critical periods in the growing season.

Bayer's portfolio for blight control includes Infinito which has been around for 20 years. Talking about how the product works, Tom was keen to advocate how its two active substances, Propamocarb hydrochloride and Fluopicolide, complement each other.

"They have different modes of action, targeting different modes of action within the cell, so we're keeping on top of everything with the Propamocarb, while the Fluopicolide is very systemic," he said.

Propamocarb is absorbed into the plant's tissues and moves upward, protecting new growth and unsprayed areas, while Fluopicolide disrupts the pathogen's cell structure and cytoskeleton stability, stopping the disease at multiple stages of its life cycle, he said.

"Because they attack the pathogen through two entirely different biochemical mechanisms, the combination helps prevent the blight pathogen from developing chemical resistance," he said.

"With our sensitivity monitoring, we've not seen any shifts to Propamocarb or Fluopicolide sensitivity, so Infinito is particularly strong, and it can be used throughout the programme. As I said, it's quite systemic, so quite useful in those periods of rapid growth, but also when there's high risk of zoo spore infections, when it gets wetter and cooler later in the season."

The minimum time between the last application and harvest is seven days, so it can effectively be used up to harvest, said Tom.

Caligula, launched around five years ago, is specifically geared towards controlling early blight and Alternaria, Tom stressed, and doesn't have any late blight activity.

"It's a co-formulation of the prothioconazole and fluopyram, so you've again got two different modes of action. You've got a DMI (Demethylation Inhibitor) and an SDHI ((Succinate Dehydrogenase Inhibitor)," he said, adding that this made it effective in terms of activity and resistance management.

Crops had been later emerging than last season, he said, with the exception of some early crops.

"It's been a dry season so far but things can change very quickly. Obviously, a lot of diseases are fairly insidious. They sort of sit there, and then you only need the right weather conditions for them to proliferate.

"This season, we've also got, potentially, new genotypes which we could be seeing have knock-on effects on CAA (Carboxylic Acid Amide fungicide) activity in fields, if the programmes aren't strong enough. Obviously, we haven't got the background use of mancozeb this season as well so this a new thing we've got to take into account this year."

His team is continuing to monitor resistance to actives, he said. BPR

"With our sensitivity monitoring, we've not seen any shifts to Propamocarb or Fluopicolide sensitivity."

Tom Astill, Technical Specialist

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Blight forecasting within spray assist app

THE BlightCast infection risk forecasts from Syngenta are now being incorporated in the company's Cropwise Spray Assist App.

Potato growers and agronomists will be able to receive up to seven days advance warning of localised blight risk, including notifications, along with integrated application advice indicating opportunities to spray, nozzle recommendations and tank mix advice.

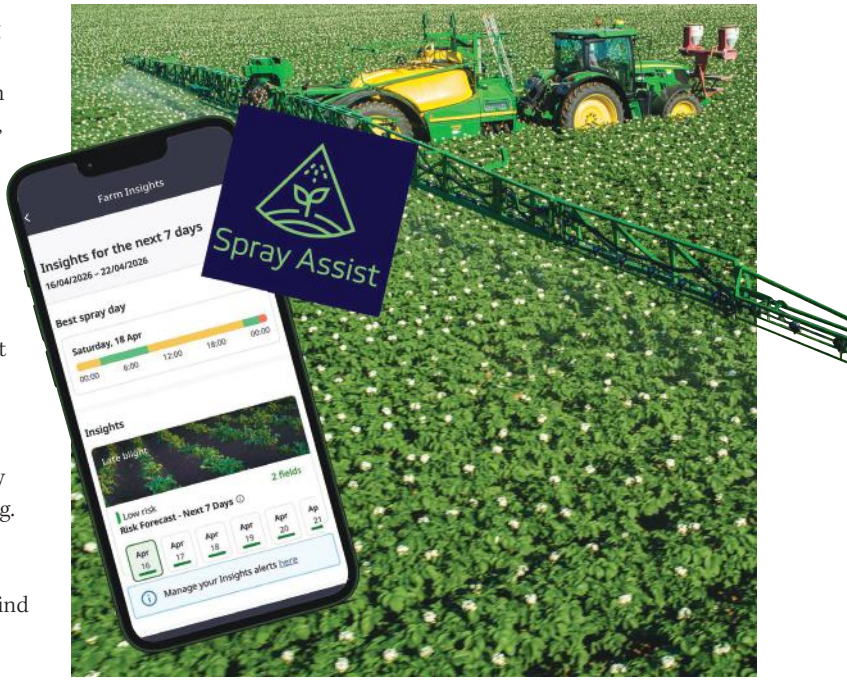
Syngenta Spray Assist enables growers to create a plan of their whole farm's cropping and field area, which then provides relevant crop agronomy and management support advice.

Agronomists and growers operating across a wide geographical area will be able to switch between multiple farms to ensure BlightCast forecasts and other advice is accurate to the chosen location.

Adding details of the farm's spray equipment into the App enables it to recommend the best available option for any application, based on the treatment target and weather conditions at any selected spray window. It also provides tank mixing recommendations and planning.

The Cropwise Spray Assist App will also include the Quantis Heat Stress forecast.

Those already using the Syngenta Cropwise Spray Assist App will find BlightCast is automatically available with the latest update and can view data under the 'Farm Insights' menu option.



Rising manganese deficiency calls for early foliar action

POTATO Crops across the UK are showing increasing signs of manganese deficiency this season, driven by a convergence of environmental pressures and heightened crop demand at a critical stage of growth, according to the technical team at OMEX.

Manganese plays a vital role in enzyme function, nitrogen metabolism and photosynthesis. Deficiency can lead to pale, chlorotic leaves, reduced vigour and ultimately lower yield potential.

Typical symptoms include pale green or yellowing patches, fine grey speckling on younger leaves, reduced tillering and a general lack of vigour.

Early identification is critical, particularly in fast-growing crops where deficiencies can escalate quickly. Tools such as SAP analysis can help detect issues before visual symptoms appear, allowing for timely intervention.

OMEX Business Growth Director, Scott Baker (pictured), said a combination of seasonal factors has intensified the issue.

"Cool overnight temperatures have restricted plant metabolic activity, limiting nutrient uptake even where manganese is present in the soil," he said. "At the same time, prolonged wet conditions have either leached manganese from around the roots or converted it into less available forms under waterlogged conditions."

"As temperatures rise and crops enter rapid growth phases, demand for nutrients increases sharply. We are now seeing crops effectively outgrowing the available manganese supply," Scott said. "Latent deficiencies built up over winter are becoming visible, which is supported by SAP analysis data."

With soil reserves proving insufficient under current conditions, OMEX is advising growers to adopt a proactive foliar nutrition strategy. Timely application can correct deficiencies quickly, sustain photosynthetic activity and support crops through periods of stress.

Growers are encouraged to apply a targeted foliar manganese product such as OMEX SuperMn at the earliest opportunity. The formulation is designed for rapid uptake, delivering manganese and magnesium directly to the plant when demand is highest. This helps maintain crop development, improve resilience and protect yield potential.

"Manganese deficiency remains the most common nutrient deficiency in UK crops," Scott said. "Higher-risk situations include high organic matter soils, pH levels above 6.5, sandy soils, and compromised seedbeds. Crops may also be more vulnerable where phosphate applications have been high, potash levels are low, or plants are under stress."

Brief and unmistakably British

Where warmer climes abide, a group of GB Potatoes growers began early lifting. *British Potato Review* gets a glimpse into their practices and hears from those in three different areas.

IN three iconic British 'early potato' sweet spots, potato lifting got underway last month in the coastal fields of Ayrshire, the farmlands of Pembrokeshire, and the Sandlings of Suffolk where growers benefit from a warm climate and kind soils have begun their season.

Within hours their crops are washed, packed and heading to supermarket shelves. GB Potatoes sees early potato production as central to that ambition – not just in volume, but in reconnecting consumers with the seasonal story behind British potatoes.

In Suffolk, Jim Wayman, of the Three Musketeers' grower group, had been working toward this moment since March. Operating across approximately 1,600 hectares of the Sandlings - a narrow strip of light sandy coastal soil that runs eight miles inland from the Suffolk coast - the group of five growers plants its earliest crops under fleece before lifting from the beginning of June.

From field to shelf in under 24 hours, their potatoes are lifted in the morning, washed, hydrocooled and packed on the same day, and in distribution centres before nightfall.

"There is nothing better than grabbing a handful of new potatoes off a harvester of an afternoon, taking them home and having them in the evening," says Jim. "That is as good as it gets."

The Sandlings' unique sandy, acidic soil warms rapidly in sunshine, creating a natural microclimate that makes it one of the earliest production areas in England. The group of farms works collaboratively - sharing machinery, pooling expertise and building resilience into their supply chain in a way that no single farm could achieve alone. They produce around 65,000 tonnes annually, making up a significant proportion of the UK's packed potato market through June, July and August.

On the Pembrokeshire coast, William Richards of Windmill Park farm represents the fourth generation of his family to work this land. Growing 30 hectares of salad potatoes within the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, his crop carries the weight of both history and protected status - Pembrokeshire Earlies hold a PGI designation, one of only four Welsh products to do so.

Harvested from early June and packed the same day at Puffin Produce's state-of-the-art packhouse in Haverfordwest - just eight miles away - the potatoes are on Welsh supermarket shelves within 24 hours. For William, the Welsh provenance story is not a marketing spin. It is simply the reality of growing food for the people closest to where it is grown.

"It's Welsh produce for Welsh consumers," he said. The furthest Welsh consumer is barely a hundred miles away, he added.

The farm operates a five-year rotation of grass, spring barley and potatoes alongside beef and sheep enterprises - sustainability is not seen by William as a scheme to comply with, but rather as the foundation of how the land has always been farmed here.

On the Ayrshire coast near West Kilbride, history is also a big part of the Wilson's potato enterprise. The family has been growing early potatoes since the early 1900s - and they are now the last commercial early potato grower left in a small area that once had over 1,200 hectares of 'earlies' in production. Where horse and cart once queued at the local station to load trainloads of new potatoes bound for Glasgow, and squads of workers crossed from the Isle of Arran to help with the harvest – with 100 pickers lifting 60 tonnes a day - today the operation is run by two members of staff, a harvester, and an undiminished passion for the crop.

"That's the main reason I do it," grower Sandy Wilson said of the first lift of the season. "Seeing them come out of the ground early June – even seventy years on, that sight never gets old."

The farm's approach to growing is rooted in generations of accumulated knowledge. Sand-based coastal soil along this stretch of the Ayrshire coast demands careful stewardship - farmyard manure and organic matter built up from the Wilson's own beef herd, worked into the land year after year to hold fertility and moisture in ground that would otherwise give little back.

Sandy is clear on what makes an Ayrshire early worth waiting for. Forcing crops too early, he argues, produces something that tastes not yet ready - "like a green tomato." The real thing, lifted when the season dictates rather than when the calendar demands, has a flavour that needs nothing added to it.

"There is a unique taste to them," he said. "There's no doubt about that."

Behind the simplicity of a new potato lies a production story of significant complexity and risk. Rising fuel costs, tightening labour availability, and increasing pressure on seed supply are challenges shared across all three regions. For William Richards, one issue stands above the rest.

"The risk is carried solely by the grower," he said. "You can lose 5% to 10% of your crop in a bad year for various reasons, and it never reflects back in the price."

In Suffolk, water is a major challenge. The farmers of the Sandlings have spent decades engineering their land for purpose - reservoirs, underground mains and precision irrigation systems that make one of England's driest counties one of its most productive.

All three growers are clear about the import competition that fills gaps when British crops are delayed by a cold spring. But they are equally clear about the quality case for home-grown.

"We've been doing this for 25 years," said Jim. "There are only two years in that time where we haven't been going in the first week of June. We're pretty robust and reliable. We want consumers to be buying from here."

Strong Roots signal a good start on crops trialled with microbial mix

POTATO crops treated with a specialised microbial biostimulant and soil health product are showing "highly encouraging" signs of early establishment, with recent field images highlighting strong root development, active root growth and a healthy start to the season.

Crop inspections were recently carried out on trial plots treated with Symposium, the specialised mix created by Emerald Research Ltd.

Yorkshire-based Emerald Research officially relaunched and rebranded its original microbial soil improver, Consortium-Plus, launched in 2016, as Symposium in September last year, following three years of field trials and formula improvements.

Photographs taken during the inspections show dense fibrous rooting, fresh white root tips and strong below-ground structure for the treated crops. For potato growers, this early rooting phase is critical, with a well-developed root system giving the plant greater access to soil moisture and nutrients. It also supports early canopy development and helps build the foundation for tuber initiation and bulking later in the season.

Symposium is a microbial biostimulant containing very high levels of active rhizobacteria, beneficial fungi and organic biostimulants. It introduces significant levels of beneficial microbes directly into the root zone, helping to create a more active and supportive environment around the developing plant, according to its manufacturer.

Emerald's CEO Simon Fox said: "Symposium introduces active beneficial microbes into the root zone, alongside organic biostimulants, helping to create the right conditions for stronger establishment. A healthy root system gives the crop the best possible platform to access nutrition, manage moisture and support growth above ground."

He said the species and individual strains used have been researched and especially selected at very high concentrations. Each hectare receives around 70 trillion viable microbes. By bringing together organic biostimulant components and active microbial strains, Symposium is designed to encourage beneficial interactions between the crop, the soil and the introduced microbes. This is particularly important during the early establishment phase, when the crop is setting its potential for the season ahead.

"Root development is not only one of the clearest indicators of how well a potato crop is establishing, but more importantly, it sets the potential for the entire crop. What we are seeing here is exactly the kind of strong, active rooting we want at this stage of the season," said Simon.

The visible root mass in the crops is a strong indicator of vigour. Fine, fibrous roots are especially important because they increase the surface area available for nutrient and water uptake. This is particularly valuable in potatoes, where the crop needs a strong start to support stolon development, tuber set and consistent growth through the season.

Simon said the results are a reminder that crop performance begins below ground and, while canopy growth is often the first visible sign of crop progress, it is the strength and activity of the root system that determines how effectively the plant can feed, hydrate and sustain itself through periods of rapid growth or environmental pressure.

"For growers, the message is clear: A strong start below ground can make a meaningful difference above ground - and these crops are already showing the benefits of introducing beneficial microbes where they matter most - around the roots."

An early maincrop crisping variety planted on April 22nd with a sample dig on May 19th.

A commercial crisping variety planted on March 25th with a sample dig on May 19th.

New tech cuts fertiliser costs and emissions

A PILOT scheme has revealed that growers can reduce fertiliser usage without impacting yields, while also cutting their carbon footprint by up to 25.8%, according to crop nutrition specialist ICL.

The new trial of controlled release fertilisers (CRFs) was carried out over 31.12ha of potatoes at Flevoland and Zuid-Holland in the Netherlands using ICL's biodegradable CRF eqo.x.

Run across three potato farms, producing both table potatoes and processing varieties for French fries, the primary aim of the pilot was to obtain more experience in quantifying and certifying CO2 reduction within a farm setup.

In total, the farms produced 1,832t of potatoes – averaging 58.87t/ha – and they emitted 24.76t of CO2e – two tonnes less than the baseline. Of this, 44% related to production of the fertiliser, 34% to direct emissions, 20% to leaching and 2% to volatilisation.

Further evaluation of the figures shows a 1.7% reduction in production emissions, a 12.6% drop in direct emissions, a 6.9% fall in leaching and a 35.4% lowering of volatilisation, according to the manufacturer.

Levi Bin, Account Manager at the Dutch farmer co-operative Agrifirm, said: "We were looking at how a higher nutrient use efficiency (NUE) could be achieved without affecting yields. If you look at the carbon footprint of growing potatoes, about 40-50% is related to fertiliser – especially nitrogen fertiliser."

CRFs are coated so that they release the nitrogen slowly, matching uptake by the plant. This reduces losses through leaching or volatilisation and thus improves NUE. So not only can farmers use less, the in-field emissions are also lower. eqo.x is the first CRF to obtain EU-recognised biodegradability certification ahead of mandatory standards set to be introduced in October 2028.

ICL is now looking for partners to scale the initiative up.

First on-farm trial of low carbon liquid fertiliser

OMEX Agriculture has delivered its first load of low carbon liquid fertiliser into the Holkham Farming Company, which grows around 400 hectares of premium potatoes in north Norfolk.

The LoC Green liquid fertiliser, which has an approximate 70% lower carbon footprint than its conventional alternative, will be initially be applied to sugar beet. The application will form part of the first on-farm trial of its kind in the UK and forms part of the estate's wider goal of becoming a carbon negative estate by 2040. The trial will provide valuable insights and data in comparison to traditional fertiliser application.

Crop Production Manager at Holkham, Henry Etherington said: "Globally, the UK is a relatively small player in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, but has been, and I think always should be, seen as an example for what can be achieved when new technologies are adopted. LoC Green liquid fertiliser is a significant investment for Holkham, but we believe it is a risk worth taking. If successful, it could represent a meaningful step towards reducing the carbon footprint of the food we grow here."

Bag in a box improves sustainability

A BAG in a box solution could be the key to making potato crops more sustainable, according to Mike Stoke, an agronomist with biostimulants specialist Orion Future Technologies.

Orion has adopted this practice following the outbreak of the conflict between the USA/Israel and Iran, using it as a way to decrease its production costs by reducing the plastic needed to package its biostimulant products.

"The bag in a box reduces plastic use by 63%, which will help us to keep prices down and has knock-on benefits, including reduced storage and transport costs, which further brings down the carbon footprint of our products," said Mike.

The bag in box also reduces the amount of air that flows back into the contents of the bag, giving the product a longer shelf life compared to when it was packed in hard plastics, he added, stating that it empties quickly, without 'glugging', and the design prevents air going back into the pack.

"For growers, the bag in a box is easier and cheaper to recycle and dispose of. It takes up less space and will also appeal to buying groups looking to promote sustainable credentials. The plastic bladder can be extracted, triple rinsed and recycled along with the cardboard outer box," Mike said.

Mike is urging other manufacturers of fertilisation and nutrition products to follow suit.

"As a manufacturer of plant nutrition products, we have targeted more sustainable packaging as part of our overall desire to reduce unsustainable plastic consumption. While the bag in a box still uses plastic, it is a fraction of what has been used in the past and we see it as a big step in the right direction," he said.

Potatoes in Practice 2026

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Growing a cover crop alongside or between potato crops offers significant agronomic and environmental advantages, primarily by protecting the soil, suppressing weeds, and enhancing overall soil health.

Haulms and harvests: Using the best strategy

In this issue, our seasonal columnist **Andrew Goodinson** offers insights on achieving optimised haulm destruction for a better harvest, reducing bruising and the advantages of using cover crops.

Andrew Goodinson, agronomist, and potato specialist at Hutchinsons, makes recommendations to help growers ensure the best results from their potato crops. At British Potato 2025, he won the award for Consultant/Advisor. Based in Herefordshire, Andrew has been working for Hutchinsons for 20 years and looks after 8000 ha of farmland, ranging from Cirencester, to the Welsh borders, south Shropshire and Worcester. Most of the potato crops he looks after are destined for the crisping or processing markets.

SINCE potatoes are living, breathing organisms, haulm destruction needs to be planned well in advance, as success depends on timing, method and environmental conditions, says Andrew.

Reflecting on the 2025 potato crops, he said many ran out of steam and had an unnatural early senescence as they died dehydrated. As a result, tubers grown on a vast range of soils from sandy to clay, had unusually high dry matter (DM) levels, resulting in potential for increased bruising.

The time between stopping growth and harvesting was often shorter than normal, but both irrigated and non-irrigated crops took longer to achieve skin-set than expected.

"Skin set is crucial as it reduces the risk of losses from bacteria, fungus and viruses entering the crop and also minimises moisture loss," said Andrew.

Soil temperatures at lifting - which were around 20 deg.C - were also higher than normal, resulting in warm tubers.

"Ideally the tubers should be at a suitable temperature for curing when they go into store, which is between 10-12deg.C. As a result they had to have large volumes of air blown at them to cool and cure them," Andrew said. "Because the potatoes were going in so warm, this caused premature sprouting, so many growers had to apply a sprout suppressant earlier than normal. In hindsight, perhaps we should we have left them longer in the field for temperatures to drop."

Storage requirements should be taken into account with all crops needing to go into store in the best possible conditions, he reminded growers.

"Storability is an important varietal trait, but we also need to remember that a tuber will never come out in better condition than it went in. A store is not a hospital and you need to ensure that the necessary four or five weeks have passed so the plant has completely died off and a good skinset complete."

Andrew adds that many growers would have liked to irrigate before lifting but found that they were unable to keep up with the speed of harvesting and/or did not have labour available.

"We are unable to control the weather, and we may have more seasons like 2025, so although a ship does not sail on yesterday's wind, we need to learn the lessons from how to get the best crop in dry conditions, just as we do from wet ones."

He emphasises that plans for haulm destruction should be devised well before planting, and one of the critical areas is nitrogen management, which depends on determinacy, whether the crop will be harvested green-top or is destined for long-term storage.

Many growers have been considering reducing their N applications, so that the crop starts natural senescence and becomes easier to desiccate. However, points out Andrew, if 200 kg/N/ha is applied but other nutritional elements are not in balance, this can affect plant health and growth.

Varietal determinacy also plays a key role because of its influence on haulm size and density. For example, indeterminate varieties not only grow a lot of haulm, but the haulm is also very long lasting. Later-maturing indeterminate varieties can be more difficult to flail effectively to an even length, and the length and greenness of stems affect effectiveness of topping.

"If you have a vigorous crop, a pre-flail chemical desiccation is very effective when applied five to seven days before flailing. This helps the crop to switch off in a more gradual way."

Field layout and soil type also come into play when devising desiccation and lifting strategies, says Andrew.

"When planning, take note of any rented fields which need to be vacated by a certain date and look at the order the fields have been planted in."

While many potato growers harvest in the same order they plant, others have different approaches, he reveals. "Some of the growers I work with like to ensure they have good harvesting options in both wet and dry harvest conditions, so they divide their fields into 'dry' and ' wet' soil categories.

"This means that if the weather is dry, they can make a start on the 'wet' soils, and vice versa, thus widening the harvest window."

Fine-tuning for effective desiccation

There are a number of different haulm destruction approaches, including applying a desiccant spray to the haulm before flailing, or going in straight with a flail and then following with a spray, or two or three applications of desiccants followed by a flail on the front of the harvester.

When flailing is done before desiccating, he advises using air inclusion nozzles, but after flailing, angled nozzles work best to cover all sides of the remaining haulm. This is because the desiccant works on contact to break down cell walls and cause dehydration.

When using a chemical desiccant, warm, dry weather is ideal for it to work quickly.

Andrew recommends doing a number of digs across different areas of the field to get a broad view of crop development and tuber size prior to desiccation. Tubers should be cut open and inspected for signs of vascular browning.

"If you have a seed crop, the kindest thing is to spray the foliage to slow the crop down and make an artificial start to senescence, rather than flailing a green crop that is still growing vigorously."

The actives used, Spotlight (Carfentrazone-ethyl), Gozai (Pyraflufen-ethyl) or Albis (Pyraflufen-ethyl), are broadly similar, and Andrew recommends sequencing rather than mixing them.

"The key is getting the application right. For example, if the desiccation plan is to first apply a chemical desiccant, water rates need to be at least 300l, said Andrew. "Any less than that, the efficacy drops off, and if in doubt, it is better to go above this."

Weather also affects efficacy, and haulm destruction is best done on a sunny day, desiccants are best applied between mid-morning and late afternoon.

As the plant dies off, late blight remains a threat, he says and he recommends a tank mix of Ranman (Cyazofamid), Gozai and oil, adding that Infinito (fluopicolide) can also be used at harvest. However, he cautions that other blight sprays offering tuber blight control do not have approved tank mixes.

Achieving effective haulm destruction

Water volume, forward speed, machinery set-up and choosing the correct nozzle are key to effective desiccation, said Andrew.

"The flail should be set to cut between 15 and 20cm above the ridge top, and blades need to be sharp. It's very important to go sufficiently slowly to give the flail time to work, and when done correctly, the haulm should go to the bottom of the furrow."

While trials have shown it is possible to desiccate using just chemistry, most growers choose to flail as well, and choice depends on weather conditions.

"If black-leg or late blight are present, spray before flailing, as flailing can spread pathogens around," he said. "Trial work has shown that if you spray before flailing, stolon detachment is

better because it is a more natural process, but it comes at a higher input cost."

Spotlight should be applied at 1l/ha followed by 0.6l/ha, while the spray rate for Gozai or Albis is 0.8l/ha for pre- or post-flailed crops.

The crop should be checked for regrowth at the base of the stem, he notes, explaining that if forward speed had been too high, or less than optimal water volumes had been used, insufficient desiccant may have landed on the haulm, so the crop may need another application.

"Sometimes two stem desiccations may be necessary, but before doing so, you need to check your maximum applications for the product you use. For example if you applied Gozai at 0.4l/ha as a herbicide, because it has a maximum per season of 1.6l/ha, you will have to look at another active such as Spotlight for the second desiccation spray."

He reminds growers that if they change desiccant, they need to keep in mind that Spotlight has a seven-day harvest interval, while for Gozai it is 14 days.

"Once you have finished flailing, you should leave the crop between 24 and 48 hours before going in with a stem desiccant to give time for the haulm at the top of the ridge time to dry off."

Strategies to minimise bruising

Bruising occurs when a mechanical impact damages the tuber's cells, resulting in black pigments, and therefore affect eating quality. Careful harvest and grading operations, alongside frequent monitoring damage levels, could help potato growers save themselves thousands of pounds a year by reducing the amount of tuber bruising that occurs during and after harvest, Andrew said.

"We need to make more use of hotboxes, because monitoring samples helps growers keep a close eye on bruising," he said. "In the light of what we saw last year, we need to know more about where damage risks occur."

Regular samples taken at every stage and hot boxed will help pinpoint where any problems are, so action can be taken, he advises.

"We find taking five or six samples each of 25-30 tubers from each harvester at different times of the day is useful."

Tuber susceptibility to bruising mainly depends on varietal tolerance and the growing environment. Nonetheless, despite the dry weather last year and high dry matter levels, some susceptible crops were loaded into store without problems.

This highlights that care taken at harvesting and grading can make a real difference to outcomes.

"Good training of harvesting and grading teams will make them aware of the importance of the work they do."

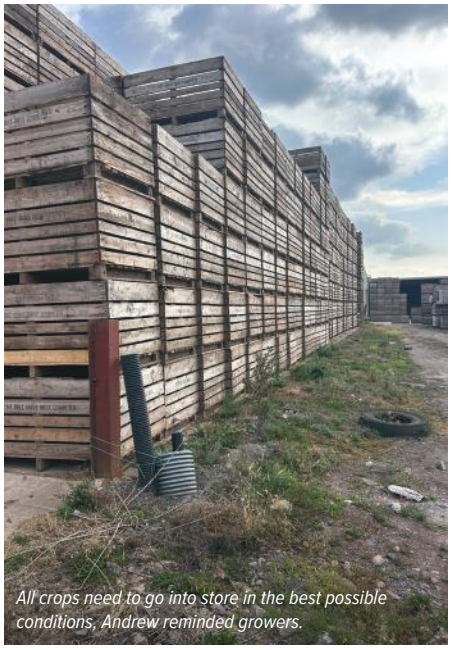
Small changes in turgor and tissue elasticity in the tuber influence bruising susceptibility, and potential damage depends on a fine line of balance between too much and too little water, notes Andrew.

Soil moisture levels in the field at harvesting can make a big difference to tuber damage, and the ideal soil moisture deficit (SMD) is around 50mm. However, this is difficult to control. If conditions remain dry, irrigation can help by increasing turgidity and help cushion potatoes as they go up the first stage of the harvester.

"If soils are dry (as they were last year), crops irrigated before lifting tended to suffer less mechanical damage and subsequent bruising."

Soil temperatures at lifting can also affect the risk of bruising; when above 10 deg.C the likelihood of damage is much higher than at 8 deg.C, so earlier harvesting can be quite different to when it is done in October. ➜

Another approach to haulm destruction is two or three applications of desiccants followed by a flail on the front of the harvester.



All crops need to go into store in the best possible conditions, Andrew reminded growers.

There are a number of different haulm destruction approaches, including applying a desiccant spray to the haulm before flailing, or going in straight with a flail and then following with a spray.

Attention to detail on machinery set-up is ever more crucial, says Andrew, pointing out that checks should be done on pinch points for potential bruising.

Some people find mats or cushions to be useful too, he adds, while new air harvesters, which have an air stream to blow out debris, are being used in the US and New Zealand.

"Bruising management is crucial because it is affected by many factors and impacts greatly on the grower's bottom line."

Cover crops – lots of advantages but not a panacea

While fertility building cover crops can be helpful in the battle to keep inputs to a minimum without compromising quality or yield, they still have costs associated with growing them, says Andrew.

These are typically £40-50/ha for the seed, with another £60/ha for cultivation and labour, and should provide around 20t/ha of biomass above ground with a healthy root biomass as well.

"Many growers plant stubble turnips before a spring crop as they then receive a visible financial benefit, which they do not perceive to get from a cover crop."

However, when stubble turnips are grazed off, the sheep can leave wet, muddy, poached soils, often with wheel ruts and tracks, which need rectifying. He recommends controlling sheep numbers, and advises that care should be taken to not graze the cover crop down to the earth but leave 5-7cm of above ground biomass.

"A cover crop which can be destroyed and incorporated can be useful, particularly if it is a mix of cover crop and stubble turnips."

On heavier ground, destruction may need to be done earlier than on light soils as they take longer to dry out.

"Cover crops are an integral part of good soil management, and the aim should be no bare stubble fields over winter," says Andrew.

"Growing a cover crop reduces the impact of the rain on the bare soil. The weight of winter rainfall is often referred to as having the same weight as eight bags of potatoes on top of each other, pushing the soil down. Having the ground covered helps reduce the impact of this weight.

"In addition, by having roots in the soil, cover crops help to reduce soil erosion and the consequent loss of nutrients such as phosphates."

Other benefits include reducing run-off and leaching of all-important nutrients.

"Moreover, cover crops help improve soil structure and therefore increase organic matter content and water holding capacity."

Decisions on which mix to buy will depend on the needs of the particular field and soil conditions and how it will be destroyed afterwards.

"This will depend on your system and rotation; some growers flail and chop it, others disc it; and best practice suggests it should be incorporated into the soil before final cultivations."

Addressing concerns about winter cover crops providing a green bridge increasing predator numbers in spring crops, Andrew notes that benefits from cover crops outweigh the threats. However, it may result in higher numbers of slugs and/or wireworm, which may need managing. BPR

Andrew recommends doing a number of digs across different areas of the field to get a broad view of crop development and tuber size prior to desiccation.

Advantages of cover crops include:

- Helping to suppress weeds with their biomass
- Improving drainage and reducing runoff
- Mopping up excess N and slowly releasing nutrients ready for the next crop
- Helping build soil organic matter and creating better conditions for beneficial soil micro-organisms

Corinna gains prominence while Jelly rises to the task

CORINNA is gaining increasing importance in the European ware potato market, according to Europlant.

A key milestone is the usage among main supermarket chains across Europe, which the company says demonstrates the variety's potential for large-scale retail programs.

Development and market launch are carried out in coordination within the international network inside the company structure.

Sales and Marketing Manager Léa Roussineau said: "The close cooperation between our teams in France and Spain with Germany, allows us to develop and position varieties in a highly coordinated way across different markets and national borders."

The Monique variety is also in a dynamic phase of development and has reached a significant commercial position with 'chair ferme' listings across French supermarket chains some while ago. This French term is commonly associated with waxy potatoes like Charlotte or Maris Peer that hold their shape perfectly when boiled or used in salads.

Europlant says the variety's excellent washability, even after long storage, makes it particularly attractive for packers and retailers, and that Monique provides consistent taste and visual quality at the point of sale as well as reliable performance in the field.

Vindika is also now also listed as a 'chair ferme' variety in the French food retail sector, after being put through the official testing process. The variety is increasingly establishing itself as a high-quality benchmark for structured trading programmes and long-term partnerships, according to the Europlant team.

Vindika offers a significant agronomic advantage thanks to its dual nematode resistance. The combination of excellent culinary quality and resistances will supply added value to all partners of the potato chain. This trait ensures greater production reliability, improves crop rotation options and reduces risks in potato cultivation."

Meanwhile rising production risks and costs as well as water limitations in many European growing regions have allowed the Jelly variety to prove its resilience. Its resilience in dry conditions, combined with its ability to serve both fresh and processing markets, offers valuable commercial flexibility to growers and packers, reducing their dependence on a single outlet, according to the Europlant team.

Jelly is described as a highly robust dual-purpose variety that delivers reliable performance in both the fresh market and in processing. One of its key strengths is its tolerance to drought and hot temperatures, which enables growers to achieve stable yields even during increasingly dry and unpredictable growing seasons. BPR

Corinna growing in the south of Spain.

The Monique variety is also in a dynamic phase of development.

Maximising marketability

Early planning and good desiccation are key to getting a sellable product this year as market challenges abound. Experts offer some key advice.

Adrian Cunnington

Antonia Walker

Oliver Johnson

WITH the current potato market battling oversupply, leaving growers facing price challenges, ensuring good crop quality could improve end marketability.

Potato storage revolves around having a good skin, as Adrian Cunnington from Potato Storage Insight is keen to point out.

"When it comes to storing potatoes, having intact skin is crucial for preventing excessive moisture loss and preserving the potatoes from external threats," he said. "If you don't have good skin set, then you end up with the potatoes having a high weight loss in store, which you sell by. So, if you get excessive shrinkage, it also affects potato quality, and if disease comes in, that will also affect the quality of the potatoes. At worst, it could also cause rotting."

A potato is made up of 80% water therefore growers should aim to preserve as much of that as possible during storage, whether that be two months or 10 months, particularly as a potato is a living organism and generates heat from respiration, said Adrian.

"We must use ventilation and, in some cases, refrigeration, to cool the crop down. But whenever we're putting air through the potatoes to do that, there's always the risk that air removes moisture from the skin through evaporation. Even if you get an intact skin, moisture still evaporates through it. So, if your skin set is not good enough, that rate of evaporation is higher."

To achieve a good skin set, growers can act pre-harvest.

"The main thing to do pre-harvest is to make sure that you're getting the crop to reach skin set before you want to harvest. So, you need to desiccate the crop in time to get a strong skin before you try to lift the potatoes.

"If you don't get the foliage down to the right level, you won't get enough skin set, and you'll have problems with the crop being damaged as you lift it, with more moisture loss in store," said Adrian.

New approach

The loss of diquat from potato desiccation programmes has reshaped how growers approach the end of crop management. What was once a relatively simple "burn-down" exercise has evolved into a more considered and integrated process, where chemistry, timing and technique all play a defining role. In this new landscape, protoporphyrinogen oxidase (PPO) inhibitors such as Nichino's Pyraflufen-ethyl, marketed as Gozai, and FMC's Spotlight Plus, have become central to desiccation strategies. ➜

Maximising performance of PPO inhibitors starts with a good understanding of how this chemistry works. Knowing its behaviour in relation to the environmental conditions, in particular ultraviolet wavelengths of sunlight, and how the active should be applied in a wider system, will significantly increase the efficacy and lead to the most cost-effective result, according to Nichino's Commercial Technical Manager Oliver Johnson.

PPO inhibitors behave very differently from systemic actives. Activity is entirely contact-based, with negligible movement within the plant itself. This means that only those tissues directly contacted by the spray will be desiccated, placing greater emphasis on application technique than was historically required.

At the biochemical level, PPO inhibitors act by disrupting chlorophyll synthesis through inhibition of the enzyme protoporphyrinogen oxidase. This leads to the accumulation of photodynamic compounds which, in the presence of light, generate reactive oxygen species. These free radicals go on to rapidly degrade cell membranes, causing structural breakdown and desiccation of plant tissue. In the field, this can often be observed within hours of application, as leaves take on a wet, scorched appearance, a visual indication that the outer cell layers are collapsing.

The key here is that PPO inhibitors are "photodynamic compounds" meaning they need UV light to create the free radicals which cause the leaf tissue degradation.

Good execution

A PPO inhibitor will not compensate for poor spray deposition, leaving untreated tissue green and capable of regrowth and blight infection. While canopy collapse may appear slightly slower than with legacy diquat-based programmes, well-executed applications can deliver comparable results within a matter of days under favourable conditions, Oliver add.

"If you're lifting in wetter conditions having desiccated, all these factors have a knock-on effect as to how that product ends up being marketed and stored."

Antonia Walker, Commercial Technical Manager, FMC

Effective desiccation is essential to halt tuber bulking at the target size, promote robust skin set, and encourage stolon detachment ahead of harvest, he advises.

"Failure to remove canopy quickly and completely can delay the lifting window, increase the risk of damage at harvest, and push tubers beyond desirable market specifications. As a result, desiccation continues to be one of the most important management steps in the potato production cycle," said Oliver.

The absence of diquat has pushed growers towards more staged programmes, often combining mechanical and chemical approaches. Rather than relying on a single pass, desiccation is increasingly a sequence of actions designed to open the canopy, expose the stems, and complete the kill in a controlled manner.

Only those tissues directly contacted by the spray will be desiccated, placing far greater emphasis on application technique than was historically required, Oliver said.

Desiccation timing

Desiccation timing is crucial for growers to ensure that potato quality reaches its peak for packers and processing contracts. By desiccating at the right time under optimal conditions, growers can improve the chances of cleaning and storing the product more effectively, according to Commercial Technical Manager for the north of England and Scotland at FMC, Antonia Walker.

"The art of desiccation is incredibly important, because it affects the overall product. For example, if you're lifting in wetter conditions having desiccated, all these factors have a knock-on effect as to how that product ends up being marketed and stored," said Antonia.

When planning desiccation, Antonia notes that application is needed after flailing, at least 21 days before lifting dates, to ensure the correct skin set growers aim for and to prevent additional blight infections from entering the tubers.

A Protoporphyrinogen Oxidase (PPO) inhibitor produces highly reactive molecules that attack and destroy lipid and protein membranes, leading to cell disintegration, breakdown of plant material, and ultimately killing the plan, Antonia said.

"One thing to remember, with this mode of action, is that you can often see the results within one or two hours of application, which looks like some water-soaked marks on the foliage, and then you end up with the eventual necrosis of the actual tissues," said Antonia.

Oliver also emphasised the importance of timing and environmental conditions, stating that they are just as critical as the dose rate.

While canopy collapse may appear slightly slower than with diquat-based programmes, well-executed applications can deliver comparable results within a matter of days under favourable conditions, they state. However, stem destruction can be more challenging. In dense or actively growing crops, leaf material can shield stems from spray penetration.

For this reason, a multi-stage approach is often required, either using initial applications to open up the canopy and/or integrating a flailing pass to expose stems ahead of follow-up treatments, he said.

"Timing should align with the onset of natural senescence, when canopy vigour is beginning to decline but plants remain physiologically active enough to support uptake. Spraying too early into a lush, actively-growing crop can reduce efficacy and extend the overall programme duration."

Determinate vs indeterminate

Whether a determinate or indeterminate variety of potatoes has been planted, a benchmark date for application is useful but needs to align with the correct conditions, said Antonia.

"When it comes to determinate and indeterminate varieties, we would often be looking at some form of decision tree in terms of when we'd be programming how to desiccate the potato crop in question. The key things to remember with desiccation are that you must ensure you've got the right conditions, which is critical," said Antonia.

When talking about desiccation and applying a PPO inhibitor, Antonia recommends focusing on essential conditions and the timing of applications. For example, she advises applying after flailing when the sun is shining brightly, and temperatures are at their peak, since PPOs are most effective under these conditions. This allows the active ingredients to perform optimally.

"We prefer to flail the crops first and then apply Spotlight Plus, with two days being the absolute maximum latest timing after flailing, and we always advise using at least 300 litres of water. We recommend monitoring the crop post the first application to ensure that if any regrowth does occur, this can be followed up with another application at 0.6 litres."

By optimising conditions, growers can achieve better skin set and storage, thereby enhancing marketability, she said.

Oliver added: "Adequate soil moisture supports plant metabolism and improves uptake, while warm temperatures enhance reaction rates. As such, applications made early in the day under favourable weather typically deliver the most consistent results."

Strategy

A new strategy is the integration of a PPO ahead of a flail-and-spray program which is increasingly common outside of the UK. Applied two to three days ahead of flailing, it can begin to weaken the canopy and initiate senescence. Alternatively, post-flail applications benefit from improved access to stems, allowing for more targeted and effective destruction. Maintaining sufficient stem height after flailing is important to ensure there is adequate target material for follow-up sprays, typically 15-20cm, both experts add.

Oliver recommends an early application of Gozai at a rate of 0.8 L/ha, with up to two treatments spaced at least seven days apart. Sequential applications with other PPO inhibitors such as Carfentrazone are typically required to fully complete stem kill, particularly in vigorous crops or challenging conditions.

An additional consideration is the ongoing risk of late blight during desiccation. As long as green tissue remains within the canopy, infection risk persists, making it essential to maintain fungicide protection throughout the programme. Tank-mixing with products such as cyazofamid is a common approach to managing this risk.

If using Spotlight Plus, this can be tank-mixed with a fungicide and does not require any wetters, Antonia said.

"It is also important to note that using another desiccant in the same tank mix doesn't give any added benefit and is a waste of money. You either use one or the other. That's the important thing to remember," said Antonia. "The key benefit here is that growers can use it on its own or in sequence, at seven-day intervals, and this can be done with other approved desiccants. BPR

Top tips

Three key things to remember for applying a PPO inhibitor are:

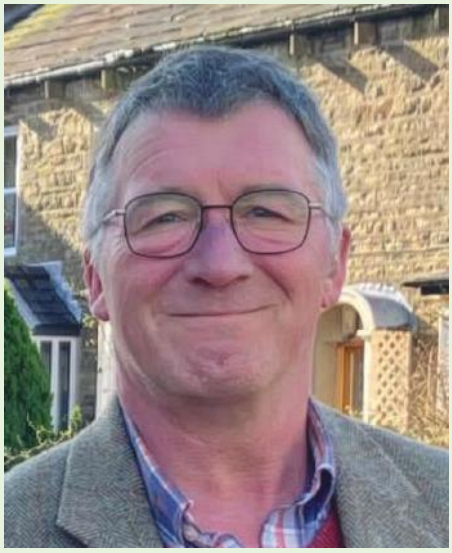
1. Time of day: Apply mid-morning or mid-afternoon when conditions are hot and sunny to enable the PPO's active substance to work at its best.
2. Use plenty of water: Recommended use at medium spray to ensure good coverage, using a minimum of 300 litres per hectare.
3. Operator checks: Check your boom height and forward speed.

"If you don't have good skin set, then you end up with the potatoes having a high weight loss in store, which you sell by."

Adrian Cunnington, Independent Advisor, Potato Storage Insight

Input costs never go down!

GB Potatoes' Development Manager, **Graham Bannister**, discusses why an updated digital RB209 guide will help growers to optimise crop nutrition and reduce grower costs.



When you read this, Donald Trump may have resolved the Iranian war that at the time of writing is still underway and, if the Straits of Hormuz have reopened, we might have seen a slight downwards movement in the costs of fuel and fertiliser.

But the long-term effects are going to be felt for many months to come.

While it is very hard to reduce the cost, or usage of diesel, fertiliser is something that can be looked at. Most growers are now producing their crops with less fertiliser than previously used, not only because of cost, but also to manage a crop to the point of senescence at the right time.

The RB209 has been the industry's guidance document for many years now and is used to give guidance on the use of nutrients in a crop. When AHDB potatoes was disbanded, section 5 of RB209 was no longer updated which, in the current climate of world disorder, is not helpful.

One of the projects identified by the industry was a review of section 5 of RB209 and this was included as one of the projects funded by the residual levy funds for the benefit of the whole industry. Over the past year a small group of industry experts, including some who were involved in the original work for section 5 along with growers and agronomists, have been reviewing the entire document. The group, chaired by Mark Willcox, has now reached the point where a revision will be submitted to the AHDB for publication in 2027. This will be in digital format, not only to keep costs to a minimum but also to allow for further updates to be made as and when necessary.

There were no major revisions needed to most of the document, but tweaks to wording were felt necessary to make the messaging clearer and more concise. The only major change has been to the table showing the determinacy groups of varieties. The previous table was very out of date and didn't reflect the varieties now being grown. To get around this, a new table will appear that shows the top 50 varieties grown in GB and their determinacy groups as well as some slight changes to varieties that were previously described, but where now it was felt that their nitrogen requirements had changed. Some older varieties have been left in the table to act as familiar reference varieties, so that newer varieties can be compared to widely understood, more traditional varieties.

Reference to carbon measuring is also now mentioned as this is something that is now being looked at more closely and as information is more readily available on inputs, as well as being requested by end users it was felt that reference should be made to this topic. Likewise Cover crops, both their nutrient requirements and their nutritional benefits will start to feature more in the publication going forward as more information is gathered.

Of course, the RB209 is only for reference, and advice should always be sought from a FACTS-registered adviser, but it is still a valuable document that can help growers investigate their utilisation of nutrition for the potato crop.

This is a good example of GB Potatoes acting on behalf of the industry to deliver what is needed by growers, driving down cost while producing larger, more marketable, crops in a sustainable and environmentally-friendly manner. We would welcome your comments on the new version when it is released in Spring 2027. We will be working with our research partners, CUPGRA, to look at work going forward and, where possible, utilise the results from trials being conducted by various organisations. While we don't have the funds, and indeed we are not allowed to commission new research using residual levy funds, there are areas where we can invest to access the data needed to keep the likes of RB209 section 5 up to date.

Keep an eye on our website (www.gb-potatoes.co.uk) to find out when the new version is released and, as always, don't hesitate to get in touch if you would like to know more about the large amount of work that GB Potatoes is doing on behalf of the British potato industry.

Without our members, it would not be possible to do the vital work that is being done, and to do more, we need more members. So, if you believe in our industry, like we do, why not consider joining us? It's a small investment for a viable and sustainable sector.

Getting dug in

With so many variable weather patterns seen this season, the Perfecting Potatoes Together initiative visits three different areas to see what choices are being made and how crops are faring.

THIS season's potato crops have experienced the whole gamut of the UK weather, from frosts to heatwaves and from drought to localised flooding.

With showery weather prevalent, potato late blight (phytophthora infestans) programmes got underway, and the Perfecting Potatoes Together initiative had a look at how the season is going for agronomists and growers.

Planting

In Scotland, Senior Agronomist at Scottish Agronomy Ltd, Eric Anderson, who looks after 7,500ha of both ware and seed crops, said the planting season had been very easy and progressed well, with crops emerging evenly.

Farm Manager of The Wicken Farms in Kings Lynn, Toby Hogsbjerg, is growing 75ha of potatoes on the 940ha ring-fenced estate. Here, the land, which ranges from blowing sand to sandy clay loam, is fully irrigated.

Potato crops growing at Dyson Farming in Lincolnshire.

"This year the fields are light, cover crops did well and we didn't get rain."

Toby Hogsbjerg, Farm Manager, Norfolk

Planting also went well for the 300ha of potatoes that Lucinda Smith, Agronomist with Dyson Farming, looks after near Nocton in Lincolnshire, where the recently-opened Dyson Farming Research Centre is situated.

Toby said: "It was the easiest planting season that we have ever had, we were done in 11 days, soil conditions were good and we had no rain breaks until we finished on April 10th.

"We do as little as possible to the fields to get them ready for potatoes. We cover crop from July, graze with sheep and then the cover crop is destroyed. This year the fields are light, cover crops did well and we didn't get rain so we were in with a Sumo trio followed by a ridger and then the de-stoner."

For Lucinda, planting was slightly delayed to accommodate the changing weather pattern. "We have a large variety of soil types, so ground preparation is tailored to the individual fields," she said. "We began planting just before Easter, slightly later than in previous years, as we were waiting for the soils to warm up and finished on May 10th."

Varieties

This year Lucinda has a dozen varieties in the ground, predominantly for pre-pack. Dual purpose varieties like Elland are valued as they spread the risk.

She said: "We can grow Elland on Nocton Heath where we struggle with stone content, so might get some bruising but the skin finish is good. We assess it at harvest to see whether it would make packing or not."

Toby's potatoes are all for processing: Premier and Desiree for potato waffles, and King Russets and Royal, for French fries.

Blight programme

In Scotland, Privest (ametoctradin + potassium phosphonates) features in Eric's blight programmes, "We use Privest three times at the beginning of the season in an alternating fashion, typically sprays one, three and five," said Eric. "It has a unique co-formulation that there is no known resistance to. It also mixes well so we can mix it with oil, for example, Newman's Crop Spray 11E, for mosaic virus control.

Senior Agronomist at Scottish Agronomy Ltd, Eric Anderson, said the planting season had been very easy and progressed well, with crops emerging evenly.

Lucinda Smith, of Dyson Farming, is a Blight Scout. Last year, she said she didn't see any.

Toby Hogsbjerg is Farm Manager at The Wicken Farms in Kings Lynn.

"Within the programme we will be using other products including oxathiapiprolin. The guidance is that we don't use a Carboxylic Acid Amide (CAA) either before or after oxathiapiprolin so basically we can't use any Revus (mandipropamid) until spray six in that context if we are using oxathiapiprolin at sprays two and four, so there are real reasons for using Privest at sprays one, three and five.

"The potassium phosphonate in Privest also acts as a potent defence elicitor so I am keen to obtain the elicitor effect early in the programme."

For Toby, the farms' onion and sugar beet crops is where their most likely source of blight will be, so he has to ensure all volunteers in these crops are destroyed.

He said: "When you are spraying every seven days and irrigating, the risk level is down to getting your product management right and making sure you are covering every acre you have and everywhere there are potential volunteers.

"I utilise Dyson Farming's research site for potato agronomy advice and through them build a programme around the financial data and the different modes of action, to give the best possible coverage in a sensible programme."

Like Eric, Toby will be alternating Privest in his programme. "Sprays 3, 5 and 7 will be Privest and I will fill the gaps according to the blight pressure," he said. "We value Privest because it's different to everything else, so it brings really good protection, especially when the crop is growing fast which is one of its main benefits."

In Lincolnshire, Lucinda has access to on farm weather stations to work out if the area is in a blight period. However, she finds the James Hutton Fight Against Blight website convenient to use.

"We can grow Elland on Nocton Heath where we struggle with stone content, so might get some bruising but the skin finish is good."

Lucinda Smith, Agronomist, Lincolnshire

"I am a Blight Scout so send samples to the James Hutton Institute if I see blight, so they can genotype them but last year, I didn't find any," said Lucinda.

The adaptability of phytophthora infestans makes it a very difficult organism to cope with and so growers need to know what genotypes of blight are in the crop to help inform spray decisions.

"We started blight programmes when the crop was at rosette stage, and we tend to keep the spray interval to seven days. We don't push it to 10 days as you can soon get in a muddle if the weather changes.

"We do have an outline plan but we keep it fairly flexible depending on blight pressure, something with tuber blight activity first just in case there is blight in the seed, and then systemic products at rapid growth, with protectants at full canopy and then something for tuber blight at the end.

"Everyone's margins are obviously tight at the moment, so we are trying to tailor the sprays but it is hard especially now without mancozeb. Fluazinam does have a place as a mix partner and I will use Privest in the programme because it has two modes of action and if the pressure isn't too high, I'll use it on its own."

The BASF Perfecting Potatoes Together campaign also caught up with grower David Bell, David Cooke from the James Hutton Institute, and BASF Agronomist Scott Milne, to find out how the season is going and share some top recommendations to give potato crops the best chance.

David highlighted the increasing challenges posed by extreme, unpredictable weather and the urgent need to address evolving potato late blight strains. He emphasised the necessity of combining robust fungicide strategies with smart, collaborative integrated pest management (IPM) to stay ahead of disease pressures.

David Cooke also emphasised an integrated approach to resistance management, including using more resilient cultivars and rotating fungicide active ingredients following the loss of mancozeb, while Scott spoke more about Privest, citing it as a key innovation to manage blight resistance, erratic weather, and to establish a robust, multi-mode spray program. He said the product acts as a specialised, non-resistant chemical "reset" button that provides proactive protection against changing late blight genotypes during high-pressure seasons. BPR

Inside the India playbook

Devendra K Jha is an Indian agribusiness executive specialising in agri-tech, farm mechanisation, and storage engineering.

Devendra K Jha, founder of a market intelligence platform for India's potato industry, discusses how Europe's biggest potato processors are quietly building a second home — and why it should matter to British growers

INDIA is now the world's second-largest potato producer, growing a record 60 million tonnes a year, and in 2025 its frozen-fry exports reached approximately 276,000 tonnes — up around 45% on the year before, with monthly shipments by the close of the year running at roughly double their year-earlier level.

The surge has carried into 2026. In the year to spring 2026, Indian shipments to the Philippines, Malaysia and Taiwan all climbed between 35% and 45%, landing in many of the same Gulf and South-East Asian markets that European processors have long served — and consistently undercutting them on price.

That combination - a vast, cheap raw-material base and an export engine that is already reshaping Asian markets - is why three of Europe's most established potato names have spent the last three years putting serious capital into Indian soil. Agristo, Farm Frites and HZPC are not testing the water, they are building.

Dutch seed-potato giant HZPC got there first. Founded in 1898 and now the world's largest seed-potato company, exporting to more than 90 countries, HZPC entered India in 2014 through a joint venture with Mahindra Agri Solutions.

India's frozen-fry exports reached approximately 276,000 tonnes last year.

From a tissue-culture and aeroponics facility near Mohali, the venture produces certified minitubers of varieties including Colomba, Taurus, Sagitta and the McDonald's fry workhorse Innovator.

Its client list reads like a who's who of Indian processing: McCain, HyFun, Simplot, Iscon Balaji and Agristo all buy in.

From flakes to fries

Belgian family firm Agristo arrived in 2022, opening a potato-flake plant at Bijnor in Uttar Pradesh through Agristo Masa, a 50:50 joint venture with Masa Global Food's Wave Group. In March 2025 it committed a further €80 million (about US$87 million) to add a frozen-fry line, taking its total Indian investment past €105 million. More than 70% of the plant's output is destined for export. The operation runs on European kit including AVR harvesters and Vyncke energy systems.

Agristo has been working with contract farmers to lift yields from around 17 tonnes a hectare toward 32.

Newest arrival

The most recent, and perhaps most striking, entry came in February 2025, when Farm Frites signed a 50:50 joint venture with KRIBHCO, one of India's largest fertiliser cooperatives, to build a "super mega" processing plant at Shahjahanpur in Uttar Pradesh.

For Farm Frites, founded in the Netherlands in 1971 and a supplier to McDonald's, KFC and Domino's across more than 100 countries, it is a major bet on Indian-grown Santana and Quintera. For KRIBHCO, it is a first move into agri-processing — and a signal of how seriously India's cooperative sector now takes the potato.

Not just the Europeans

The European three are not alone. In August 2025, Canada's McCain announced a US$457 million greenfield plant at Agar-Malwa in Madhya Pradesh - its first major site outside Gujarat - producing both fries and flakes and drawing on more than 10,000 contract farmers.

Domestic players are scaling fast too. HyFun is already India's largest frozen-potato exporter at more than 250,000 tonnes a year, and Iscon Balaji has pushed into Punjab. The result is a processing build-out, foreign and domestic together, with few parallels anywhere in the world.

Why this matters in Britain

The competitive pressure is real and the latest trade data shows it intensifying. It is, above all, a price story. In mid-2025, Indian fries were landing in export markets at around €912 a tonne, against roughly €1,231 for EU product and €1,415 for American.

By the first half of 2026 that advantage was visibly rewriting market share across Asia. In Taiwan, Indian shipments climbed 35% over the year to mid-2026 while Belgian imports fell 24.5% and Dutch imports 12.3%, with India undercutting every major rival at about US$1,319 a tonne, against US$1,830 for American and US$1,695 for Belgian fries.

India has meanwhile become the second-largest fry supplier to the Philippines, behind only China.

The North-Western European Potato Growers (NEPG) has named rising imports from emerging exporters such as India among the factors weighing on free-buy potato prices in Europe, and as India, China, Egypt and Turkey all scale up together, the pressure on the EU-4 - Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands - is unlikely to ease.

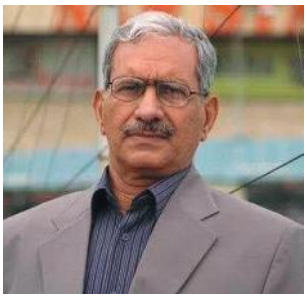
For British growers and processors, the lesson is not that India is about to flood UK shelves tomorrow. It is that the world's most experienced potato companies have concluded the next decade of growth lies in Indian soil — and they are building the capacity to prove it.

The question worth asking is what that means for everyone still planning around a European-centred map of the trade. BPR

Pakistan's potato pioneer

In this issue, we get an in-depth insight into Pakistan's Potato Growers Cooperative Society and the contribution it's making to the country's agricultural development.

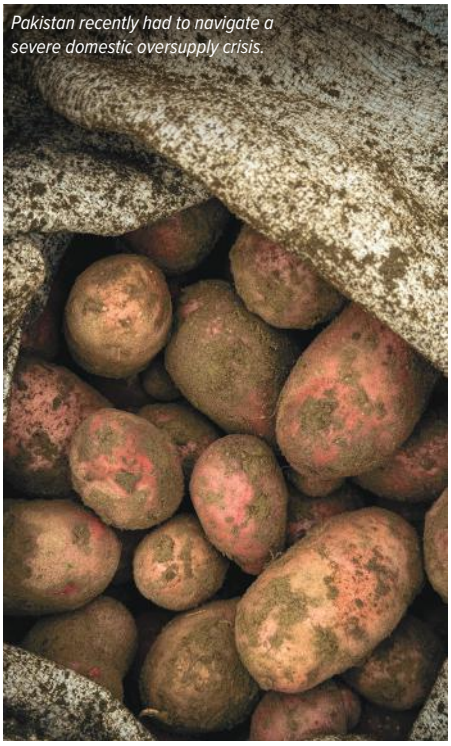
Mohammad Maqsood Ahmad Jatt, Vice President of The Pakistan Potato Growers Cooperative Society (PGCS) and Chairman of the Potato Research & Development Board Punjab.



PAKISTAN'S potato sector has seen massive structural growth in recent years and has recently had to navigate a severe domestic oversupply crisis that triggered a collapse in farmgate prices.

The Pakistan Potato Growers Cooperative Society (PGCS) has played a key role in helping to overcome such challenges, and its Vice President Mohammad Maqsood Ahmad Jatt, who is also Chairman of the Potato Research & Development Board Punjab, spoke to *British Potato Review* about how the society has grown and developed since it was first established in 1979.

"The Potato Growers Cooperative Society (PVFGCS) has been at the forefront of Pakistan's agricultural development, with a particular focus on potatoes and grower welfare," he said. "Since its inception, the society has worked tirelessly to support growers, strengthen agricultural policy, and promote sustainable development across the country."



Pakistan recently had to navigate a severe domestic oversupply crisis.

> *"With more than four decades of service, the Potato Growers Cooperative Society continues to stand as a symbol of innovation, farmer empowerment, and institutional leadership."*
>
> **Mohammad Maqsood Ahmad Jatt, Vice President**

The society is a non-political, non-profit, and policy-oriented organisation, recognised as Pakistan's first formal agricultural organisation of its kind. Its core mission has been to serve growers by improving agricultural practices, strengthening market linkages, and ensuring growers' voices are represented at national and institutional levels.

"Over the decades, the Potato Growers Cooperative Society has played a pivotal role in promoting potato cultivation, marketing, export, and processing in Pakistan. Through advocacy, research collaboration, and institutional engagement, the society has contributed significantly to transforming potatoes into one of the country's most important cash crops," said Maqsood Ahmad.

"The society maintains representation in all major agricultural organisations, committees, councils, and forums related to potatoes and the broader agriculture sector at national and provincial levels. This extensive presence ensures effective coordination between farmers, policymakers, and regulatory bodies."

A major milestone in the society's history was achieved when its Vice President became the Founding Chairman of the Potato Research and Development Board Punjab. In addition, the society holds memberships in several key national platforms, including the Working Group for Potato Advice to the Ministry of Commerce, Islamabad, the Sectoral Council for Agriculture and Food Processing, Ministry of Commerce, Islamabad, and WEC & NRC, Islamabad.

Senior representatives of the society have also served as members of the Punjab Agriculture Commission, and the society has officially represented growers at the Punjab Agriculture Marketing Regulatory Authority. Furthermore, it has actively participated in the Divisional Agriculture Task Force, Divisional Agriculture Advisory Committees, District Agriculture Advisory Committees, and numerous other agricultural forums, reinforcing its role as a trusted stakeholder in agricultural governance.

The Potato Growers Cooperative Society also holds the distinction of being Pakistan's first importer of seed potatoes and the country's first exporter of table potatoes, setting benchmarks in quality, trade, and market expansion. These achievements opened new avenues for international trade and helped integrate Pakistani potatoes into global markets.

"With more than four decades of service, the Potato Growers Cooperative Society continues to stand as a symbol of innovation, farmer empowerment, and institutional leadership," said Maqsood Ahmad. "Its legacy reflects a sustained commitment to strengthening Pakistan's agricultural economy, supporting growers, and positioning the country as a competitive player in the global potato and agri-food sector.

"The society remains dedicated to advancing research-driven agriculture, value addition, and export-led growth, while advocating for policies that ensure food security, farmer prosperity, and sustainable development." BPR

USA

New launch by family company

THE family-owned Little Potato Company, which specialises in breeding, growing, and selling pre-washed and peeled potatoes, has launched a new product in its microwave-ready line-up.

The newest addition is called A Little Homestyle Ranch and is being sold by major retailers.

Production site closed

IDAHOAN Foods, known for its instant mashed potatoes, has closed one of its processing plants, saying it intends to reduce operational overheads, eliminate redundancies, and consolidate production at its more efficient facilities

Earlier this year, the company announced plans to close its potato processing plant in Rupert, Idaho, in a letter it sent the Idaho Department of Labour.

This closure meant 61 employees were made redundant.

The company said the facility closure was part of a production network optimisation strategy, driven by long-term demand forecasts and other broader business considerations.

GERMANY

Cooperative expands operations

TRADING and service cooperative Raiffeisen Waren GmbH is actively expanding its potato operations, primarily focusing on modernising and scaling its agricultural infrastructure in Germany.

Raiffeisen Waren GmbH and RWZ recently officially combined their agricultural engineering sectors to form a new company operating under the name "Raiffeisen Technik". Headquartered under the operational management of Raiffeisen Waren GmbH in Kassel.

It is currently developing its Wesendorf location into a state-of-the-art potato centre for Northern Germany offering extensive storage, sorting, packaging, and logistics services for industrial, seed, and table potatoes.

AUSTRIA

"Subdued' demand for earlies

FAMILY-OWNED Dorfinger KG, one of the largest potato packaging companies in Austria, has said that while the earlies season is picking up steam, demand is somewhat restrained.

Head of Sales & Purchasing Florian Kugler recently told Fresh Plaza: "From our perspective, demand is rather subdued, which is primarily due to the surplus of older stored potatoes."

Florian said regionality plays a major role when it comes to early potatoes.

"The respective federal states are largely self-sufficient, and the current quality is very good. About a quarter of the potatoes are already 55+ in size, bringing the average yield to 40 t/ha."

Despite promotional campaigns, no significant increase in volume had been seen, Florian added.

NETHERLANDS

Registration is a first for hybrids

BREEDING company Solynta has registered SOLHY019 as the first diploid Hybrid True Potato Seed (HTPS) variety on the Dutch Variety List.

It is the first registration of a diploid hybrid potato variety grown from hybrid true potato seed (HTPS) in the Netherlands.

The company's hybrid breeding platform develops potato varieties that combine strong agronomic performance with uniformity, improved disease resistance, and scalable seed-based distribution. By producing potatoes from true seed rather than traditional seed tubers, HTPS offers a more efficient and sustainable way to deliver quality planting material globally, according to the company's Market Access and Regulatory Affairs Lead Ard Rijlaarsdam.

Electrification and decarbonisation project

PROCESSOR Aviko has launched a major electrification and decarbonisation project at its Steenderen production facility.

Aviko processes over 1.7 million tonnes of potatoes annually, turning them into chilled, frozen, and dried products for the retail and foodservice industries globally. It has 12 production locations in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Poland and China.

The company aims to reduce Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions by 45% by 2030 and achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.

ITALY

New pumps help with potato preservation

ENGINEERING firm Boema, which designs and manufactures industrial turnkey processing lines and automated equipment for potatoes, has introduced new food pumps which offer key product preservation benefits.

The pumps utilise a liquid suspension method that creates a protective water cushion, preventing bruising, abrasion, and physical damage to whole or cut potatoes during transfer.°

KAZAKHSTAN

Domestic price increase

ACCORDING to Kazakhstan's Ministry of Trade and Integration, domestic potato prices are rising sharply, influenced by global food prices, import costs, logistics expenses and currency fluctuations.

To contain food inflation, the government has expanded the list of socially-significant food products to include potatoes and other vegetables.

Strong global demand for potatoes could tighten supplies if exports increase significantly, leading to higher prices on the domestic market and more expensive imports. The government is not currently considering restrictions on potato exports.

INDIA

Frozen snack for air fryers

MCCAIN Foods India has introduced Air Fryer Masala Crispers, a frozen potato snack developed specifically for air fryer cooking. The snacks feature a V-shaped design and masala seasoning.

Broader product offerings as consumer tastes change

GOODRICH Cereals, which creates potato-based dehydrated and frozen food products, says changing consumer preferences are prompting processors to expand their standard offerings and develop broader product portfolios.

The company, which is based in Karnal, Haryana, says processors are placing greater emphasis on securing reliable sources, with contract farming programs, grower partnerships, agronomic support, and storage infrastructure becoming increasingly important in maintaining consistency from season to season.

It firmly believes that supply challenges can be better managed by strengthening relationships at farm level.

Consistency between shipments, traceability, food safety systems, and reliable product performance have become key purchasing considerations, it adds, as the industry is focussing less on just selling products and more on delivering dependable processing performance.

Inventory planning, storage capacity, and integrated sourcing systems have become more important as customers increasingly need confirmation that products will be available when required, regardless of fluctuations in crop cycles, logistics, or market conditions.

At the same time, packaging is becoming an important part of delivering a complete solution rather than simply supplying a product.

MOLDOVA

45 tons of imports sent back

Authorities in Moldova have refused entry to two batches of imported early potatoes totalling 45 tons after inspections found that the products did not comply with national quality requirements, according to the country's news source Moldova1.

National Food Safety Agency (ANSA), inspectors determined that the potatoes were excessively covered in soil, exceeding the limits permitted under national legislation.

For early potatoes, a maximum of 1% of the total mass may consist of impurities. For late potatoes, the allowance is up to 2%, of which no more than 1% may be adherent soil.

KYRGYZSTAN

Exports decline in 2026

KYRGYZSTAN recorded lower exports of potatoes in the first four months of the year, according to the National Statistical Committee.

Potato exports totalled 13,436 tonnes worth $1.639 million, down 29% from 18,958 tonnes valued at $2.594 million during the same period of 2025. Export destinations for potatoes included: Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Russia and Azerbaijan.

UKRAINE

Southern growers flaunt war effects with agrofibre

POTATO growers in Ukraine's southern regions of Odesa and Mykolaiv have completed harvesting the early crop grown under agrofibre, a lightweight, breathable, and UV-stabilized material made from polypropylene fibres, overcoming disruptions caused by missile and drone attacks and air raid sirens.

Digging is continuing in open fields, with yields of 19–23 tonnes per hectare having been reported.

Agrico Ukraine, which distributes Dutch varieties, has said the early variety Riviera was the first to be harvested, while other varieties Ranomi, Arizona, Twister and Alouette, were developing strongly.

Tuber set had reduced as a result of lower spring temperatures. Riviera and Ranomi were showing between six and eight tubers per plant, while Arizona recorded nine to 11. Longer stolons and a second wave of stolon formation were also observed. Recent moderate rainfall, together with mineral fertiliser applications, has supported more intensive plant growth, the company said.

Irrigation and fertilisation programmes were underway, using sprinkler and drip systems, while late and early blight had been contained through two or three fungicide treatments.

Growers have moved away from soil herbicides based on metribuzin this season, instead using metobromuron, flurochloridone, prometryn and pendimethalin. Agrico Ukraine said this had allowed them to avoid herbicide stress and phytotoxicity in the Twister variety.

Twister and Joly are also showing good potential this season. In the Odesa region, demonstration plantings of early varieties are being used to show growers the genetic potential of these cultivars under different irrigation systems.

CHINA

Import rules tightened for seed potatoes

NEW phytosanitary measures to prevent the introduction of Candidatus Liberibacter solanacearum (CLso), a bacterium affecting solanaceous and apiaceous crops including potatoes, have been announced for the country.

The General Administration of Customs of China (GACC) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA) made a joint announcement about the introduction recently.

China will suspend import approvals for seed potatoes from countries and regions where CLso occurs, including the United States.

China Customs stated that CLso has recently been detected in imported seed consignments from countries including Italy and the Republic of Korea. According to the announcement, the pathogen can affect crop yield and quality in potato crops.

The suspension on imports from Italy and the Republic of Korea may be lifted for material originating from recognised pest-free areas, subject to evaluation by Chinese authorities.

For plants intended for planting originating from other affected countries and regions, national plant protection organisations (NPPOs) must conduct testing using the same protocol, confirm freedom from CLso, and include the required declarations in phytosanitary certificates with shipments.

Prepare for scorchio

Increasingly frequent heat events make the case for preventative QUANTIS treatments right through the summer

Potato crops have already faced repeated extremes of heat this season, with climate shift trends highlighting more to come through the summer.

That becomes an increasing challenge as the growing season progresses, when potato plants become less able to cope with heat and impacts on plant performance become more serious, warns Syngenta Technical Manager, Andy Cunningham.

"As the growing season progresses, the optimum temperature for potato plant photosynthesis declines, with performance falling off at higher temperatures," he highlights. "That can be crucial through tuber bulking and associated yield."

With more frequent heat events occurring, Andy advocates the use of QUANTIS biostimulant can pre-condition plants ready for a stress event. "Upregulating the plant's genes naturally responsible for heat resistance means that it is primed and ready to respond when the stress hits.

"In research proven by Nottingham University, enhancing this natural mechanism can prolong the period the plant is able to withstand the heat, before adverse effects on its cells and function. The potato can essentially continue to photosynthesise more efficiently, which continues to build tuber size and yield."

Furthermore, when the heat stress event eases, QUANTIS treated plants can recover faster and continue healthy growth more effectively.

Key to this success is to make QUANTIS treatments ahead of any heat event occurring, to enable plants to build up their resistance mechanism.

Heat risk warning

New for the 2026 season, the acclaimed Quantis Heat Stress forecast tool is now incorporated within the company's popular Cropwise Spray Assist App, along with BlightCast.

Now potato growers and agronomists will be able to receive advance warnings of localised heat risk periods affecting potato crops, to enable timely QUANTIS application.

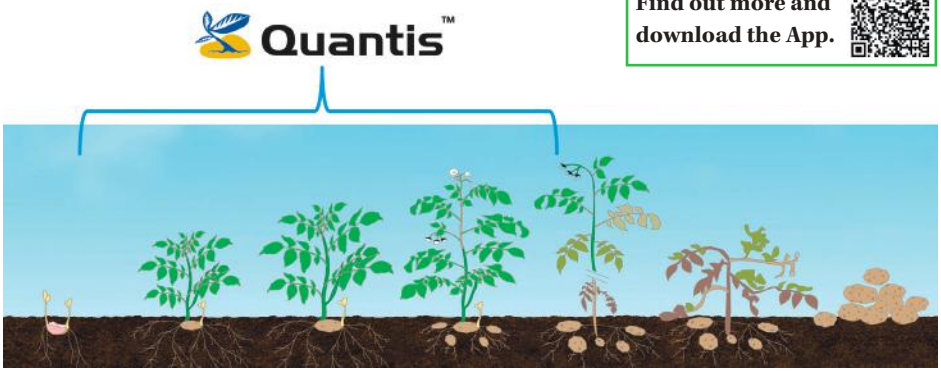
A finalist for innovation in the British Potato Awards, the App includes notifications, along with integrated application advice indicating opportunities to spray, nozzle recommendations and tank mix advice.

Alternaria severity

Potato agronomists advise that crop stress is a precursor of alternaria (early blight) attacks. With more severe climate shift stresses and many growers forced to cut back inputs this season, there's a risk of more frequent and severe alternaria outbreaks.

Mid-season blight strategies should look to include products active on both early and late blight, such as AMPHORE PLUS, as well as any opportunity to prevent potential stress points and reduce the early defoliation impacts of alternaria.

Find out more and download the App.



Applications guided by Quantis Heat Stress tool. Apply anytime from emergence. Repeat applications when required. Minimum 14-day interval. Application rate: 2.0 l/ha

Seed growers take a fresh look at storage disease

At a workshop in Aberdeenshire, agronomists and growers discussed tuber disease threats, the importance of store hygiene and the role seed tuber treatments should play.

FOR many potato growers, tuber diseases have traditionally been viewed as a background risk.

Unlike late blight or aphids, they rarely attract attention during the growing season and often remain hidden until crops are in store or affected tubers have been planted.

Yet for seed producers, their impact can be considerable.

Diseases such as Fusarium dry rot, gangrene, silver scurf and skin spot can affect crop quality, storage performance and ultimately the establishment of their or their customers' next crop.

As storage periods lengthen and market expectations increase, concerns are growing that some of these diseases are becoming more problematic.

Those concerns were the focus of a recent tuber disease workshop hosted by Fortrie Farms near Ellon, Aberdeenshire.

Organised for seed growers, it brought together researchers from SAC Consulting, industry specialists and growers to discuss the latest evidence on tuber-borne diseases and the tools available to manage them.

The workshop was part of a series of regular meetings and events that are held for the benefit of members of the SAC Association of Potato Producers (SACAPP).

Kyran Maloney and Darren Wonnacott talking to delegates at the recent tuber disease workshop.

Disease pressure

Darren Wonnacott, a tuber seed treatment specialist with Frontier Agriculture, has seen increasing evidence that some tuber diseases are becoming more common.

"I've been doing this for 23 years and I've seen a lot of things change. We've certainly seen increases in Fusarium and dry rot issues over that period, particularly in ware crops," he said.

While no single factor is responsible, Darren believes changes in variety choice, storage duration and harvest conditions are all contributing to the problem.

"A lot of the newer processing varieties are very thin-skinned and prone to damage," he explained.

That damage can create ideal entry points for pathogens, particularly Fusarium species responsible for dry rot, and the challenge for growers is that symptoms often develop slowly.

"You won't necessarily see it immediately as a seed grower, but when those crops are planted, we can see losses in the field," notes Darren.

The issue is becoming more apparent because, over recent seasons, potatoes have been pending longer in storage than they once did.

Challenging market conditions have resulted in crops remaining in store for extended periods, providing more opportunity for latent infections to develop into visible disease.

At the same time, dry harvest conditions have exacerbated bruising and skin damage, creating additional opportunities for infection: 2025 was a prime example. ➜

Fortrie Farms' Farm Director Craig Bartlet and Potato Manager Craig Bartlett (left) and Craig Coutts (right).

SAC's Verena Schmidt said growers are often dealing with multiple pathogens simultaneously rather than a single disease problem.

Lack of treatment

Despite concerns over disease pressure, relatively little seed receives post-harvest fungicide treatment.

Drawing on SASA's Pesticide Usage Survey (PUS), potato specialist Kyran Maloney of SAC Consulting highlighted that treatment use is lower than many might think.

The figures suggest relatively few seed crops receive post-harvest treatment, despite the regular occurrence of Fusarium, silver scurf and other tuber-borne pathogens.

That evidence generated considerable discussion among delegates but Kyran stressed that this does not necessarily mean more crops should automatically be treated.

"Seed treatments are about managing risk. They're not always necessary, but where you've got disease present or conditions that favour disease development, they can be very valuable."

For Darren, part of the challenge is that many seed treatments are applied at first grading, by which time tubers may already have spent many weeks in store.

The ideal is to apply treatments as soon as possible after harvest, but this isn't always practical, he said.

Most seed businesses aren't set up to treat crops before entering store or want to wait until the ware fraction has been graded off first. As a result, first grading is often the most practical opportunity. However, Darren notes that these products are protectants rather than eradicants.

"They won't reverse infections already established, but they can protect fresh wounds created during handling and grading and reduce the risk of further disease development as seed moves through storage, transport and onto customers' farms."

Rather than being an either-or decision, Darren sees treatment as part of a wider risk-management strategy.

Kyran agrees that decisions should be based on risk assessment rather than waiting for symptoms to appear.

"Once you've got disease in store, you're really on the back foot. The aim is to reduce that inoculum before it becomes a problem," he said.

Understanding diseases

Survey work being carried out by SAC Consulting is helping to build a clearer picture of the pathogens affecting potato crops in store.

SAC's Verena Schmidt explained that growers are often dealing with multiple pathogens simultaneously rather than a single disease problem.

Fusarium species remain among the most frequently identified causes of tuber rot, while silver scurf continues to be one of the most common skin blemish diseases affecting seed and ware potatoes.

Black dot, skin spot and bacterial rots also feature regularly in diagnostic samples with symptoms often looking similar.

"Without proper diagnosis, it can be difficult to know exactly what you're dealing with."

The work has reinforced the importance of accurate diagnosis when assessing risk in seed stocks and making subsequent treatment decisions.

Not all diseases respond equally to the same chemistry and understanding which pathogens are present can help growers select the most appropriate management strategy.

The findings also highlighted the importance of an integrated approach.

"No single measure will solve every disease problem. Good handling, hygiene, storage conditions and targeted treatments all have a role to play," said Verena.

Hidden risk

Another interesting piece of work discussed during the workshop focused not on the potatoes themselves, but on the environment in which they are stored.

Working with Certis Belchim, SAC Consulting has been investigating the role that store dust and debris may play in harbouring disease inoculum between seasons.

Dust samples collected from two commercial stores were analysed to identify the presence of pathogen DNA.

The results revealed several important potato pathogens suggesting that stores themselves are reservoirs of inoculum that can carry disease over from one season to the next.

Dry rot symptoms often develop slowly.

While the findings do not necessarily prove that disease will develop, they do demonstrate that pathogen material can persist within stores long after a crop has been removed.

This reinforces the importance of store hygiene as a core component of disease management.

Essential measures are removing debris, cleaning ventilation systems and carrying out thorough disinfectant programmes with products like Jet5 before introducing a new crop.

For growers facing prolonged storage periods or recurring disease problems, hygiene may be one of the most cost-effective interventions available.

Seed treatments

While good storage and hygiene practices are essential, delegates agreed that seed treatments continue to have an important role to play.

Products based on active ingredients such as imazalil and thiabendazole have been used for many years to help protect tubers from storage diseases, particularly Fusarium dry rot and silver scurf.

Gavel is widely used in situations where growers are seeking protection against storage diseases and to maintain tuber quality during prolonged storage.

Storite Excel provides an alternative mode of action and is often used to broaden disease control or strengthen resistance management strategies.

According to Darren, the choice of treatment should depend on disease risk, varietal susceptibility and intended market.

"If you've got a high-risk situation, there can be a strong argument for using both actives. You've got two modes of action, and your resistance management is built in."

Kyran agreed that higher-risk situations may justify a broader approach.

"There are several Fusarium species involved in dry rot symptoms, and we know there have been resistance issues reported historically in some populations," he said.

"If you have a genuinely high-risk situation, there is certainly an argument for including thiabendazole alongside other chemistry."

However, he stressed that treatment decisions should always be based on risk rather than routine application, with not all stocks needing both actives, one active, or even a fungicide treatment at all.

"That balanced approach reflects the wider industry move towards more targeted crop protection and integrated disease management," said Kyran.

Silver scurf continues to be one of the most common skin blemish diseases affecting seed and ware potatoes

Targeted approach to seed treatment

FORTRIE Farms near Ellon, Aberdeenshire, produces seed potatoes for both domestic and export markets and has adopted a risk-based approach to seed treatment.

Farm director Craig Bartlet said the business routinely uses Gavel and, where appropriate, Storite Excel to protect seed quality during storage and transport.

"Export varieties that are going to be in containers for a long time, such as Hermes going to Egypt and Atlantic going to Asia, will get treated, along with varieties that we know are likely to be in store for longer periods."

Craig said treatment decisions are influenced by a combination of agronomic advice and practical experience.

"A lot of it comes from SAC Consulting and our agronomists, but it's also our own experience. Some varieties clearly benefit from that extra protection in store."

Potato manager Craig Coutts said variety characteristics are a major factor when assessing disease risk.

"It's very variety-driven," he explained. "Some varieties store exceptionally well, while others need more help.

"When you've got seed travelling long distances or sitting in storage for extended periods, you want to do everything you can to protect quality."

The business uses Gavel as the foundation of its seed treatment programme, with Storite included where disease risk and market requirements justify a dual approach: Storite is believed to bolster skin spot activity.

For Craig Bartlet, maintaining tuber quality throughout storage and transport is essential.

"As seed growers, quality is everything," he said. "If the crop arrives in good condition and performs for the customer, that's all that matters."

Key takeaways from the workshop:

- Tuber diseases are becoming more problematic as storage periods lengthen and harvest damage increases opportunities for infection.
- Fusarium dry rot, silver scurf, skin spot and bacterial rots remain among the most common diseases affecting seed and ware potatoes.
- Seed treatments are most effective when applied soon after harvest damage, helping protect wounds before infection becomes established.
- SAC research suggests potato store dust and debris can harbour pathogen DNA, reinforcing the importance of thorough cleaning and disinfection between seasons.
- Good disease management relies on an integrated approach combining careful handling, accurate diagnosis, store hygiene and targeted treatments.
- Seed treatments remain an important tool, but decisions should be based on disease pressure and storage risk rather than routine application.

As investments drop off, more machinery purchasers urged to consider total cost of ownership

COST of ownership has become a deterrent for those purchasing post-harvest potato equipment such as weighing and inspection technology, with investment dropping off in 2026.

KPMG forecasts only moderate investment growth of 1.3% for the eurozone this year while the EY Europe Attractiveness Survey 2025 highlights that all types of company are scaling back or cancelling investment projects. EY cites weak growth, high energy prices and geopolitical tensions as the main drivers.

For food manufacturing companies, this is shifting the criteria for investment decisions. The focus is no longer solely on the purchase price, but on the economic impact a piece of equipment will have over the years in actual operation. Where processes are tightly scheduled, subject to stringent regulations and material-intensive, a technical detail can quickly become an economic factor.

For potatoes (whole, prepared, or packaged), automated systems verify target fill weights, optimise filling processes, and detect metal contaminants, so purchase price should always be considered alongside savings made in other areas. Photo: Minebea Intec

Product Manager at Minebea Intec, a manufacturer of industrial weighing and inspection technologies, Yannick Salzmann, said: "Especially under cost pressure, people often look first at the purchase price. In operation, however, it very quickly shows that the actual costs arise elsewhere. For example, due to instability, additional operating effort or unplanned downtime."

This is particularly evident in weighing processes. Even minimal measurement deviations can add up to significant material losses at high throughput rates, he said. This means unnecessary overconsumption.

Precision directly influences raw material consumption, process reliability and product quality, said Yannick, stressing that systems with long-term stability not only reduce deviations but also the need for readjustments, manual corrections and additional testing efforts.

The term Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) provides a more precise description of these interrelationships than any consideration of price alone, Yannick added. It encompasses not only the initial investment, but all costs throughout a system's lifecycle: Integration, commissioning, maintenance, calibration, energy consumption, spare parts, training costs, unplanned downtime and the consequential costs of scrap, measurement errors or recalls.

"Total Cost of Ownership means not evaluating technology in isolation. What matters is how robust, durable, precise and low-maintenance a system is – and how reliably it fits into the actual process," he said.

The situation is similar in inspection technology. Checkweighers, metal detectors and X-ray inspection systems are now far more than mere inspection stations at the end of a line. They ensure product quality, protect consumers, reduce the risk of complaints and recalls, and at the same time provide data that can be used for ongoing process monitoring, said Yannick, adding that modern production environments require systems that fit seamlessly into automation and IT landscapes – for example, via interfaces to SPC applications, statistics and reporting solutions, or higher-level production systems.

"The benefit of modern systems lies not only in the measured value itself, but also in the way data can be further processed. It is only through integration into higher-level processes that the basis for transparency and continuous optimisation is created," said Yannick.

Scottish seed grower doubles productivity after installing new grading line

A SCOTTISH seed potato grower has doubled productivity after installing a fully-integrated grading line from Tong Engineering, combining optical sorting technology with grading and handling systems.

WW Martin and Son, a pre-basic seed potato producer based in North Scotland, has now processed more than 4,000 tonnes through the new system, reporting significant gains in efficiency, throughput and grading consistency.

The business decided to invest in a new grading line to achieve four precise size splits, improve box and bag filling efficiency, increase throughput, and integrate optical sorting technology to remove defects.

The new line includes conveyors, EasyGrade sizing modules, a dry brusher and UniFill big bag and box-filling system.

At the heart of the system is an optical sorting unit from Flikweert Vision, fully integrated into the line to ensure consistent, high-throughput defect removal. The system uses high-resolution camera technology and intelligent image analysis to detect both external and internal defects in real time, removing substandard product without disrupting flow and maintaining gentle crop handling throughout.

Director Jonnie Martin said: "Productivity per labour unit has doubled from our previous grading line, which is more than we anticipated."

New inspection systems launched

METTLER-Toledo has recently launched advanced inspection systems ideally suited for the potato and snack industries.

These innovations are engineered to enhance contamination detection—such as low-density plastics and rubber—and support quality control for bulk and packaged potato products.

The two primary launches include the X56 DXD+ X-ray System, a dual-energy photon-counting x-ray system designed with built-in AI capabilities suitable for unpackaged and packaged potato products (such as multi-packs and bags of crisps). It features Advanced Material Discrimination Pro (AMD Pro) software to detect difficult, low-density contaminants. It boasts throughput rates of up to 500 products per minute and includes AI inspection to reduce unnecessary false rejections.

Earlier this year, it launched the M50 R-Series Advanced Line Metal Detectors which are designed for both unpackaged and packaged food applications, including raw and processed potato lines. These are specifically built to meet demanding, high-throughput environments that require caustic, high-pressure washdowns. They combine strong detection sensitivity with modern data connectivity, audit readiness features, and secure access control.

Third generation sieving harvester unveiled

SIXTEEN years after its first introduction, a four-row self-propelled sieving harvester has been upgraded to offer greater bunker capacity and ease of use to growers.

Dewulf, which specialises in machines for potatoes and root crops, has unveiled the third generation of the Kwatro (Xtreme), which now has all the features seen on the company's Enduro, four-row self-propelled sieving harvester.

The Level X Gold option allows the harvester to make decisions based on sensors, data and AI-driven analysis. The company claims this mean's harvesting can also be done at more than 2 km/h faster.

The Level X Silver features a new camera system that enables users to further personalise settings, have remote view, slow motion and casting integration via a smartphone, as well as on-road navigation. With Level X Bronze, growers gain insights via the integrated IoT platform.

The third generation comes in four variants.

New QualityGrader with 30 tons per hour capacity

FLIKWEERT Vision has introduced an upgraded QualityGrader for potatoes.

The optical sorting machine is now available in working widths of 1.0 and 1.5 metres and processes up to 30 tons of product per hour. Thanks to a second ejection unit, the machine can separate multiple product streams.

The upgraded QualityGrader builds on the existing machine, with more than 450 systems now operating in more than 20 countries. With the additional working width and expanded sorting capabilities, the QualityGrader is applicable across a wide range of uses, from growers to processors and industrial sorting lines.

In-house software development The QualityGrader automates quality control with high accuracy. Advanced cameras and AI software detect defects in potatoes quickly and objectively.

Commercial Director Pieter Priem said: "We develop our software entirely in-house and train it specifically to recognise potatoes, onions and quality deviations. By continuously collecting and analysing data, we further improve sorting performance."

The sorting machine is available in multiple capacities and configurations and can be integrated into a wide range of sorting lines.

Sideshooter changes the game

SIDESHOOTER X-ray systems, now used by some in the potato industry for inspecting processing potatoes, are setting new standards in quality control, according to manufacturers of industrial weighing and inspection technologies.

Unlike traditional top-down X-rays, sideshooters scan horizontally from the side, effectively reducing the thickness of the product that the beam must penetrate.

Manufacturers including Minebea Intec and Anritsu say they allow easier and more reliable detection of foreign bodies such as glass, metal, stone or dense plastics.

The systems can be deployed for inspecting tall, upright packaging like jars of processed potatoes or vertical pouches, and for bulk-flow lines.

New fully-integrated chip processing line

PPM Technologies and Key Technology, both Duravant operating companies, introduced their new fully-integrated potato chip processing line at SNACKEX recently.

Designed for processors managing raw material variability, labour shortages and the coordination demands of high-volume chip production, the line brings together PPM's frying, seasoning and product handling capabilities with Key's optical sorting technology into a single, unified solution.

After frying, optical sorting is the last opportunity to remove defects and foreign material before product reaches packaging. Combining multi-channel sensor data and multi-wavelength strobing technology, Key's COMPASS® sorter identifies dark spots, green discoloration and white knots as well as fryer debris without the more complex laser-based systems that can increase maintenance costs.

Recipe-driven operation, simplified controls and an open sanitary design help processors sustain consistent inspection performance while reducing training requirements, cleaning time and maintenance burden across long production runs, the company claims.

From inspection, product is transferred to PPM's FlavorWright™ All-in-One seasoning system, which applies liquid and/or dry seasoning immediately before the weigh scale and packaging equipment.

PPM's slice feeder is at the front of the line and equipped with a dual auger feed conveyor to meter whole potatoes into the slicer at a controlled rate to produce uniform slices for consistent frying. A coordinated network of PPM conveyors then connects each subsequent stage, with horizontal-motion conveyors moving chips gently between steps to minimize breakage and seasoning loss, and vibratory conveyors metering product accurately to multi-head weighers at packaging.

Recirculation conveyors can also be integrated to keep product moving when a scale or packaging machine goes offline, helping processors avoid waste and maintain uptime during real production disruptions.

Beyond the conveying network, each element of the line is configured to fit the processor's plant layout and production requirements, while centralised and local controls give operators real-time visibility across the line. Key Discovery™ software collects and analyses data about every object passing through the COMPASS sorter, helping processors identify and address trends in yield, reject rates, raw material variability and upstream equipment performance.

Dedicated dealer appointed for South West

AUSTRIAN manufacturer Pöttinger has appointed Masons Kings, which has branches in Somerset, Devon and Cornwall, as the South West region's exclusive dealership for its potato field machinery.

Pöttinger potato machinery is used primarily for soil preparation, tillage and crop care. While the company historically manufactured potato harvesters in the 1950s, today's focus lies heavily on preparing the optimal tilth for planting and managing ridge cultivation

Through the new agreement, Masons Kings customers will gain access to the company's full product portfolio.

Paul Bennett, who recently joined the Masons Kings sales team, said: "This is a positive development for both the Masons Kings team and our customers. Pöttinger machinery is widely respected for its performance and durability in the field."

Compact Auto Splice model demonstrated

ISHIDA recently demonstrated its new, compact Auto Splice model at SNACKEX.

Customers can now choose between two models depending on their needs: The fully-automatic Auto Splice, requiring minimal operator input, and the Compact Auto Splice, a more cost effective, space-saving solution.

Both models deliver near continuous film feed through faster reel changes and reduced risk of operator errors, resulting in increased uptime and safer operations.

Ishida designs, manufactures and instals end-to-end weighing, packing and safety solutions used in potato processing.

The new machine can be integrated with Ishida's Inspira Vertical Form Fill and Seal (VFFS) bagmakers and is offered as a solution to snack food manufacturers and processors that package potato products like chips and pellet snacks.

Grower and manufacturer celebrate 20-year partnership

STRAWSON, which produces approximately 40,000 tonnes of potatoes per year, growing crops across five counties, is celebrating a 20-year business partnership with vertical form fill and seal packaging machinery manufacturer, GIC, which has enabled the company to grow its operations significantly.

The Strawson business has grown out of a family farm, which is still active today, growing potatoes, as well as carrots, parsnips and arable crops across more than 16,000 acres in Suffolk, Norfolk, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and Lincolnshire.

The family firm ventured into contract packing for retail customers in 2002, and after four years, needed to improve its end-of-line packaging machinery, which is when Strawson first encountered GIC.

"Back then, it was Jake Rice who was overseeing engineering," says Andy Beal, GIC's managing director. "We met at a trade show and got talking, after which he invited me over to the factory to look at how they were packing and to suggest improvements. We installed our first machine into Strawson, two VFB2000 machines, a couple of months later."

Andy Beal and Harry Strawson are celebrating a 20-year business partnership.

Since then, Strawson has grown significantly and today supplies potatoes, parsnips and carrots to major retailers and food producers. The business has always remained focused on its core values, though, says Harry Strawson, joint Managing Director: "Strawson has changed a lot in the last 20 years, and in particular, in the last five years. We've seen significant growth in demand, and as a result, we have had to invest in technology, automation, and our team, while all the time staying true to our original family culture."

He went on to add: "As a business that works across multiple different areas - farming, transport, and factory – we have decided to partner with individual suppliers in each area. We're putting high volume through fewer people and working collectively with them, rather than going out to tender every time. This means we're not wasting people's time, and we don't have lots of different kit and spares from different suppliers.

"GIC have got a really good product, good people, and they're local, which makes them the ideal company to partner with for our end-of-line bagging and packing."

Today, Strawson operates 14 GIC vertical form fill and seal packaging machines: Two intermittent machines on four lines and single GIC 8000 continuous motion machines on six other lines. The latest GIC 8000s were installed in August 2025 ahead of a bumper Christmas period.

The GIC8000 is a high-speed continuous-motion servo VFFS machine ideal for producing a wide range of pack formats with bag widths up to 400mm. Strawson is currently running its GIC8000s at 75 bags per minute, but they can reach 80 packs per minute if required, which futureproofs them in anticipation of further growth.

"At the moment, we're optimistic about the future and confident of expanding and growing," said Harry. "But we don't want to sacrifice quality and reliability. We don't want to lose our reputation, which is based on delivery. We only want to grow at a speed at which we can maintain that reputation."

Like Strawson, GIC has also grown considerably in the past 20 years. In 2006 current directors, Andy Beal and Luke Murphy, completed a management buy-out. Since then, the company has relocated to its current home, grown to employ 30 people, introduced several new VFFS machines, joined the Rockwell Automation OEM partner programme and more than doubled its turnover.

Black-grass and ryegrass: Act quickly

UNCONTROLLED black-grass and ryegrass are rearing their heads this season, and experts are advising acting now to save time and money later.

ADAS' Senior Research Scientist and weed specialist, Dr Sarah Cook, said black-grass doesn't just die back but will re-tiller from the bottom and produce heads later.

"Once it starts producing seed, it stops thinking about producing new tillers and concentrates on producing seeds, that's the time to take it out," she said.

Nick Sanderson of Tynegrain Agronomy, based in Northumberland, highlighted the importance of taking measures beyond those plants you can see above the crop.

"If you're spraying off a patch and can see the 'end', give it an extra metre or two. Often when you look beneath the crop canopy, there are extra tillers or smaller plants. If you stop at the patch edge, you won't catch these and they will seed."

Stuart Kevis, Business Development Manager at BASF, also advised the need to target smaller grassweeds, stressing that even after haulm topping, both ryegrass and black-grass can regrow and seed.

"Smaller plants that are growing beneath the canopy are unaffected," he said, adding: "Grassweeds can re-tiller and go on to produce viable seeds later in the season. It may require multiple passes to stop any regrowth setting seed.

"Spraying off is probably the most reliable and practical way to remove in-crop grassweeds. It is important to completely kill the plants. Ensuring glyphosate penetrates the crop canopy is needed to catch those shorter grassweeds."

Simon Roberts from CCC Agronomy in the South East says knowing precisely where the grassweeds are is essential for short and long-term control.

"Where we share apps with farmers and operators, we will drop a pin wherever there are wild oats, black-grass or ryegrass. At this time of year, they will either go back out and mow, rogue or spray it with glyphosate."

"Mapping helps inform harvest and drilling – avoid harvesting the worst fields first, if possible, to prevent further spread around the farm with the combine, or leave patches within a field until last then clean the combine thoroughly ideally not in the field gate way.

"In autumn the maps will determine which fields we should delay drilling. Maximising the opportunity for grassweed germination before the crop is drilled."

Dormancy develops

Dormancy is developed in the period where the seeds start to ripen, notes Sarah.

"Historically, that's been around the same time as Wimbledon, but that's moved a bit now, though the tennis is still a good indicator. About a week before Wimbledon take note of the conditions. If it is hot and dry dormancy is likely to be low. Where we have a cold wet summer, it's more likely to be high and that's when we could have trouble getting black-grass to chit in the autumn."

Automated slug identification and precision control a step closer

AGRI-TECH companies Fotenix and Farmscan Ag have revealed a multispectral scouting system innovation, developed as part of the SLIMERS project, which will help potato growers in the control of the grey field slug.

SLIMERS – Strategies Leading to Improved Management and Enhanced Resilience against Slugs – is a three-year £2.6M research programme involving more than 100 farms and seven partners, which comes to an end in August.

Based on a 1m camera spacing, the scouting system can scale up to any boom width. The system operates overnight, leveraging AI to identify grey field slugs. It was developed alongside SLIMERS partner, the UK Agri-Tech Centre.

Farmscan Ag's advanced ISOBUS spot spraying system allows precise applications which will unlock the potential of biological controls, such as nematodes, to growers. Together, the solutions have the potential to become a complete 'scout and spray' system, providing growers with more sustainable slug control.

Fotenix founder and CEO Charles Veys said further market developments were needed before a specific slug service would be available commercially, however work carried out during SLIMERS had achieved key milestones in commercialising the core boom platform.

He said: "This short, accelerated project expanded the operational possibilities of our boom system, increasing the speed and capabilities of a 'see and spray' offer. Further field veg and plot trials will now help us take the system forward commercially."

Farmscan Ag director, Callum Chalmers, explained that using 25cm narrow spacing was key to effectively utilising nematodes. He said: "With the smaller nozzle spacing, autonomous-ready integration, and ISOBUS support, it allows farmers to use biologicals in a more cost-effective way. We aimed to develop a fully modular system, that can utilise existing equipment but also integrate directly with autonomous vehicles.

"It's been exciting to work on such a significant project which will contribute to more sustainable slug control solutions for arable farmers."

Funded by Defra's Farming Innovation Programme, delivered by Innovate UK, the SLIMERS project has been led by the British On-Farm Innovation Network (BOFIN), with other partners Harper Adams University, the John Innes Centre and Agrivation.

Understanding slug behaviour

Data collected by a team of 28 Slug Sleuth farmers and agronomists enabled Prof Keith Walters and his team at Harper Adams University to increase their understanding of slug behaviour, establish a model to predict where slugs will be found in arable fields, and validate it. Extensive soil sampling across the monitoring fields by Agrivation also formed part of the analysis.

The successful creation of slug prediction maps unlocks the potential for more precise control of slugs in potato fields, including reduced use of pesticides.

Keith said: "In waterlogged soils, patches become unstable and break down, but we have now confirmed that patches reform temporarily in places we wouldn't expect in normal conditions and then quickly return to their predicted areas once more typical soil conditions return."

Having this additional understanding strengthened a model that was developed in the latter stages of the three-year project to explain the underpinning biology leading to patch formation. "We had some glitches in the early days, but they were all solvable and this has now formed the basis of a forecasting model that I am really confident in."

The resulting slug prediction maps were tested by the Slug Sleuths over Autumn/Winter 2025-26.

"Despite low slug numbers over the testing period we have sufficient data to prove that the model works and perhaps most importantly, that growers are happy to use it and it fits in with modern commercial equipment," said Keith.

Aphid-tackling seed partnership strengthened

ALBERT Bartlett and Fera Science Ltd are expanding their efforts to aid Scotland's seed potato sector through an extensive aphid monitoring programme for the 2026/27 growing season.

As aphid populations continue to pose a major threat to potato health and yields, the collaboration is delivering critical data, improved decision-making tools, and enhanced protection for growers across Scotland.

Beyond weakening plants by ingesting sap, aphids act as key vectors for potato viruses, including Potato Virus Y (PVY), Potato Leaf roll Virus (PLRV) and Potato Virus A (PVA), which cost the UK potato industry millions of pounds annually. Their rapid reproductive cycle and ability to colonise new plants quickly make them particularly challenging to control.

For the 2026 season, Albert Bartlett has funded 43 monitoring trap sites across Scotland and two in Jersey supporting Fera's long-running national programme, which dates back to 2004 and typically processes around 850 samples from 100 UK sites annually.

Across the 48 Scottish sites in 2025, 443 samples were processed, with an average of 9.4 samples per trap. All growers were supplied with specialist monitoring kits, equipped to collect aphid samples throughout the season. Fera managed kit distribution, grower onboarding, grid reference verification, data permissions, and all laboratory identification work.

These tools help growers decide whether and when to apply insecticides, which insecticide to use based on species-specific virus-vectoring risk and resistance considerations, when to desiccate haulms to reduce late-season virus spread, whether home-saved seed remains viable and safe.

The system also supports resistance management and encourages integrated pest management (IPM) by helping growers minimise unnecessary treatments while protecting quality.

Analysis from the 2025 Scottish monitoring programme shows significantly elevated virus pressure.

Virus pressure peaked early, with the first major spike occurring one week earlier than in 2024 and two weeks earlier than typical years.

In some regions Virus Pressure climbed to five or six times the all-year average, particularly in late May and mid-June, and many regions experienced multiple peaks, with some lasting several weeks.

AI tech facilitates PCN analysis

NEW technology has provided a major breakthrough in the battle to control potato cyst nematode.

By combining AI, automated microscopy and high-throughput image analysis, large numbers of eggs and juveniles from opened cysts can be assessed rapidly and reproducibly, the European Society of Nematologists (ESN) recently heard.

Dutch companies HLB, an independent research and advisory laboratory specializing in soil health, plant health and agricultural diagnostics, and Antonie, which uses AI-driven monitoring to improve soil and crop intelligence, have developed a new AI-driven technology that automates one of the most labour-intensive parts of the analysis process.

During the annual meeting of the ESN, Antonie co-founder Peter den Hartog unveiled a method for the automated analysis of potato cyst nematodes (PCN).

"This is an important breakthrough that impacts the entire sector and a major step toward fully scalable nematode analysis," he said.

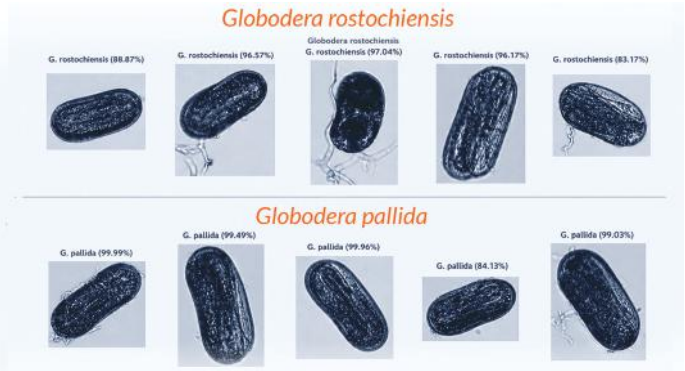
By combining artificial intelligence (AI), automated microscopy and advanced image analysis, a large part of the analysis process can now be performed faster, more consistently and at scale.

Reliable and timely analysis is essential for crop management decisions, export certification and integrated crop protection but until now, this work has relied heavily on specialist microscopy and highly experienced laboratory personnel. Laboratories around the world face the same challenge.

Managing Director of HLB, Pieter Vos, said: "The work is highly specialized, extremely labour-intensive and qualified personnel are increasingly difficult to find. With Antonie's technology, we can now support a significant part of this process without compromising quality or reproducibility."

Existing protocols for isolating and opening cysts remain unchanged. The innovation lies in the automated analysis of cyst contents, a step that until now has been performed largely by hand. BPR

PCN Egg Identification to Species Level



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INDUSTRY NEWS

New processing line: 30-ton per hour capacity

BRAZILIAN processor BEM Brasil has installed a new Key Technology processing line designed to run 30 metric tons of frozen potato strips per hour.

Founded in 2006, the company produces around 500,000 metric tons of product each year and supplies more than half of all chips consumed in the country, in addition to serving international markets.

Bem Brasil relies on Key's VERYX™ optical sorters in both the wet and frozen areas. Upstream in the wet area, three VERYX B210 sorters equipped with off-axis cameras in a tilted-X configuration find and reject product defects without blind spots.

In the frozen area, just before packaging, three VERYX B175 sorters equipped with cameras and lasers perform three-way sorting and final inspection, separating short potato strips into a dedicated stream while simultaneously removing foreign material (FM) and product defects. Key's Sort-to-Grade (STG) software evaluates each strip's dimensions and quality profile to determine its impact on the final grade and make accept/reject decisions. Pixel Fusion™ technology identifies even the most difficult-to-find FM and defects immediately prior to packaging.

The line also incorporates an ADR EXOS™ automatic defect removal system downstream of the wet-area sorters.

www.key.net

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