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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2026

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Editor's letter

AT the time of writing this intro, the whole of the *British Potato* team was busy pulling together a showguide for the first *British Potato Confex*, while liaising with exhibitors, discussing what current topics our seminar speakers will focus on, and liaising with many different organisations offering skills development and training opportunities.

Many have been a little reticent about the Confex, and I confess I was also a little cynical, but after chatting to the people involved and learning more about what it will offer, I can honestly say I'm really looking forward to it. Not only will it give everyone the chance to catch up and network on the 'gap year' between the main *British Potato Industry Events*, but there are some genuine topics up for discussion that this smaller-style event will give us a chance to learn from and create solutions from.

The exhibition stands are on a smaller scale than the main BP show, where new launches are generally unveiled, and will give all visitors a chance to see all types of machinery and other products up close, under one roof, with specialists on hand to talk them through any questions they have.

Having worked closely with the GB Potatoes team on the skills development side, I'm also happy that so many organisations will either be exhibiting, speaking or circulating within the Skills Hub at the BP Confex. Attracting and retaining talent within the potato industry is imperative to securing its future, and this will demonstrate to young people embarking on future careers, or those already in the industry looking for a new focus, just how many different types of opportunities exist within the potato supply chain – be that in growing, marketing, engineering, research or other.

The 16-page show supplement included in the centre of this issue of *British Potato Review* contains everything you need to know about Confex, with a floorplan, seminar programme, exhibitors' stand numbers and speakers' details. We're immensely grateful to our sponsors, Tong and Wyma, alongside all those who've partnered with the BP team, for helping get this off the ground.

I look forward to seeing you all on November 18th and 19th. In the meantime, check out the recent developments in our machinery section, catch up on the latest disease insights and, if you weren't lucky enough to attend in person, see what this year's PotatoEurope had to offer, alongside our news, markets and feature round-ups.



Editor

Stephanie Cornwall

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British POTATO REVIEW

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New potato trait combines higher antioxidant levels with traditional flesh colour

BREEDING and seed company Royal HZPC Group has received a patent for a new generation of potatoes with increased levels of flavonoids, natural antioxidants associated with potential health benefits.

The development combines characteristics of coloured potatoes with the appearance of traditional potatoes and is a result of research conducted by the Breeding, Molecular Biology, and Quality teams at Royal HZPC Group, with support from Wageningen University & Research.

Flavonoids belong to the polyphenol group and are associated with various potential health benefits. These compounds occur naturally in red and purple potatoes, although consumers often prefer potatoes with white or yellow flesh.

HZPC therefore developed a potato with an increased concentration of the flavonoid kaempferol while retaining the appearance of a traditional potato.

Stan Oome, Program Leader Molecular Biology at Royal HZPC Group, said: "A patent is only granted when an innovation is genuinely novel and distinctive. That makes this patent particularly meaningful. We have developed a trait that combines the potential health benefits of coloured potatoes with a potato that looks more familiar to consumers."

The discovery originated from a research question within Royal HZPC Group's breeding programme. By combining different genetic traits, researchers found it possible to develop

potatoes with both increased flavonoid content and traditional flesh colour.

Stan said the development illustrates the possibilities for introducing consumer-oriented traits into potato breeding programmes.

"Many innovations in our sector focus on yield, disease resistance or agronomic traits. This development is different because it focuses on a characteristic that may be directly relevant to consumers."

Following the granting of the patent, Royal HZPC Group is assessing potential applications and markets for the new trait. Possible applications include table potatoes and processed potato products. Further research is also underway to optimise the trait and incorporate it into future potato varieties.



Early reservoir refilling and call for more investment

POTATO growers in England face concerns over irrigation water availability for the next growing season following the 2026 drought.

The Environment Agency has stated that some agricultural reservoirs in affected areas are only holding between zero and 20% of their capacity.

The drought has affected potato yields, tuber size, quality, and irrigation costs. An Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit analysis estimated potential drought-related potato crop losses at £80–169 million, based on a scenario comparable to 2018.

The agency introduced a temporary measure allowing eligible abstraction licence holders to refill existing irrigation reservoirs outside their authorised periods during October. It required growers to notify the agency before abstracting water, comply with abstraction limits, and maintain daily records for six years.

Water abstracted under the measure will not count towards annual authorised licence volumes. Catchment exclusions and environmental restrictions remain applicable.



The agency has reported that 11 English areas were in drought as of October 9th, with river flows remaining at or below seasonal norms.

GB Potatoes has called for investment in water storage and consistent abstraction regulations, alongside financial support for growers facing cash-flow difficulties.



Youngsters embrace spud focus as sponsors sought for further activities

WITH the start of a new school year and 2026's potato crop currently being lifted and moved into climate-controlled storage, following an unusually early and difficult harvesting season, organisers of the annual 'Grow Your Own' Potatoes Challenge are celebrating another successful year of the event, and looking for more companies and suppliers to get involved.

The annual project, which takes place throughout Perth and Kinross schools and Nurseries, is co-ordinated by Lorraine Henderson, has been running for at least 10 years and was sponsored recently by ISJ, Horticultural Seed Potato Company Almondbank Perth.

Other potato companies supporting the project with their diverse varieties included Albert Bartlett, Andrew Skea of Potato House and Branston Potatoes Abernethy.

Growing Packs were distributed by local RHET volunteers to around 100 classes throughout the area with each participant

having the opportunity to write stories, create healthy recipes, have fun with STEM-based puzzles and basically observe and learn where the potato comes from.

This year's winner for the heaviest crop was again Craigclowan Primary One. The previous year's winner had moved up from nursery to retain its much-deserved trophy. Runners up were Luncarty then Abernethy.

During the project, participants wrote themed songs and created healthy recipes, examples of which were Letham's tattie scone and Glenfarg's medley of healthy potato dishes.

John Marshall, dubbed 'Potato Professor' held around 50 classroom sessions, and was delighted when Letham pupils created a 'Tattie Song' specifically for him which was sung to the tune of Fitba Crazy.

This year, the Royal Highland Education Trust (RHET) Food and Farming Days, hands-on educational events organised across Scotland to connect primary school pupils

(typically P5 to P7) with working farms, estates, and agricultural centres, have continued to provide potato-focussed information.

Pupils rotate through around 10 to 12 different learning stations during a single day. Pupils are bussed in from local schools rotating around with 20-minute sessions learning about food production.

Potato industry supporters of these events included Albert Bartlett Potatoes, Branston and Andrew Skea of Potato House who supply a diverse range of varieties, and a recent introduction of has been making a "tornado potato" with spiralisers supplied by Branston.

John said further industry support is always welcomed. Support is currently being sought for sponsors with banner making and helping with transport - even sponsoring a bus for the children.

Anyone who can help is urged to contact John at johnmarshall278@btinternet.com.

Counting and measuring worm feeding depths

FOLLOWING October harvests at trial sites like Holkham Estate in Norfolk, the team behind WORMOUT, is currently counting and measuring wireworm feeding depths across thousands of harvested tubers.

Researchers led by Sanjeev Kumar Sharma will now analyze the genetic data to identify specific markers associated with wireworm susceptibility or tolerance. These findings will feed into breeding programs to develop more

resilient potato varieties and give commercial growers reliable data for selecting crops suited to high-risk, wireworm-prone soils.

WORMOUT is a collaborative research project dedicated to combating wireworm infestations in potato crops. The project utilises advanced genomics and field phenotyping to identify genetic markers associated with wireworm tolerance. The aim is to help breeders develop resilient potato varieties and help

growers make informed choices for wireworm-prone fields.

At its Trial Showcase in August, researchers and partners (including Holkham Emerald Ltd, Blackthorn Arable, and VCS Potatoes) demonstrated field trials using the SPUD-SPET genomics platform to screen potato varieties for wireworm tolerance.

WORMOUT

GENOMIC TOOLS FOR WIREWORM TOLERANCE



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International Potato Symposium

AROUND 250 professionals from across Europe gathered at The first International Potato Symposium, held in Madrid earlier this month.

Organised by FEPEX, industry-based organisation that represents Spain's horticultural and ornamental production sector, in collaboration with Fruit Attraction and Europatat, the Symposium took place on the eve of Fruit Attraction 2026, where potato was selected as this year's Star Product.

Speakers addressed some of the most pressing issues currently facing the European potato sector, including production and market developments, competitiveness, plant health, innovation and sustainability.

More information about the events and its take-aways can be found at <https://bit.ly/4yx03qs>.

VARITRON 470 CONSTANT FLOW: GENTLE GIANT BUILT FOR THE UK

Every potato-growing business is different. Varieties, soil conditions, harvesting systems and storage requirements all influence the machinery needed in the field. That is why GRIMME continues to develop the VARITRON 470 range, giving growers greater choice without compromising output, crop quality or operator comfort.

The journey began with the VARITRON 470 and its 7-tonne reversible bunker, followed by the VARITRON 470 XL, unveiled at Agritechnica in 2025. Now, for 2026, GRIMME introduces the **VARITRON 470 Constant Flow**: a self-propelled four-row harvester developed specifically for the UK market and the specialist potato varieties grown here.

Designed for exceptionally gentle box filling in the field, the machine features a 5-tonne automatic filling bunker that lifts and lowers during loading to minimise drop height and protect valuable crops. Its 1.2-metre-wide unloading elevator supports fast, even filling and can be fitted with an OptiBag-style web for enhanced crop care.

Powered by a 460 hp Mercedes-Benz (MTU) engine, the VARITRON 470 Constant Flow combines impressive work rates with outstanding separation. The heavy-duty MultiSep provides increased sieving capacity to remove soil, stones and haulm in demanding UK conditions. An optional four-person inspection platform also allows picking staff to remove any remaining trash, helping ensure a clean crop enters every box.

For the operator, the latest X11 cab offers excellent visibility, intuitive controls and a spacious working environment. It includes the CCI 1200 operator terminal, SmartView camera system and myGRIMME connectivity, bringing machine information and enhanced control together for long harvesting days.

Getting noticed at fresh awards

MAJOR potato industry participants were featured as finalists and contenders at the FPC Fresh Awards 2026, held recently at the JW Marriott Grosvenor House in London.

Greenvale AP was shortlisted as a finalist in the Net Zero Impact Award category (won by Porta Nova) and featured individual nominees like Tom Eyles and Gracie Tucker for Rising Star of the Year.

Branston Ltd was shortlisted as a finalist in the Net Zero Impact Award category and recognised through campaign and industry showcases at the event and A.H. Worth was featured as a category contributor/finalist associated with innovation (such as product rollouts at Tesco).

The FPC Fresh Awards are a prestigious annual event organized by the Fresh Produce Consortium (FPC), often referred to as the “Oscars” of the fresh produce industry. British Potato Review is a media partner.

Confidence in German season

DESPITE a significantly smaller harvest, the German potato industry is confident about the upcoming marketing season.

The 73rd International Autumn Potato Get-together in Hamburg focused on the 2026 harvest, the current market situation and the regulatory framework affecting the potato industry. Around 150 representatives from production, trade, politics and industry associations used the event to exchange views on current developments.

This year’s potato harvest is significantly smaller than last year’s. In 2025, around 13.9 million tonnes of potatoes were harvested in Germany. For 2026, a harvest of 10.4 million tonnes is expected based on the preliminary results of the Special Harvest and Quality Assessment (BEE), published by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Homeland (BMLEH).

President of the German Potato Trade Association (DKHV), Thomas Herkenrath, stressed that the smaller harvest requires a differentiated assessment of the market situation: “What matters is what is available on the market and how supply and demand develop. We should therefore take a

measured approach to the current situation and not jump to conclusions about potential supply shortages.”

Market expert at Agrarmarkt Informationsgesellschaft mbH (AMI), Christoph Hambloch said the potato market is constantly evolving. “In the coming months, the key factors will be how demand develops and how market participants manage the available volumes,” he said.

Meanwhile Dr Melanie Leonhard, Senator for Economic Affairs, Labour and Innovation of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, announced closer cooperation between the plant protection services of Hamburg and Bremen in order to make phytosanitary inspections and potato sampling faster and more efficient in the future.

“Functioning structures are of central importance for the movement of goods and the food industry. If we want goods to be available on the shelves, we need reliable and practical framework conditions for the food industry,” she said.

For more international news updates, turn to page 49.



After proving highly popular during its first harvest, the new VARITRON 470 Constant Flow is ready to meet the changing needs of British growers: a gentle giant engineered for quality, capacity and a cleaner crop.

GRIMME

Demonstration fields and trial plots were key attractions.



International industry gathers in force

PotatoEurope's 20th anniversary event showcases climate-smart cultivation tech, with live demonstrations and more than 50 machinery combinations.

POTATOEUROPE showcased the latest technology and innovations in potato cultivation to an international audience drawn from all sectors of the potato supply chain when it took place near Hanover recently.

The trade fair marked the 20th anniversary of the event and introduced several unprecedented occurrences compared to previous editions.

For the 2026 edition of the event, the industry shifted focus toward climate-adapted potato crop production and modern storage management. Prompted by severe summer droughts and historic crop losses across Europe, the exhibition highlighted precision irrigation, automated mechanical weeding, and energy-efficient ventilation systems.

The new venue, Rittergut Gestorf estate, near Hanover, Germany, was a departure for the event as it replaced the previous German host location.

The 2022 and 2018 German editions of the event were held at the Rittergut Bockerode estate in Springe-Mittelrode, near Hanover, Germany.

In another departure, the event also ran concurrently with the SugarBeet Expo for the first time which enabled visiting growers and others from the potato supply chain to cross-examine shared machinery, field solutions, and technical challenges of the two crops.

Managing Director of DLG Markets GmbH, Tobias Eichberg, said: "PotatoEurope and the inaugural SugarBeet Expo, held together for the first time, have impressively demonstrated the innovative strength of root crop production. Bringing these two sectors together encouraged exchange among professionals from the potato and sugar beet industries as well as discussion on common challenges and solutions.

"What makes the event particularly valuable is its practical relevance: New machinery, production

systems and cultivation concepts could be experienced and compared under real field conditions. The high quality of the international professional participants and the intensive exchange underline the power of this format."

The international exhibition and technical program covered the entire production chain, from varieties, soil cultivation, sowing and planting, fertilisation and crop protection to harvesting, transport and processing. Solutions in the fields of digitalisation, automation, robotics and artificial intelligence highlighted additional opportunities for more efficient processes, lower production costs and greater resilience.

10,100 visit to see live demonstrations

Trade visitors experienced the latest developments to aid in crop production and supply, including machinery in field use, and



More than 10,000 visitors attended the trade fairs



The Spotlight FarmRobotix was a highlight in 2026.

exchanges with experts. The focus was on the entire value chain - from breeding to processing.

The event brought together around 10,100 trade visitors and 300 exhibitors from across the globe for a practical, innovation-driven showcase. In total, 79 countries were represented.

Live demonstrations featured more than 50 machinery combinations, showing self-propelled units and stationary systems being operated under real field conditions. Core themes focused heavily on sustainable production, efficiency, and competitiveness in root crop management, while on-site features included specialised trial plots, dynamic demonstration fields, and the DLG Expert Stage.

‘Forward-looking policy needed’

Organisers described the 2026 event as ‘an essential international meeting place’.

DLG President Hubertus Paetow gave an opening address in which he focused on the immediate challenges facing the industry. He stated that climate change has accelerated much more quickly than envisaged, stressing that potato growers must adapt their production systems.

Stable pest-management solutions and a forward-looking policy framework are essential, instead of forcing the industry to operate under consecutive emergency approvals that disrupt long-term strategic planning, Hubertus stated.

The Union of the German Potato Industry (UNIKA), which acts as a conceptual partner uniting the value chain from breeding to packaging, reiterated that technical advancements in resistance breeding must be paired with innovation-friendly policies.

Overall, the organisers concluded that while the sector faces massive pressure from global market shifts and climate extremes, the high 96% visitor satisfaction rate proves the industry is highly resilient and actively looking toward sustainable, tech-driven solutions.

Future technologies for root crop production

DLG’s ‘Digital Farming powered by FarmRobotix’ Spotlight focused on autonomous machines, robotics, automation and artificial intelligence. Live applications demonstrated how digital solutions can make farming operations more efficient and sustainable.

The Agricultural Logistics DLG Spotlight focused on transport and logistics solutions, ranging from specialist equipment to digital applications. At the DLG Expert Stage, more than 20 presentations, expert talks and discussion panels provided additional technical guidance. Participating experts from farming, science, advisory services and industry discussed soil health, machinery trends, digitalisation and robotics, as well as the economic future of potato and sugar beet production.

Breeding company feedback

Feedback from exhibitors and visitors at the event focussed on climate resilience, precision handling, and strategic industry collaboration.

Seed potato breeders reported exceptional trade visitor engagement and strong global market optimism, while highlighting a sector-wide push for climate-resilient agronomic traits and advanced genetic varieties.

Representatives from Interseed Potatoes GmbH, a German potato breeding and seed potato company based in Wittmund, Lower Saxony, that specialises in developing sustainable potato varieties for the commercial food processing industry, said that because the event only happens in Germany once every four years, it felt like a crucial “home game” that generated valuable, intensive customer discussions.

Europlant Pflanzenzucht GmbH’s Managing director Jörg Renatus described the show as one of the ‘most vital networking opportunities’ for the sector. He expressed delight at the “excellent response from visitors,” noting that the high turnout of

international delegates from regions like North Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East proves potatoes are continuing to rapidly gain ground globally.

“We were particularly pleased with the strong visitor response, the high professional level and the large proportion of international visitors. We were able to showcase our new high-performance varieties and conduct many valuable and intensive discussions with customers, partners and interested visitors from Germany and abroad,” he said.

Solynta showcased its breakthroughs in diploid hybrid varieties, specifically SOLHY019, the first diploid hybrid potato officially registered on the Dutch Variety register. Representatives of the breeding company said they’d been “delighted by the interest” from growers looking into the logistical and sustainability advantages of true potato seeds over traditional seed tubers.

Interseed Potatoes and Norika, two prominent German potato breeding and seed potato production companies, showcased a powerful alignment of advanced technology and cutting-edge genetics.

Interseed, a core regional location partner, provided the seed stock for the event’s live field trials. Highlighting their integrated approach, Interseed’s Managing Director Arne Rehnert said: “We have a value chain in which genetics, cultivation and processing are fully aligned.”

Norika, also a key event partner, centred its showcase on the vital role of climate-resilient breeding. The company used live field demonstrations and industry networking to address urgent sector threats, offering practical solutions against severe drought and emerging disease pressures.

Machinery showcased

UK vegetable-handling manufacturer Haith and GRIMME, which manufactures machinery for soil preparation and planting, harvesting, handling and storage, teamed up to co-exhibit together for the first time this year. →

Haith's Managing Director Duane Hill said this had been of great value in bringing together the two companies' respective portfolios to demonstrate unified solutions from field planting and harvesting straight through to post-harvest washing, grading, and packing.

The Tong Engineering team actively invited growers and industry professionals to watch their live demonstrations. On Day One, they declared that the event was "in full swing" and that the team was "ready to talk potatoes" while giving live operational looks at their machinery setups. After the event, representatives from partner brand Tong Swift Lift stated that they ended the trade fair "on a high" with latest conveyors and elevators performing successfully alongside the Tong Storemaker during live store-loading demonstrations, proving a fully integrated field-to-store solution.

Machinery manufacturer, Dewulf, used the event spotlight to unveil new Kwatro Generation 3 harvester and feature a live demonstration of the harvester. The company also showcased the Certa 40 Integral planter coupled with a Lemken Zirkon 12 power harrow.

Lincolnshire-based firm Scotts Precision Manufacturing displayed its Evolution Separator, allowing international visitors to see its technical field-to-factory sorting solutions up close. The company used the event to celebrate a major milestone, having now sold 1,000 of the Evolution Separator units worldwide.

Crop protection exhibits

AgTech and agribusiness company Syngenta, which specialises in crop protection and seeds, used the event to address the intersection of safety and efficiency, focusing discussions with growers and advisers on tools like its SprayAssist app for smarter field applications and its InterraScan soil-scanning service to build precision into volatile seasons.

Sebastian Funk, Lead Sustainable Farming & AG Solutions Technology / Digital Ag

Commercialization DACH, Syngenta Agro GmbH, said: "Safe crop protection application and application success are not mutually exclusive. We discussed this topic with farmers, advisors and service providers at PotatoEurope, and the SprayAssist app brings this knowledge directly to the field. With our InterraScan soil scanning service, we are also demonstrating how digital soil analysis can make potato and sugar beet production more precise."

Cropscience company Bayer promoted its FieldView digital platform and connected weather station monitoring tools to give growers immediate, data-driven foresight into late blight risks, irrigation needs, and aphid pressure. To tackle tightening EU pesticide restrictions and soil-borne threats like Potato Cyst Nematodes (PCN), emphasis was also placed on its liquid nematicide, Velum Prime.

Biologicals and trade synergy

Biological crop protection companies Biofa GmbH & ABiTEP, who are part of the Andermatt Group, held extensive technical exchanges regarding the practical field applications of biological solutions amidst rising demands for environmental compliance.

Distributor APH Group representatives said the event had been "highly successful" for them and had enabled them to connect with a large influx of global partners and host vital conversations concerning the future of automated potato handling.

Storage discussions

Discussions around storage highlighted a critical shift in post-harvest management, emphasising that growers can no longer treat storage as a "black box." Instead, the sector must prioritise modernising storage infrastructure to consistently meet year-round quality demands and build strong resilience strategies against extreme weather impacts.

The integration of sensors and AI-driven camera systems on harvesting machinery was

particularly emphasised as a proactive storage strategy. Identifying undetected tuber damage before the crop enters the facility dramatically reduces the subsequent risks of rot and disease transmission inside the storage building, visitors learned.

Storage specialist Omnivent used the expo to demonstrate sustainable storage solutions under optimal conditions. The company showcased its OmniCuro NEXT storage control and energy management systems, highlighting that modern storage design must incorporate live automation and smart ventilation/cooling to keep up with economic and resource constraints.

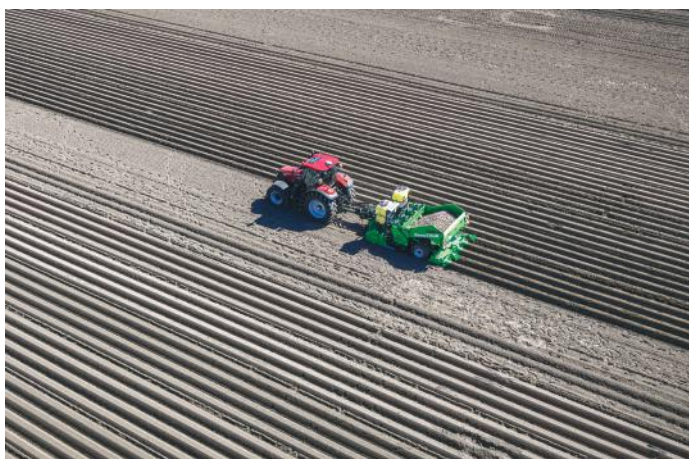
European rotation

PotatoEurope is a major international open-air trade fair and exhibition dedicated exclusively to the entire potato value chain, from breeding and cultivation to harvesting, storage, and processing. The event takes place annually, rotating sequentially among four core partner countries: Germany, the Netherlands, France, and Belgium.

Organised by a joint network of partner organisations across four host countries, it has been running for 20 years. This year's event, being hosted in Germany, was organised by the DLG (German Agricultural Society) in cooperation with the Union of the German Potato Industry (UNIKA).

Next year's event, which will be hosted by Belgium, will be organised by Fedagrim, the Belgian agricultural machinery association, and will take place on September 8th and 9th, 2027, in Tournai, Belgium.

Last year's PotatoEurope was hosted by the Netherlands at Wageningen University & Research (WUR) Field Crops in Lelystad and organised by DLG Benelux (a subsidiary of DLG) while France's event in 2024 was led by the agricultural research institute ARVALIS alongside the potato organisation Fedepom and was held in Villers-Saint-Christophe. 



Planting for PotatoEurope 2026 officially took place on April 21st at the Rittergut Gestorf estate in Springe near Hanover, in preparation for this year's event. Photo: DLG



Regional location partners provided seed stock which were planted in April for the event's live field trials. Photo: DLG



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New resource to help protect seed

Hutton Scientific Service launches commercial potato virus testing service for the UK seed potato industry.

HUTTON Scientific Services (HSS), the commercial arm of The James Hutton Institute, has announced the launch of a new commercial potato virus testing service for the 2026 seed potato campaign, developed in response to the recent withdrawal of commercial testing services by Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA).

The new service has been established to ensure continued access to reliable, high-quality virus testing for the UK seed potato sector, helping to safeguard market confidence in Scottish-origin seed potatoes and supporting informed management and marketing decisions across the industry.

HSS provides scientific research and technical expertise across agriculture, environmental management and food security. Through innovation, applied science and industry collaboration, it works to address global challenges and deliver practical solutions that support a more sustainable future.

Delivery Lead for the new virus testing service, Dr Louise Gamble, said: "With SASA stepping back from commercial testing, the availability

of reliable and robust virus testing services is essential to maintain market confidence primarily in Scottish origin seed.

"With the unique combination of glasshouse facilities and relevant expertise in potato plant pathology, HSS has endeavoured to develop a service which meets Scotland's need for post-harvest virus testing for the two most prevalent viruses, potato leaf roll virus (PLRV) and potato virus Y (PVY).

"Our aim is to continue to align with industry's biggest challenges whilst building on the Hutton's international reputation for quality and excellence in commercial testing."

The introduction of virus testing expands the Hutton's established portfolio of potato health services, which already includes testing for late blight, potato cyst nematode (PCN) and free-living nematodes (FLN).

Potato-infecting viruses remain a significant threat to crop health, yield and certification standards within the seed potato industry. Aphid-transmitted viruses such as PLRV and PVY can result in substantial economic losses and crop downgrading if not effectively monitored and managed.

By adding commercial virus testing to its service offering, HSS aims to strengthen the reputation of Great Britain's high-health seed potato stocks while providing the industry with intelligence at a critical time.

HSS, in collaboration with the Centre for Agricultural Sustainable Innovation (CASI) has begun accepting bookings for the new service on a first-come, first-served basis, with all samples requiring a pre-booking confirmation.

Customers will have access to both ELISA (enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay) tests and rapid real-time PCR (polymerase chain reaction) testing. Screening for both PVY and PLRV will be included as standard, providing growers, seed producers, exporters and agronomists with robust diagnostic information to support crop management and market planning.

Commenting on the launch, Business Development Manager at HSS, Jamie Smith, said: "The withdrawal of SASA's commercial testing service creates a clear gap for the industry at a time when demand for high-quality virus diagnostics remains strong."

Customers interested in pre-booking or discussing their virus testing requirements are encouraged to contact Dr Louise Gamble or Technical Expert Graham Cowan at VirusTesting@Huttonltd.com. **BPR**





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Investment in leafroll study

PLRV research aims to protect crop quality and cut growers' risk.

GROUNDED Agronomy Ltd is investing in potato leafroll virus (PLRV) research through the Crop Innovation Centre – Skills, Technology and Research Training programme (CIC-START).

PLRV is a serious threat to marketability through reduced quality leading to increased risk of rejection and poses a risk to future crops through infected seed. The project aims to show growers where risk is greatest, and which actions can reduce it.

CIC-START is backed by a UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Industrial Doctoral Landscape Award worth about £1.87 million and will support 12 postgraduate researchers working across a range of potato projects. Grounded Agronomy will help keep the PLRV research focused on industry needs: Understanding how the virus spreads, improving management tools and turning findings into clear on-farm actions. With around three-quarters of the UK potato crop grown from Scottish seed, limiting PLRV spread is critical to maintaining healthy supplies for ware and processing growers.

CIC-START brings together the University of Dundee, the James Hutton Institute, Harper Adams University, the University of Nottingham and industry partners. Based at the Hutton's Crop Innovation Centre in Dundee, it combines crop science, specialist facilities and practical industry input to tackle problems seen in commercial crops and deliver results growers can use.

Director of the National Potato Innovation Centre, Dr Ian Toth, said: "CIC-START is an important investment in the people and research needed to future-proof the UK potato industry. PLRV threatens potato production across the UK and many parts of Europe, including Scottish seed-growing areas. By combining scientific and industry expertise, the project will track how the virus is changing and spreading and turn that knowledge into better decisions for growers."

University of Warwick graduate David Reynolds will begin the four-year PLRV PhD studentship in October 2026. Registered at Harper Adams University, the project will be supervised by Professor Tom Pope and Dr Eugene Ryabov of the James Hutton Institute. David's previous work

examined aphid transmission of turnip yellows virus in lettuce, plant resistance and differences between virus strains. That experience will support research shaped by farmers, advisers and industry partners and translated into practical guidance for potato growers.

Principal Agricultural Adviser and Director at Grounded Agronomy, Eric Anderson, has been appointed Industrial Supervisor for the four-year studentship. His role is to link the science with commercial seed potato production and keep the work focused on growers' practical questions. His experience includes membership of Scottish, British and European potato and aphid-virus groups, longstanding technical support for the seed sector, the Pre Basic Growers Association's Dr James Hardie Memorial Award and recognition as Potato Agronomist of the Year in 2023. The project will examine PLRV, the aphids that spread it and the responses of infected plants to identify where risk comes from and how it can be reduced.

"Practical priority"

Aphid monitoring shows why the work is urgent. Peach-potato aphid numbers in Scotland were high in 2026, the seventh-highest season in 39 years. As the main carrier of PLRV, this species can settle and breed in potato crops, continuing to spread the virus even after weekly trap catches decline.

"The practical priority is to reduce virus sources across the local area. Tackling one infected field while leaving volunteers and infected crops nearby is like putting out one bonfire while embers burn elsewhere. Once aphids acquire PLRV, they can carry it for life and infect clean crops weeks later," said Eric.

"Milder winters have increased unmanaged potato volunteers, or groundkeepers, in cereal crops. These plants can appear healthy while carrying PLRV and acting as infection sources. Colonising aphids can move the virus from infected volunteers into potato crops, where infected plants may later emerge as rogues in certified seed."



University of Warwick graduate David Reynolds has begun the four-year PLRV PhD studentship.



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PLRV is a serious threat to marketability.

By 2023–24, one PLRV variant had become dominant in some potato crops, replacing a type that had been present for more than 40 years. PLRV can persist between crop generations in infected seed tubers, while aphids can introduce it into early-generation crops. Understanding how these routes favour particular variants could improve surveillance and help target control.

For growers, the wider PLRV risk points to five practical actions:

- Check cereal stubbles for potato volunteers and groundkeepers.
 - Control volunteers promptly to remove potential sources of PLRV before aphids move into next year's potato crops.
 - Use aphid monitoring and local risk information to target crop inspections and decide when crop-protection action is justified.
 - Treat PLRV as a wider landscape issue, not just a single-field problem.
 - Follow project updates and join industry discussions or field activities so future guidance reflects commercial conditions.
- The project will compare older and newer PLRV variants with current aphid populations to understand why the virus is spreading more readily. The findings should show when and where crops face the greatest risk, sharpen monitoring and control decisions, and help the industry target action more effectively.

"Grounded Agronomy is investing because the potato industry needs research that improves decisions in the field. CIC-START brings researchers, growers, advisers and commercial partners together to test ideas against real production challenges and turn the results into guidance growers can use," Eric said. **BPR**

‘Don’t scrimp on the fungicides’

Higher rainfall prompts warning for growers to finish blight programmes to protect against resistant strains, despite low number of outbreaks in 2026.

FUNGICIDE programmes need to be kept up to protect potato crops against the spread of resistant late blight strains as rain returns, growers have been reminded.

Agrii’s Lead Technical Advisor for potatoes, Ed Maule, and Senior Research Development Scientist at the James Hutton Institute, Dr David Cooke, have both issued some timely advice in light of the recent rainfall volumes.

“We learned last year that even in a dry year it can still turn wet late in the season and then, all of a sudden, EU_43 or EU_46 appears,” Ed said.

Fight Against Blight monitoring has not detected EU_43 this season, although the other new resistant strain, EU_46, has been detected in two separate outbreaks, David said.

“Now we have had some rain, it’s good to put some focus back onto blight programmes,” he said. “It can still infect low levels of green leaf late in the season, and volunteers will need managing.”

Fight Against Blight, which is run by the James Hutton Institute and supported by sponsors across the potato industry, has continued monitoring pathogen strains and resistance this year. It has reported outbreak numbers remaining well below average following an initially dry period that suppressed early primary infections.

But the returning autumn rains have prompted warnings for growers not to cut back fungicide programmes too early.

The fact that EU_43 was first detected on a volunteer last autumn highlights this risk, David said.



Dr David Cooke, Senior Research Development Scientist at the James Hutton Institute

“We found EU_46 at two sites this season, just before it got really dry. One in Shropshire and one in Lancashire. We aren’t entirely sure of the origins, but the evidence points to ingress from airborne spores because, in one case, the infection spread across the field,” he said.

“Fortunately, these outbreaks have been controlled by good programmes, alternating chemistry, and a bit of luck because of the weather becoming so dry.”

So far this season, the main focus in the East has been on *Alternaria* and keeping crops green, Ed added.

“We have some varieties like Nectar that can produce big yields, but we have really had to focus on canopy retention if we are going to hit that potential with late season bulking,” he said.

Because of this, his programmes have leaned toward anything with an elicitation or plant-stimulus effect. Products like Voyager (valifenalate and fluazinam) and Privest (ametoctradin and potassium phosphonates) have featured heavily. Ed has also used a lot of Innocul8, which is a peptide-based plant defence elicitor.



Ed Maule, Agrii's Lead Technical Advisor for potatoes

“Innocul8 also provides the plant with zinc and manganese. Foliar feeds have been another important part of spray programmes this year to maintain a healthy canopy,” he said.

However, with attention once again turning to late blight for the final few weeks of the season, programmes will need tweaking towards late blight and tuber blight, Ed said. Intervals may also reduce.

“Where there is still green leaf that needs protecting from blight, Lieto (cymoxanil + zoxamide) will form the backbone of programmes from now on. We will alternate with Ranman Top (cyazofamid), Shinkon (amisulbrom) or Infinito (fluopicolide + propamocarb) for tuber blight protection.

“Even though this season will largely be known for very low pressure, we knew at the start that it would still need a flexible approach,” said Ed.

To report a blight outbreak to Fight Against Blight, visit the organisation’s website at www.blight.hutton.ac.uk/ 

Potential dual role of liming

LIMING, far from being 'a no-no' before potato crops, could play an important role in maximising nutrient uptake, improving skin quality and minimising incidence of key diseases, it has been claimed.

Previous theories about liming in front of potato crops increasing the risk of common scab have largely been disproven by trials by British Sugar and others in the past decades, even if the last version of AHDB's Fertiliser bible, RB209, for potatoes published in 2021 still suggests that liming should be avoided unless soil pH is very low.

One good reason for applying lime is to maximise nutrient availability, says independent potato agronomist John Sarup from Spud Agronomy.

"Lime is extremely important," he says. "We're now spending an increasing amount of money on fertiliser, so we have to make sure we are maximising its nutrient efficiency, and one way is to make sure pH is optimal."

A number of the growers he advises are using LimeX from British Sugar, primarily for that reason, he says. "But they are also seeing a better skin finish and quality generally."

Common scab could be one skin finish condition LimeX is helping with, despite the misconception that it increases risk. British Sugar trials in 2012-2015 and repeated in 2024 found reductions of up to 50% in scabbed tubers where LimeX had been applied to fields before potato planting.

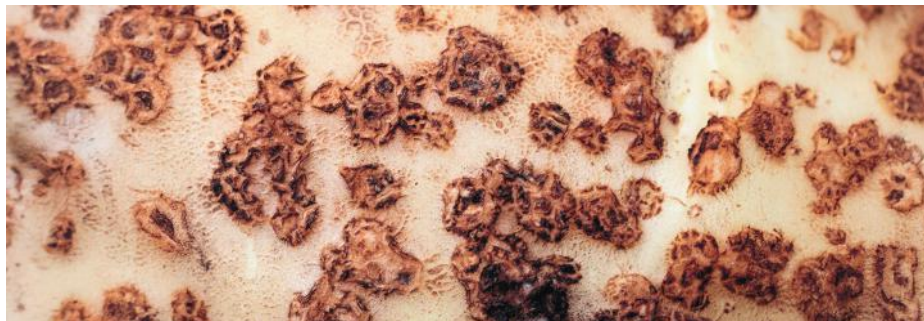
Maintaining adequate moisture around tubers for up to six weeks following tuber initiation remains the key focus for controlling common scab, John says. "But we've seen enough data to know that liming can help."

Surprisingly in such a dry summer, John said common scab infections are lower than normal on his grower's farms. "I think that might have been because there was no moisture at tuber initiation at all and the *Streptomyces scabiei* bacteria that cause common scab literally couldn't move in the soil to infect the plants."

It's not the first very dry year where common scab incidence is less common than in a more normal year, he said. Where he has seen common scab this season, it's been in processing crops where the timing of irrigation was not targeted at tuber initiation.

LimeX Business Manager, Glenn Carlisle from British Sugar explains that the fine particle size of LimeX rapidly increases available calcium in the root zone ahead of planting, with over 250kg of elemental calcium

Overcoming common scab in potatoes could be a further advantage to a nutrient maximiser, says agronomist.



Common scab could be one skin finish condition LimeX is helping with.

applied in every tonne. One of the roles of calcium in plant cells is to strengthen cell walls.

"When growing a scab-susceptible variety, such as Maris Piper, making sure the plant has an abundance of available calcium in the soil will help with common scab control," he said. "As the plant will transport calcium to areas infected by the bacteria to help the plant defend itself by strengthening cell walls."

That mechanism is perhaps one reason why there has been a historic disconnect between liming and common scab, he notes. "Historic analysis of potato skins near infected areas showed a higher calcium concentration as a result of this natural defence mechanism. This led to the incorrect assumption that high levels of calcium in the soil and in the crop increase the incidence of scab rather than reduce it."

In the most recent trials in 2024, LimeX was spread in strips at 7.5t/ha and 10t/ha in a field of Maris Piper separated by an untreated 12m buffer, resulting in a 50% reduction in scab incidence in the plots receiving 10t/ha of LimeX compared with the untreated. That mirrored trials done a decade before in three separate years, where scab was reduced by LimeX applications.

"LimeX will also help reduce

calcium deficiency symptoms, like internal rust spot, as well as supplying a large proportion of the crop's requirements for nutrients such as phosphate and magnesium," said Glenn, adding that application timing would ideally be post-ploughing, pre-planting and then incorporated. "But it is better to apply when there is access to the field, rather than holding off for ideal conditions." **BPR**



Independent potato agronomist John Sarup from Spud Agronomy.



Glenn Carlisle, LimeX Business Manager



Surprisingly in such a dry summer, John reports that common scab infections are lower than normal, at least on his grower's farms.

New era for fungicide distribution

POTATO crop protection and pest control provider Nichino Europe and Bi-PA, an independent Belgian agricultural technology and biotechnology company, have entered into a strategic agreement under which Nichino Europe acquires all intellectual property rights for the patented biofungicide TEMAP® in Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA).

Because Nichino Europe is headquartered in Cambridge, UK, having fully integrated its UK subsidiary Interagro in 2025, this acquisition places the UK at the operational centre for distributing the key biological disease-management tool across the EMEA region.

TEMAP®, based on choline pelargonate, controls a range of diseases in potato crops. Extensive development work conducted by Bi-PA has demonstrated preventive, eradicated, and early curative activity against a broad spectrum of fungal diseases. TEMAP

also represents an important addition to integrated disease-management and resistance-management strategies. The recent classification of choline pelargonate within the FRAC BM 03 group further supports its role as a valuable tool for growers to manage resistance development.

Managing Director of Nichino Europe, Manfred Hilweg, said: “We are excited to add TEMAP®, a product we have successfully trialled for several years, to our portfolio which will expand our offering of differentiated and efficient technologies to support plant health.

CEO of Bi-PA, Johan De Saegher, added: “TEMAP® is one of the most important innovations developed by Bi-PA in recent years, reflecting our commitment to bringing novel and sustainable crop protection solutions to the market. We are delighted to partner with Nichino Europe.”

Focus change for crop protection provider

CROP protection and digital biological solutions provider Corteva has recently ‘spun off’ its seed and genetics department, which has become an independent, standalone company named Vylor.

Both Vylor and Corteva are now independent, publicly traded companies owned by shareholders.

The move means that Corteva can now concentrate purely on crop protection chemicals, biologicals, and digital ag tools. At the same time, Vylor, which will operate independently under CEO Chuck Magro, will be able to concentrate 100% of its R&D, capital deployment, and strategic partnerships on seed germplasm, gene editing, and trait pipelines (such as 4,000+ germplasm patents and hybrid wheat platforms) without competing internally with chemical/crop protection priorities.

Between 2020 and 2025, the crop protection business increased revenue by over \$1 billion which included the establishment of a biologicals and natural products platform, and agtech evolution.



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Reasons to be cheerful, part three...

Despite an exceptionally difficult season, the British potato industry can find reasons for optimism through coordinated supply chain actions according to **Graham Bannister**, Development Manager at GB Potatoes.

AFTER the season potato growers have endured, 'Reasons to Be Cheerful' may sound like an odd title, but those of a certain age will remember Ian Dury and the Blockheads' 1979 song, which found reasons for optimism during a difficult decade.

That feels appropriate today. There is no point pretending that things are easy, but neither should we overlook the work being done to give this industry a stronger future.

This has been an exceptionally difficult year for most potato growers. Prolonged heat and drought have restricted crop growth, and although harvesting is still under way, national yields will be down. The supply chain will make fuller use of the crop that is available, including a wider range of sizes and specifications, to meet market demand.

However, that should not be mistaken for a windfall for growers. Many will struggle to produce enough crop to fulfil their contracts. If spot prices rise significantly, most growers

will have little or no uncommitted crop left to sell on the spot market because everything they have produced will be needed for existing customers. A higher headline price cannot compensate for missing tonnes, higher costs and a season carrying this level of risk.

This season comes on top of wider pressures that are already well documented. Input costs can be changed by a single international event or political statement. Successive periods of extreme heat and drought have exposed the sector's reliance on secure access to water. The plant protection product toolbox continues to shrink, while regulation and market requirements become more demanding. It is entirely understandable that growers are questioning whether the risk is still worth taking. Yet there remain good reasons to believe in the potato and in the future of the sector, provided the industry acts together.

Start with the potato itself. Few foods offer consumers the same combination of nutrition, versatility, flavour and value



for money. Potatoes provide vitamins and minerals, complement almost any meal and make productive use of a relatively small area of land. That is a strong proposition at a time when household budgets, sustainable food production and national food security all matter.

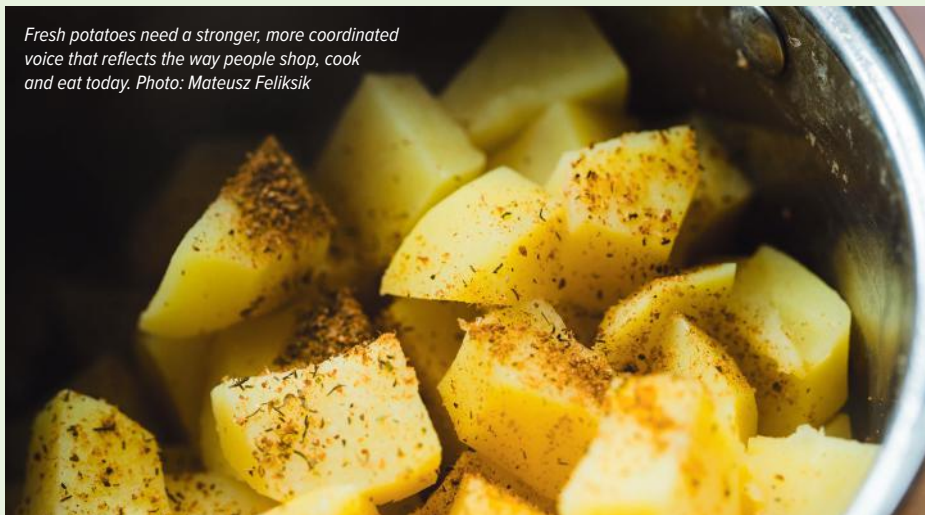
Halting the decline

We need to do more to halt the decline in fresh potato consumption. Changes in lifestyles and eating habits have increased demand for the convenience offered by processed potato products, which have also benefited from substantial and sustained investment in advertising. This has helped processed products remain attractive and relevant to today's consumers, while fresh potatoes have had a much quieter voice. The decline is therefore in fresh potato consumption, rather than across every part of the potato market.

However, that decline is not inevitable. Ireland has shown what can be achieved through sustained, coordinated promotion, first halting and then reversing the decline in fresh potato consumption. That experience gives us confidence that we can achieve the same in Great Britain.

GB Potatoes has therefore appointed an advertising agency to develop a promotional campaign that reminds consumers of the value, nutrition, versatility and convenience of fresh potatoes. Fresh potatoes need a stronger, more coordinated voice that reflects the way people shop, cook and eat today. A campaign that benefits the whole sector will require support beyond GB Potatoes' existing membership, but we are ready to coordinate that effort.

Fresh potatoes need a stronger, more coordinated voice that reflects the way people shop, cook and eat today. Photo: Mateusz Feliksik



Preparing for the extreme

Water is another area where coordinated action is essential. We need to prepare not only for drought and heat, but for increasingly variable and extreme weather. Whether there is too little water or too much, the ability to capture, store and manage it is fundamental. At a summit organised earlier this year by GB Potatoes and the National Potato Innovation Centre, growers and the supply chain made it clear that they are willing to invest in water infrastructure but need greater certainty and simpler processes. We are continuing those discussions with government and its agencies. A recent visit, organised by GB Potatoes and the Potato Processors Association, took Defra officials onto a Norfolk farm to see the practical barriers for themselves. Examples were provided of how planning, abstraction and water management could be improved for the benefit of both food production and the wider water system. Change will not happen overnight, but the potato sector is now firmly part of that conversation.

There are also reasons for confidence in the work of plant breeders. Varieties with greater resilience to heat, drought, pests and disease will be central to the industry's future. Progress on resistance to late blight and potato cyst nematode shows what can be achieved, and attention is increasingly turning to virus resistance. Through the National

Virus Forum, problems are being identified, research is being coordinated and practical answers are being developed. New varieties and new approaches will only succeed if growers, breeders, processors and retailers work together. Alongside this, we are working with Horticultural Crop Protection where we have a risk register for current plant protection products, identify future threats and, where possible, will pursue emergency authorisations that give the industry time to adapt. GB Potatoes' role is to connect this work and make it useful and accessible to growers.

Making consequences understood

The same principle applies to the proposed Sanitary and Phytosanitary agreement with the European Union. Potatoes face plant-health and trade issues, so our industry must be represented in the discussions shaping the agreement. Our Chair, Alex Godfrey, and CEO, Scott Walker, are involved in the relevant groups, ensuring that the practical consequences for seed, ware potatoes and the supply chain are understood by the people making the decisions and that the industry's voice is heard.

So, no, this is not a cheerful year for most growers, and optimism must never become an excuse to understate the pressures they face. But difficult seasons make coordinated action

more important, not less. Across water, crop protection, breeding, trade and promotion, a great deal of practical work is under way. The task now is to turn that work into changes that rebuild confidence and give growers sound reasons to keep investing in potatoes. If ever the industry needed a body representing the whole supply chain, it is now.

If you would like to get involved, take up our grower membership promotional offer or share your thoughts and concerns, please contact Scott, Alex or Graham. Our website and newsletter also carry a range of industry information. We will be at Potato Confex in Lincolnshire in November, so please stop by our stand for a chat. And if some '70s music is your thing, look up 'Reasons to Be Cheerful, Part 3'. Ian Dury overcame considerable adversity to build a lasting career that brought pleasure to many - rather like the potato! 



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WELCOME to the first-ever British Potato Confex! We're delighted to bring the industry together at Lincolnshire Showground for two days of networking, innovation and industry insight.

Building on the success of *British Potato Review*, the *British Potato Industry Awards* and our flagship *British Potato Industry Event* in Harrogate, Confex is the latest addition to our commitment to supporting, connecting and celebrating the British potato industry. Taking place every other year, between our larger Harrogate exhibitions, Confex has been created to keep the industry connected, informed and moving forward.

Combining a conference and exhibition, the event brings together industry experts, leading suppliers and professionals from across the potato supply chain to share ideas, discover solutions and tackle the challenges and opportunities ahead.

With expert-led seminars, an exciting new Education, Knowledge & Skills Area and plenty of opportunities to connect, there's something for everyone.

We hope you enjoy the very first British Potato Confex!

If you haven't yet got your free ticket, scan the QR code on page 21 or visit our website at www.britishpotato.co.uk/industry-event/british-potato-confex-26/

The British Potato team

Education, Knowledge and Skills Hub

THE future of the British potato industry depends not just on innovation and technology, but on the people, knowledge and skills that drive it forward.

That's why we're excited to introduce a brand-new concept at British Potato Confex 2026 - the Education, Knowledge and Skills Hub, supported by its very own dedicated seminar stage.

Created to champion learning, professional development and the next generation of industry talent, this exciting new addition aims to bring together organisations and experts who can help individuals and businesses develop the skills they need to succeed.

Whether you're starting your career, looking to expand your knowledge or seeking opportunities to develop your team, the area will provide a valuable space to discover training, qualifications, mentoring and research opportunities, while making connections with those helping to shape the industry's future. Featuring in the area are:

- **BASIS:** BASIS supports people working across agriculture, land management and food production through recognised qualifications, training and continuing professional development. Its courses cover crop protection, plant nutrition and environmental management, helping individuals build technical knowledge and professional skills.
- **TwoCan:** TwoCan Mentor provides structured mentoring for people working across food, farming and agriculture. Its approach connects participants with mentors who offer a fresh perspective, a sounding board and support with professional development.
- **Potato Storage Insight Ltd:** Potato Storage Insight provides independent advice, training and technical support to help growers and store managers improve their understanding of potato storage. It combines practical experience with guidance on managing crop quality, storage costs and challenges faced during storage.
- **CIC-START:** The Crop Innovation Centre – Skills, Technology And Research Training programme — brings together universities, research expertise and industry partners to develop the next generation of crop scientists. A partnership between The James Hutton Institute's Crop Innovation Centre, and Universities of Dundee, Nottingham and Harper Adams, and connected to through its National Potato Innovation Centre, the programme supports postgraduate research addressing practical challenges in the potato and cereal industries, including crop and soil health, sustainable production and waste reduction.
- **Lincoln Institute for Agri-Food Technology:** The Lincoln Institute for Agri-Food Technology (LIAT) at the University of Lincoln provides a range of academic, vocational, and industry-led training opportunities relevant to the potato sector. Its Riseholme Campus features a working mixed farm, crop trial plots, refrigeration research units, and agri-food robotics test track.
- **Branston Ltd:** Branston provides comprehensive training and development pathways across the potato and fresh produce supply chain, spanning internal apprenticeships, graduate schemes, logistics driver programs, and wider industry leadership initiatives.

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A special thank you to our sponsors Wyma and Tong Engineering, for their valued support in bringing the first-ever British Potato Confex to life. Their contribution helps us create more opportunities for the industry to come together, share knowledge and build a stronger future for British potatoes.





Two stages of insight, innovation and industry expertise

There's plenty to learn at British Potato Confex 2026, with a packed seminar programme bringing together industry experts, leading voices and practical advice across two days.

THE Main Seminar Stage at British Potato Confex 2026 will host a series of engaging talks and panel discussions tackling some of the biggest challenges and opportunities facing the potato industry today.

From crop protection and storage costs to automation, sustainability and future growth, the programme promises valuable insights, expert opinions and ideas you can put into practice.

We're introducing a dedicated Education, Knowledge and Skills Stage, offering even more opportunities to learn.

With sessions focusing on training, mentoring, professional development and career progression, this exciting addition aims to

support the next generation of talent while helping those already working in the industry build their knowledge and skills.

Whether you're looking for practical solutions, fresh perspectives or opportunities to develop your expertise, there's something for everyone.

Earn BASIS and NRoSO CPD Points at Confex

There's an opportunity to make your visit to British Potato Confex 2026 even more rewarding if you're BASIS or NRoSO-registered. You can earn valuable CPD points by attending the event, exploring the seminar programme and taking part in the BASIS Knowledge Trail.

BASIS-Registered Visitors can claim up to six points per day, including two points for attending the event and up to four additional points by participating in the BASIS Knowledge Trail or attending seminars (one point per seminar).

NRoSO-registered Visitors can claim up to six CPD points for one day only, including two points for attendance and up to four additional points through the BASIS Knowledge Trail or seminars (one point per seminar).

You'll find the BASIS team in the Education, Knowledge & Skills Area. Make sure you visit their stand to register your attendance and collect your BASIS Knowledge Trail card so you can start earning points during your visit.

WEDNESDAY

MAIN STAGE

10:00 – 10:45

Automation in the grading line

Chair: Tom Stevenson

Speakers: David Wilson – Sales Manager, Tong Engineering; Tom Harrison – HDF Farming Ltd; George Crane – Hugh Crane Ltd.

As cost pressures increase, and access to good staff becomes ever harder we take a look at one option that may help to overcome these issues. Optical sorting has come on in leaps and bounds over the last few years and is now suitable for on farm applications, but does it justify its cost? We will hear from two growers who have installed an optical sorter into their grading lines. George Crane of Hugh Crane Ltd has put in a completely new grading line incorporating an optical sorter whereas Tom Harrison of HDF Farming has installed one into an existing system. David Wilson of Tong Engineering will be talking about the options available and the practicalities involved with implementing this advanced technology. The session will be Chaired by Tom Stevenson MD of G A Stevenson Ltd potato growers and arable farmers from Essex.

11:30 – 12:15

Reducing the cost of Potato storage

Chair: Adrian Cunnington. Director – Potato Storage Insight Ltd.

Speakers: David Armstrong – Abbey Farm, Lincolnshire; Andy Blair – Field Technical Manager, Branston Ltd; Ray Andrew – Crop Systems Ltd.

As all costs involved in the production of potatoes come under scrutiny, storage has become ever more important. In Lincolnshire David Armstrong has had impressive results with the changes he has made to his store, seeing a large reduction in the energy costs. At this seminar you can hear how David has achieved this using the services of Ray Andrews of Crop Systems and assisted by Branston Ltd. Adrian Cunnington of Potato Storage Insight will chair the session and Ray Andrews and Andy Blair (Branston) will go through the processes involved that have achieved the significant reductions in energy use. David Armstrong will be on hand to answer questions and talk about his store in more detail.





14:00 – 14:45

No Mancozeb: The impact on late blight and Alternaria

Chair: John Sarup – Independent Agronomist

Speakers: Dr David E L Cooke – Head of the Plant Pathology group at the James Hutton Institute; Andy Cunningham - Syngenta UK Potato Technical manager.

2026 has been the first season without the ability to use the highly effective fungicide, Mancozeb. How has this affected the spread of blight and its new variants? Not only late blight could be impacted, but Alternaria Solani, or early blight, as mancozeb would have played a part in its control.

Dr. David Cooke of Fight Against Blight, (FAB) will present the results from the FAB project for 2026 and look at possible effects on Alternaria, then Andy Cunningham of Syngenta will talk through the programmes available post Mancozeb with an eye on Alternaria control.

The session will be chaired by John Sarup, independent agronomist with many years experience of advising on the potato crop.

EDUCATION, KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS STAGE

10:45 – 11:30

Best Practice Potato Management: A Deep Dive into Wireworm and Blight Control Strategies

Speaker: Andy Cunningham - Potato Technical Manager, Syngenta

This seminar will focus on advanced agronomic solutions for two of the crop's most destructive pressures. The session will cover soil pest management, late blight/resistance stewardship and Alternaria, as well as previewing Revus Neo. In terms of soil pest management, he will give a practical overview of pest control strategies including PCN & wireworm. Looking at late blight and resistance stewardship, Andy will give a review of 2026 disease pressure, resistance traits and how to build spray programmes using mixtures, alternation and application timing. His Revus Neo preview will look at maximising mandipropamid against phytophthora infestans and his Alternaria focus will look at life after mancozeb, giving an overview of the disease, resistance considerations and control options, including AMPHORE Plus and a preview of Adepidyn.

12:15 – 13:00

Mentoring: the key to unlock your future

Speaker: Helen Wyman – Founder of TwoCan

Every great career has a secret ingredient, and it's rarely luck. It's the person who believed in you before you did, asked the question you were dodging, or opened a door you didn't know was there.

Helen Wyman of TwoCan® Mentor shares the journey that shaped their own path, and the people who changed its direction. Expect honest talk about what mentors can do, what they can't, and why mentoring and coaching are not the same thing.

Whether you're growing a business, a team or yourself, you'll leave with practical tools to try the very next day. Come and find your key, then choose which doors to open.

13:00 – 13:15

CIC-START: A postgraduate student programme to develop the next generation of potato industry professionals

Speaker: Ian Toth – James Hutton Institute

Professor Ian Toth is heavily involved with CIC-START through his leadership at the James Hutton Institute, providing strategic leadership representation, working directly with potato sector stakeholders to gather feedback on their major agricultural bottlenecks and acting as a primary advocate for the project's goal to address critical skill shortages. CIC-START – the Crop Innovation Centre – Skills, Technology And Research Training programme – brings together universities, research expertise and industry partners to develop the next generation of crop scientists. Based at The James Hutton Institute's Crop Innovation Centre, and connected to its National Potato Innovation Centre, the programme supports postgraduate research addressing practical challenges in the potato and cereal industries, including crop and soil health, sustainable production and waste reduction. It is a partnership between The James Hutton Institute's Crop Innovation Centre, and Universities of Dundee, Nottingham and Harper Adams

14:45 – 15:30

Irrigation management and soil moisture monitoring

Speaker: Peter White – Soil Moisture Sense

Peter White, Director and co-founder of Soil Moisture Sense, emphasises that effective irrigation management requires objective data rather than guesswork. Drawing on more than a decade of providing crop decision support across hundreds of farms, Peter will highlight how continuous multi-depth soil monitoring unlocks precision agriculture. His talk will cover how by accurately tracking the root zone, potato growers can establish clear 'full' and 'refill' thresholds. This exact tracking ensures crops never experience moisture stress while preventing waterlogging and nutrient leaching. Utilising advanced Sentek hardware, Peter's approach delivers reliable data directly to growers. Peter will demonstrate how data-driven scheduling optimises water resources, boosts yields, and builds long-term farm resilience.

BASIS Registered Visitors - Claim up to six points per day

NROSO Registered Visitors - Claim up to six CPD points for one day only

Visit the BASIS Stand! Find the team in the Education, Knowledge & Skills Area.





THURSDAY

MAIN STAGE

10:00 – 10:45

Cover crops: What is all the fuss about?

Chair: Andy Knaggs – COO, CUPGRA

Speakers: Dr. Nathan Morris - Senior Specialist - Farming Systems and Soils, NIAB; Dr Kate Smith - Principal Research Scientist, ADAS; Andrew Webster – AW & MA Webster

Cover crops are becoming an important part of the rotation and are widely being used ahead of potatoes. But what are the benefits and pitfalls of cover cropping? Dr. Nathan Morris of NIAB will discuss the benefits and pitfalls of cover cropping and their impact on soil structure and fertility. Dr. Kate Smith of ADAS will then talk through the newly launched decision tree which is aimed at making the decision-making process simpler.

Finally, Andrew Webster, potato grower from Lancashire and long-time user of cover crops will talk about his experience of cover crops in a potato rotation. The session will be chaired by Andy Knaggs, the COO of CUPGRA who's experience across a variety of crops will lend a whole rotation perspective to the discussion.

11:30 – 12:15

Drivers for growth in the potato industry

Chair: Jamie Lockhart - Managing Director of Frederick Hiam

Speakers: Alex Godfrey - Grower and Chair of GB Potatoes; Prof. Ian Toth - Director of NPIC

In June, GB Potatoes and the National Potato Innovation Centre (NPIC) hosted a summit in London looking at what was needed to create growth in the potato industry.

Bringing together all sectors of the industry and including Government, regulators, retailers, growers and researchers the day looked at what was holding the industry back and what was needed to drive it forward.

The seminar will be chaired by Jamie Lockhart, Managing Director of Frederick Hiam and representing the NFU Potato Policy Forum who will give his perspective from the day and Alex Godfrey, Grower and Chair of GB Potatoes with Professor Ian Toth Director of NPIC will discuss the findings and actions brought up at the summit.

14:00 – 14:45

In Conversation with Alistair Carmichael MP, Chair of the EFRA Committee

Speaker: Alistair Carmichael MP

The EFRA Committee is a cross-party House of Commons Select Committee responsible for scrutinising the work of Defra and its arm's-length bodies. Chaired by Alistair Carmichael MP, Member for Orkney and Shetland, the Committee examines some of the most significant issues facing food, farming and the rural economy.

In recent years, the Committee has investigated topics including changes to inheritance tax relief for farm businesses, the UK-EU Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) agreement, supply chain fairness, and agricultural innovation through visits and roundtables across the sector. Most recently, Committee members attended seven agricultural shows across the UK, speaking directly with farmers and rural stakeholders to understand the challenges and opportunities facing the industry.

In this session, Alistair will provide an insight into the Committee's work, what it has been hearing from the farming community, and the issues likely to shape its future agenda. There will also be an opportunity for questions.

EDUCATION, KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS STAGE

10:45 – 11:30

Storage training courses

Speaker: Adrian Cunningham - Director of Potato Storage Insight Ltd.

Adrian Cunningham's consultancy, Potato Storage Insight (PSI), runs highly-recognised courses for commercial potato store managers. In his talk, he will give details of the annual two-day residential Store Managers' Course that he has run for the past 30-plus years and will be running again in 2027, while also discussing BASIS modules including the BASIS Crop Protection IPM (Stored Potatoes) qualification, contributions to Advanced Potato BASIS, Scottish training in conjunction with SAC as well as options for bespoke training for specific supply chains, including shorter courses or courses for specific sectors.



A special thank you goes to Graham Bannister of GB Potatoes for his invaluable support in bringing together this year's Main Stage seminar programme. His knowledge, expertise and dedication have helped shape a fantastic line-up of informative and engaging sessions, and we're extremely grateful for his contribution.



12:15 – 13:00

BASIS Knowledge Trail: NRoSO CPD and Best Practice

Speaker: *Emiel Grobler – Technical Manager*

As the Technical Manager at BASIS Registration responsible for developing the National Register of Sprayer Operators (NRoSO) training course, Emiel Grobler will speak about the BASIS Knowledge Trail, an interactive, event-based initiative designed for National Register of Sprayer Operators (NRoSO) and BASIS members to earn Continuous Professional Development (CPD) points. Managed by BASIS Registration Ltd on behalf of the Voluntary Initiative (VI), the scheme rewards participants for engaging in technical, stand-focused education and best-practice discussions). Both schemes help growers and farm businesses prove competence, meet legal and safety standards, and comply with farm assurance schemes and there will be an opportunity to learn more about how this works.



WEDNESDAY SEMINARS AND TALKS

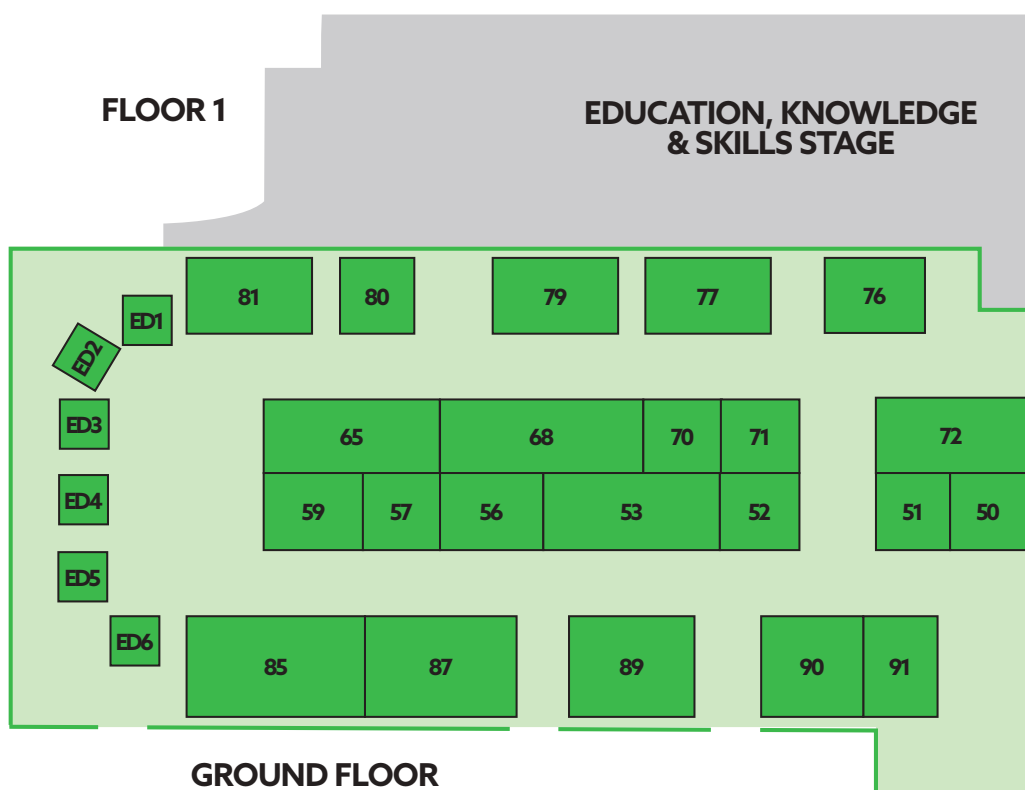
MAIN STAGE	EDUCATION, KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS STAGE
10:00 – 10:45 Automation in the grading line	10:45 - 11:30 Best Practice Potato Management: A Deep Dive into Wireworm and Blight Control Strategies
11:30 – 12:15 Reducing cost of Potato Storage	12:15 - 13:00 Mentoring: The key to unlock your future
14:00 – 14:45 No Mancozeb: The impact on late blight and Alternaria	13:00 - 13:15 CIC-START: A postgraduate student programme to develop the next generation of potato industry professionals
	14:45 - 15:30 Irrigation management and soil moisture monitoring

THURSDAY SEMINARS AND TALKS

MAIN STAGE	EDUCATION, KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS STAGE
10:00 – 10:45 Nutrition and cover cropping	10:45 - 11:30 Storage training courses
11:30 - 12:15 Drivers for growth in the potato sector	12:15 - 13:00 BASIS Knowledge Trail: NRoSO CPD and Best Practice
14:00 - 14:45 In Conversation with Alistair Carmichael MP, Chair of the EFRA Committee	



SITE PLAN 2026

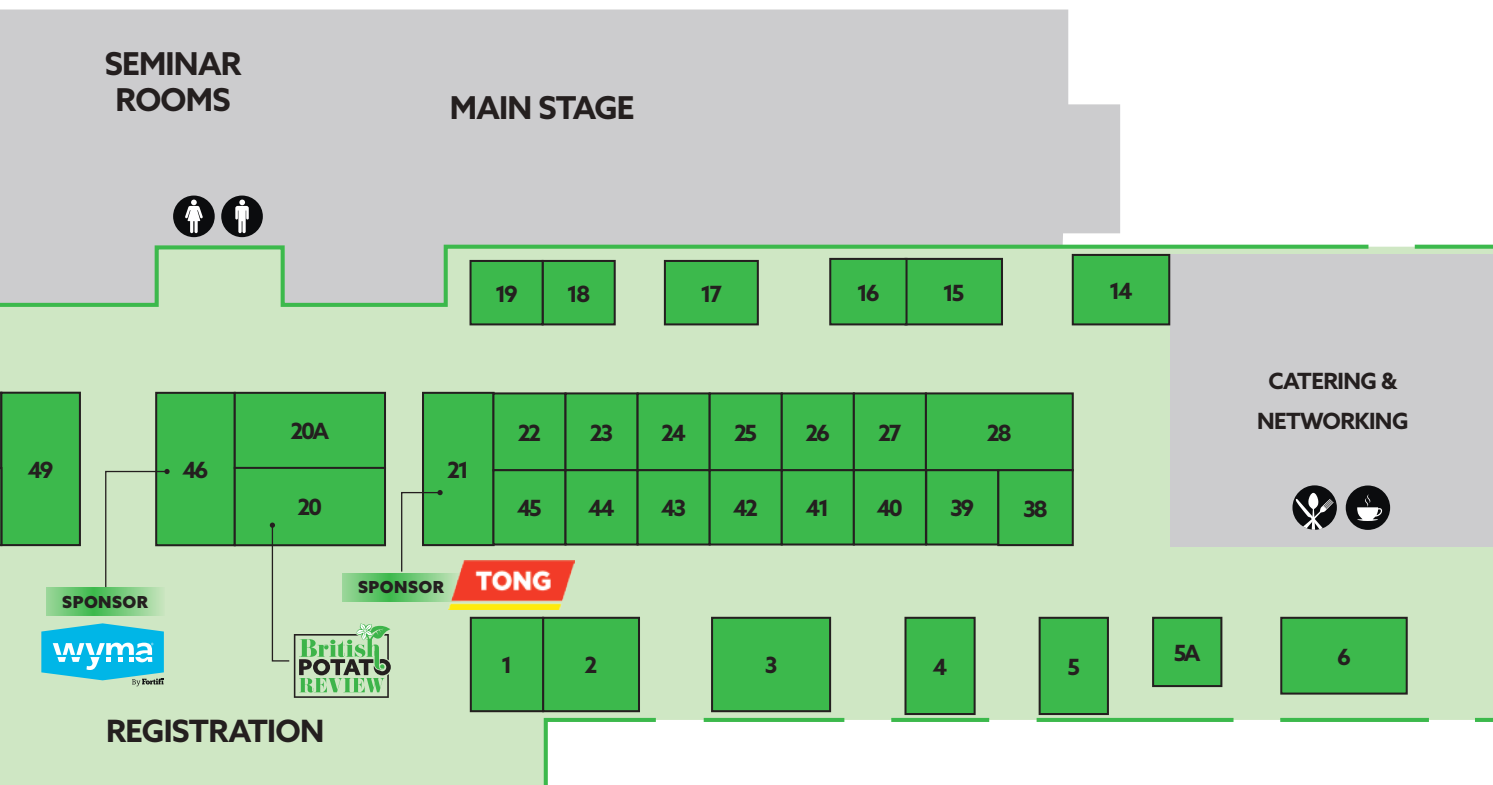


British Potato Industry Confex 2026: Exhibition hall

VISITORS to the British Potato Confex 2026 will be able to engage directly with those offering services, products and guidance on topics including:

- Agricultural machinery and engineering
 - Agronomy and crop protection
 - Seed potato suppliers
 - Crop storage and climate preservation
 - Agtech and precision harvesting
 - Packaging and logistics
 - Industrial component manufacturing
- Exhibitors are listed below in alphabetical order.

Company name:	Stand	Business/organisation type
APROLIS UK	39	Materials handling and industrial equipment
BASF PLC	70	Biotechnology and crop protection
BASIS REG LTD	19	Auditing and awarding organisation
BRADLEY ENGINEERING LTD	68	Automation and machinery
BRADLEY REFRIGERATION LTD	22	Storage climate control and cooling
BRITISH POTATO REVIEW MAGAZINE	20	News and information platforms
CLAYTON PLANT PROTECTION LTD	16	Agrochemicals supplier and distributor
CLIFTON RUBBER COMPANY LIMITED	52	Crop machinery components
CORNERSTONE SYSTEMS LTD	77	Storage monitoring and control systems
COVERIS WINSFORD	5A	Packing Solutions
CROP SYSTEMS LIMITED	87	Box and bulk storage systems
DOWNS VISION LTD	85	Handling, grading, and storage equipment
EMERALD RESEARCH LIMITED	20A	Research, soil science, and crop nutrition
EUROPLANT PFLANZENZUCHT GMBH	26	Breeding and seed supply
FARM ELECTRONICS LIMITED	2	Crop stores and storage control systems
FRESH PRODUCE CONSORTIUM	25	Trade association
FRONTIER AGRICULTURE LTD	28	Input supplier and agronomy
GB POTATOES ORGANISATION LTD	18	Membership organisation
H L HUTCHINSON LTD	72	Input supplier and agronomy
HK TIMBERS LTD	89	Storage and handling box supplier
HOWSEMAN AGRISUPPLIES LTD	59	Irrigation/liquid nutrition systems
HUB 4 PARTS LTD	56	Agricultural machinery components
JSE SYSTEMS LIMITED	17	Soil health, crop nutrition, field preparation
MARTIN LISHMAN LTD	45	Post-harvest and storage solutions
MITCHELL-ROWLANDS	6	Field machinery supplier
NATURALLI	50	Wooden storage crates
NERG LTD	14	Energy-saving systems for storage/supply
NEWTEC ODENSE (UK) LTD	41	Weighing, packing and sorting machinery
NICHINO EUROPE CO LTD	53	Agrochemical and plant health solutions
NOVALUX	38	Energy-saving systems for storage/supply
OMEX AGRICULTURE LIMITED	80	Crop Nutrition



OMNIVENT UK LTD	57	Storage monitoring and control systems
PAN ANGLIA (COUNTRY MERCHANTS) LIMITED	51	Crop machinery components
PELLCROFT ENGINEERING LTD	91	Storage and seed handling equipment
PLOEGER UK LIMITED	15	Harvesting equipment
PROJX SERVICES LTD	65	Processing and handling equipment
RECYCLED CROP NUTRIENTS LTD	4	Fertilisation and nutrition
RESTRAIN COMPANY LTD	49	Storage crop treatment
RGS FORFAR LTD T/A SCANSTONE	90	Soil preparation and harvesting machines
RIPON FARM SERVICES	27	Cultivation equipment and technology
ROVENSA	23	Biological control and nutrition
ROWLINSON PACKAGING LIMITED	3	Wooden storage crates
RPS MACHINERY	76	Processing, grading and handling equipment
SCOTT'S PRECISION MANUFACTURING LTD	79	Field, handling and separation equipment
STATECH SOLUTIONS LTD	5	Processing and machinery manufacturing
STANDEN ENGINEERING LTD	1	Field and post-harvest machinery
STORED CROP CONSERVATION LTD	71	Storage fogging and spraying systems
SYNGENTA UK LIMITED	40	Crop protection, seed care, and solutions
TEAM SPRAYERS LTD	81	Field and storage application equipment
THE MACHINE INSTALL COMPANY LTD (TMIC)	42	Washing and handling equipment
TIMAC AGRO UK LIMITED	24	Nutrition and soil conditioning
TONG ENGINEERING LTD	21	Handling, grading, washing, processing
WELVENT LTD	44	Storage cooling, ventilation and control
WROOT WATER LTD	43	Irrigation and moisture monitoring
WYMA	46	Post-harvest handling equipment

Skills hub exhibitors	
BASIS Registration Ltd	ED1
TwoCan Mentor	ED2
Potato Storage Insight Ltd	ED3
CIC-START	ED4
Lincoln Institute for Agri-Food Technology	ED5
Branston Ltd	ED6

About the speakers ...

An A-to-Z of who'll be sharing their insights on our main seminar stage.

A

Ray Andrew

Ray Andrews is the founder and Managing Director of Crop Systems Ltd, a market-leading agricultural technology firm based in Happisburgh, Norfolk. With a career spanning more than four decades in agriculture, Ray has established himself as a highly-respected authority within the potato growing and crop preservation community. He is a prominent industry voice, actively campaigning for UK potato storage research and advising growers on navigating volatile in-store sprout suppressants with automatic fogging control.



Under Ray's leadership, Crop Systems Ltd has spent more than 27 years designing, manufacturing, and installing bespoke crop storage ventilation, refrigeration, and control systems. The company's award-winning innovations—including the SmartStor® controllers, SmartSola®, WarmStor®, and TaperStor®- focusing heavily on maximising energy efficiency for potato, onion and grain storage.

Most recently, the company introduced UltraStor®, an innovative system utilising next-generation fan and evaporator coil designs to achieve ultra-low energy usage. Validated by three-year trials in collaboration with TuberNetzero and Innovate UK, UltraStor® minimises weight loss in stored crops while reducing electricity costs by up to 45%.

David Armstrong

David, of Abbey Farm, Lincolnshire, has been growing potatoes for over 35 years on his farm in mid-Lincolnshire. As a business he grows around 70 hectares each year, of approximately 50% packing Maris Piper, 25% packing whites and 25% crisping. He works on a long rotation of at least 10 years and has invested heavily over the years in the potato enterprise. From initially building bulk ambient stores he has now invested in cold stores, drip irrigation and most recently the new energy efficient refrigeration unit from Crop Systems.



"Potatoes have always been a huge passion of mine, so being part of the Innovate UK Net Zero project alongside Branston, B-hive, Lincoln University and Crop Systems was a huge honour. The new refrigeration technology from Crop Systems is revolutionary and has transformed our potato storage."

B

Andy Blair

Now Field Technical Manager at Branston Ltd, Andy grew up on a family farm in Yorkshire and studied at Nottingham University. His passion for fresh produce kick-started with Management Development Services. Spending two years in four different businesses opened his eyes to the scale and diversity that fresh produce could offer. Through his career, he has been involved in many different fresh produce crops, always supplying into retail, holding growing, technical and general management roles with Emmett UK and TH Clements. The opportunity to join Branston has allowed him to combine growing, technical, agronomy and building grower relationships. He said pushing potato growing towards net zero has been an exciting challenge and an opportunity to link growing at scale with groundbreaking research.



C

Alistair Carmichael MP

Alistair Carmichael MP is one of the most prominent agricultural advocates in Westminster, currently serving as the Chair of the House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Select Committee. Elected as the Liberal Democrat MP for Orkney and Shetland in 2001, his background as an islander and a hill farmer's son heavily shapes his political focus on food security, supply chain equity, and rural resilience. As the Chair of the cross-party EFRA Committee since September 2024, the MP holds the crucial role of scrutinising the work of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and holding ministers to account. His legislative work directly intersects with the potato and broader horticultural sectors.



Dr David E L Cooke

Dr David Cooke is head of the Plant Pathology group at the James Hutton Institute in Dundee, UK and has over 20 years' experience in studying potato late blight, caused by *Phytophthora infestans*. He has worked with industry and research partners at national and international scales, co-ordinating the Fight Against Blight monitoring in Britain since 2006 to survey the evolving pathogen population and report to industry on the implications for disease management. He also co-ordinates the data collection, analysis and interpretation of the EuroBlight population data which gives British growers a 'heads-up' on the traits of clones of the pathogen emerging in continental Europe.



George Crane

George Crane is a co-owner and farm manager of the agricultural and farming operations at Hugh Crane Ltd, a family-run business operating out of Hall Farm in Upton, Norfolk. He runs the farming side of the business alongside family member Nicholas (Nick) Crane.

Hugh Crane Ltd grows, harvests, and grades potatoes, specialising in high-value crops and has historically exported its potatoes internationally. The farming operation focuses primarily on ware potatoes and uses a highly-adaptable grading system. It recently upgraded its grading line which has allowed the company to double its potato processing speed from 25–30 tons per hour to 50 tons per hour. Because its post-harvest grading system became so efficient, the company also expanded its field operations by investing in a four-row harvester to match the high processing speeds.



Emiel Grobler

With more than 20 years of experience across agriculture, environmental management and vegetation management, Emiel Grobler brings a wealth of practical industry knowledge to BASIS. As Technical Manager for NRoSO and Amenity, he is passionate about promoting professional standards, sharing knowledge and supporting continuing professional development across the industry.



H

Tom Harrison

Tom Harrison is a director and fourth-generation young farmer at HDF Farming Ltd, a family-run contract farming business based in Trimmingham near Cromer, North Norfolk.

With a strong focus on sustainability and innovation, HDF is actively involved in adopting new technologies and modern farming practices to improve efficiency, crop quality, and environmental performance.

Tom took over the reins of the business in 2021, and oversees more than 1,200 hectares of land, which includes cultivating 460 hectares of potatoes across rented land stretching along the North Norfolk coast.

He also manages the growth of seed potatoes under contract for various seed companies, as well as potatoes destined for processing (supplying major brands like Lamb Weston and Albert Bartlett), supermarket pre-packs, and direct sales to local markets under their own brand.



K

Andy Knaggs

Andrew Knaggs joined CUPGRA as Chief Operating Officer in January 2026, working with growers, researchers and the wider potato industry to help translate science, knowledge and research into practical value for potato production.

Andrew has more than 20 years' experience across UK agriculture and fresh produce, with a background spanning farming, operations, supply chain, procurement and commercial roles. Alongside CUPGRA, he continues to work in the leafy salads sector as Head of Farming for Agrial Fresh Farms.

Andrew also holds a number of wider industry roles, including Board positions with British Growers, Red Tractor Fresh Produce and the British Leafy Salads Association, where he chairs the Research & Development Committee. These roles give him a broad perspective across UK crop production, research, innovation and the practical challenges facing growers.



Andy Cunningham

Syngenta's UK Potato Technical manager Andy Cunningham has more than two decades of experience in independent field trials in a wide range of crops.

He joined Syngenta in 2016, taking over potato and foliar biostimulant technical responsibly in 2021.

Andy has a strong passion for potato agronomy, particularly around Late Blight and the control of it.

He is BASIS and FACTS-qualified.



Adrian Cunnington

Adrian, Director of Potato Storage Insight Ltd, has worked in potato storage since the mid-80s. He was the Head of Site for Sutton Bridge Crop Storage Research from the mid-90s until its closure in 2021. Adrian co-authored the Potato Store Managers Guide and has been involved in the subsequent revisions. He was also heavily involved in the European Association for Potato Research, co-chairing the post-harvest section from 2006 to 2014. Adrian has been a regular contributor to the World Potato Congress and helped to organise the 2012 event in Edinburgh. After the loss of Sutton Bridge, Adrian set up Potato Storage Insight, placing an emphasis on training, continuing to organise and run the annual Potato Store Managers Course. On top of everything else, he now chairs the CIPC Residues Monitoring Group tasked with submitting residue data to CRD from previously treated stores.



G

Alex Godfrey

Alex is a director of his family's Lincolnshire-based farming business, growing potatoes, sugar beet, vining peas and combinable crops. The potato operation encompasses pre-pack, chipping, crisping and seed. He is a former chairman of the NFU's Potato Forum and is the current Chair of GB Potatoes.



L

Jamie Lockhart - Managing Director for Frederick Hiam Ltd

Jamie Lockhart is Managing Director for Frederick Hiam Limited, a diverse farming and fresh produce business, with farms in Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire. With more than 100 years of history, Frederick Hiam's farms cover around 2,500 ha. The main site at Brandon Fields includes two vegetable packhouses packing potatoes and root vegetables. Frederick Hiam grows potatoes for the packing and processing markets.



M

Dr Nathan Morris

Having graduated in 2008 with a PhD in Plant Sciences from the University of Reading looking at establishing arable crops in UK cereal stubbles using strip tillage, Nathan currently works at Niab as the Farming Systems and Soils Specialist and has more than 16 years' experience in agriculture research and knowledge dissemination. He is actively involved in the knowledge exchange and farmer training activities including the Niab Training Programme and has participated in national farming events such as Cereals where over the past years the 'soil pit' has been a major attraction and involved many one-to-one discussions with growers. Nathan has a particular interest and expertise in farming systems and the impacts on soil structure and fertility whilst maintaining crop productivity. Nathan has been actively involved with many projects funded through AHDB, Defra, Innovate UK, EU Seventh Framework programme which have included the dissemination of results to groups of farmers, agronomists and allied businesses. Nathan is a full member of the British Soil Science Society, Association of Applied Biologists, International Soil Tillage Research Organisation and International Fertiliser Society and is a fully FACTS trained advisor.



S

John Sarup

An independent agronomist, John was born in London, John started life in agriculture at the age of 16 milking cows in the Yorkshire Dales. His involvement with potatoes began in 1986 when he joined farm management company Velcourt.

In 2000 John joined B&C Farming as company agronomist, further developing his knowledge of seed and ware production. In 2003 John joined SAC working closely with Dr Stuart Wale to expand SAC's services into northern England.

In 2012 John decided to go it alone and set up SPUD Agronomy & Consultancy Ltd. The need for independent agronomic advice that didn't stop when chemical sales stopped was of high value and, as a result of rapid expansion, John was joined by Rob Blades from McCain.

The business continues to grow and has an influence on more than 12,000 acres of potato production. In 2016 John won the inaugural AHDB Above and Beyond award for services to his clients and in 2025 was awarded The Farmers Weekly Farm Advisor of the Year.



He has spent time in Australia and New Zealand, speaking at conferences, and has been lucky enough to spend some winters down under working with Potatoes New Zealand.

Dr Kate Smith

Kate is a Principal Soil Scientist at ADAS with specialist knowledge of soil and nutrient management and diffuse pollution of air and water from agricultural systems. Kate has more than 14 years' experience of carrying out applied research. Her current research focuses upon cover cropping, improved nutrient management and efficacy testing of enhanced efficiency fertilisers. Her research involves both experiments carried out on commercial farms and evidence reviews. Kate is FACTS (Fertiliser Advisors Certification and Training Scheme) qualified and a full member of the British Society of Soil Science.



Tom Stevenson

Tom is Managing Director of G A Stevenson Ltd, which grows and provides long-term storage for potatoes predominantly for the packing market, on 160Ha of rented land, as well as contract farming cereals on 1400Ha.

Tom has been with the business since 2006, having initially worked with farm business consultancy before returning to the Essex-based family farming business in 2006. Following reorganisation of the family business in 2019, Tom took on the role of Managing Director of G A Stevenson Ltd which took on the potato growing enterprise of the Stevenson family and the contract farming of all the family land in addition to four external Contract Farming Agreements.

Key customers rely on G A Stevenson Ltd for the supply of predominantly King Edward potatoes towards the back end of their procurement programmes. The company's cold stores will regularly have potatoes in them more than 12 months after their harvest date.

Tom is BASIS and FACTS-qualified and is regularly involved in training students working towards their BASIS qualification, particularly focussing on potato agronomy. He is also a former director of the farmer cooperative Fram Farmers.



T

Prof. Ian Toth

Ian is a potato disease specialist at the James Hutton Institute in Dundee and a Visiting Professor at the University of Glasgow. He is the Director of both the National Potato Innovation Centre and Scotland's Plant Health Centre and is President of the European Association for Potato Research (EAPR). He received the 'British Potato Industry Award' in 2020.



W

Andrew Webster

Andrew Webster of AW & MA Webster is a third-generation potato grower and farmer in Southwest Lancashire, who represents potato growers as a member on the NFU's potato policy group.

Cover crops have been in the rotation since 2012 as part of the farm's drive for sustainability.

Andrew believes the biggest challenge facing potato growers is climate change, with ever-changing weather extremes. Through trialling varieties and techniques, the farm is continuing to strive for improvements in sustainability against rising growing costs, changing weather patterns and staffing levels.



David Wilson

David, who is Sales Manager at Tong Engineering, has a wealth of experience in the agricultural and vegetable handling industry spanning more than three decades. Having originally started at G&J Peck Ltd in Ely, initially in parts, he became an Area Sales Representative selling agricultural equipment to the local farming community, then, in 1999, joined Standen Engineering Ltd as UK Sales Manager where he progressed to Sales Director. He also worked for Cheffins Auctioneers in the root crop side of the business, as an Associate and regular Auctioneer. He has a deep understanding of the ongoing needs of the vegetable handling industry and has been Tong Engineering since November 2023 shortly after the Spilsby-based company acquired Terry Johnson Ltd, manufacturer of the Swift Lift range of conveyors and elevators.



Peter White

Director of Soil Moisture Sense, Peter White has been working with sensing technology hardware and data interpretation since 1985. In 2012 he co-founded Soil Moisture Sense, one of the UK's leading providers of crop data and decision support services. continues to grow in all sectors of irrigated crops both in the whole of the UK and overseas. SMS build the stations we use from simple stand-alone rain gauges to highly complex systems. His expertise focuses on leveraging multi-sensor probes to monitor root water uptake, track infiltration, and help growers interpret complex underground soil dynamics.



Helen Wyman

Helen Wyman is the founder of TwoCan® Mentor and a 2022 Nuffield Farming Scholar, sponsored by the John Oldacre Foundation. After nearly two decades in commercial and leadership roles across agriculture, renewables and the environment, including ADAS, Future Biogas and Environment Bank, Helen spent two years researching mentoring in Canada, Brazil, Scandinavia and the UK. The result is TwoCan: structured mentoring that matches people with others from within their own industry, and in-house programmes for businesses. Over 300 professionals have taken part. Helen is based in Yorkshire.



Meet the British Potato team ...

The British Potato team is always on hand to listen to your insights, share updates from throughout the supply chain, discuss how to promote your goods and services, and organise the events where the whole industry can network, discuss best practice and see latest developments first-hand.

We're a friendly bunch – be sure to get in touch if there's something you'd like to discuss.

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Meet the sponsors ...

British Potato Confex 2026 wouldn't be possible without the generous support of our sponsors and industry partners. We'd like to extend a special thank you to the organisations helping us bring the industry together to share knowledge, build connections and drive innovation.

Main Sponsors



THE BEST FROM EVERY HARVEST

WYMA (Stand 46)

Wyma is a global specialist in post-harvest handling solutions, providing innovative equipment and fully-integrated processing lines for the fresh produce industry.

From field intake through to packing, Wyma's solutions help growers and processors improve efficiency, reduce labour requirements and maximise product quality and yield. With decades of experience and a strong presence in the UK and worldwide, the company combines global expertise with local support.



TONG ENGINEERING (Stand 21)

Leading UK manufacturer Tong Engineering is recognised worldwide for its innovative potato handling equipment and advanced processing solutions.

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Our thanks also go to our media partners for helping us reach, inform and engage with industry professionals across the UK and beyond.

British Potato Review (stand 20): Supporting the industry since 1991, British Potato Review delivers essential news, expert insights and technical developments across every stage of the potato supply chain. Alongside Confex and the *British Potato Industry Awards*, the publication helps keep the industry informed, connected and moving forward throughout the year.



PotatoPro: A leading online information platform dedicated to the global potato industry, PotatoPro shares the latest news, innovations, market developments and industry insights. We thank PotatoPro for helping bring British Potato Confex to an international audience.



The Vegetable Farmer: A respected monthly publication covering field vegetables, outdoor salad crops and potato production, The Vegetable Farmer provides growers with industry news, technical advice and developments in crop production. We're grateful for its support in promoting Confex across the wider agricultural community.



Knowledge Exchange Partners

Sharing knowledge and developing skills are central to British Potato Confex, and we're particularly grateful to our Knowledge Exchange Partners for helping us deliver these opportunities.

GB Potatoes (Stand 18): As the collective voice for the British potato industry, GB Potatoes plays an important role in bringing the supply chain together to address shared challenges and opportunities.

A special thank you goes to Graham Bannister and the GB Potatoes team for their invaluable support in developing our Main Stage seminar programme, bringing together industry experts and insightful discussions on the topics that matter most to the sector.

A special thank you goes to Graham Bannister of GB Potatoes for his invaluable support in bringing together this year's Main Stage seminar programme. His knowledge, expertise and dedication have helped shape a fantastic line-up of informative and engaging sessions, and we're extremely grateful for his contribution.

BASIS (Stand 19): We're delighted to have BASIS supporting Confex through its BASIS Knowledge Trail, encouraging visitors to engage with exhibitors, develop their knowledge and earn valuable CPD points.

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Wireworm damage shows up when it is too late to do anything about it. Blight arrives faster than the spray window. Both are getting harder to manage, and both reward the growers who plan earliest. At British Potato Confex this November, Syngenta Technical Manager Andy Cunningham takes a deep dive into best practice potato management, covering practical wireworm and blight control strategies for the season ahead. Expect field-level detail on timing, risk assessment and building a programme that holds up in a difficult year. Andy speaks at 10:45am on Wednesday 18th November. The Syngenta team will be on the stand throughout the day, ready to talk through what is and is not working in your rotation.



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Andy Cunningham, Technical Manager, Syngenta.
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Full integration for sorting and grading

Tong Engineering and Flikweert Vision strengthen UK partnership.

TONG Engineering and Flikweert Vision have expanded their partnership, with Tong now representing the Netherlands-based optical sorting specialist throughout Southern England and Wales.

Building on several successful collaborative projects, including a recent installation for a UK potato grower where labour efficiency doubled following the introduction of the Flikweert Vision QualityGrader, the collaboration brings together Tong's expertise in complete grading and handling systems with Flikweert Vision's specialist potato and onion optical sorting solutions. The result is a fully-integrated system that maximises sorting performance, streamlines crop flow and delivers exceptional grading results.

Founded in the Netherlands, Flikweert Vision specialises exclusively in optical sorting solutions for the potato and onion industries. Working closely with growers, the company develops intelligent camera-based systems that deliver more consistent crop quality, reliable defect detection and higher throughput, helping businesses improve productivity and efficiency.

Integrated within a Tong grading and handling line, Flikweert Vision's optical sorter forms part of one connected process. Tailored infeed design, intelligent controls and efficient outfeed equipment work together to optimise product flow and ensure the sorter performs at its full potential.

Sales Director at Tong Engineering, Simon Lee, said: "We're seeing increasing demand from customers looking to introduce optical sorting into their grading operations. Whilst the technology delivers significant benefits as a standalone machine, its full potential is realised when it is engineered into a complete grading and handling line. Combining Flikweert Vision's optical sorting expertise with Tong's handling equipment and advanced control capabilities, enables us to deliver complete systems that maximise performance, minimise labour, simplify operation and achieve the very best results for our customers."

Managing Director of Flikweert Vision, Martijn Flikweert, added: "Our focus is on developing advanced optical sorting solutions for the potato and onion industries. With Tong as our partner for the Agri sector across Southern England and Wales, customers can integrate our sorting technology more easily into a complete handling and grading line. By ensuring the Flikweert Vision sorter is well matched

with the infeed, outfeed and controls of the overall line, customers can get the most from their sorting process. At the same time, they benefit from local support for advice, installation, commissioning and service. Together, we can make advanced optical sorting more accessible and provide customers with a well-integrated solution, from installation through to day-to-day operation."

As Flikweert Vision's partner for the Agri sector across Southern England and Wales, Tong will provide sales, system integration, installation, commissioning and aftersales support for the Flikweert Vision range.



Simon Lee of Tong (Left) with Martin van der Have of Flikweert (Right)

Major transformation by manufacturer

BRITISH manufacturer JCB, whose tractors and handlers are used by many potato growers, is making a £100 million transformation to its Staffordshire headquarters which has been JCB's home since 1950.

The company says the investment will benefit UK growers by modernising the production of key agricultural machinery such as Loadall telescopic handlers, Fastrac tractors, and hydrogen-powered farm equipment, while improving manufacturing efficiency, quality, and parts availability.

As JCB invests for its next chapter, George Bamford has also become Joint Chairman of the family company alongside his father, Lord Bamford in the first change at the top of JCB in more than 50 years.





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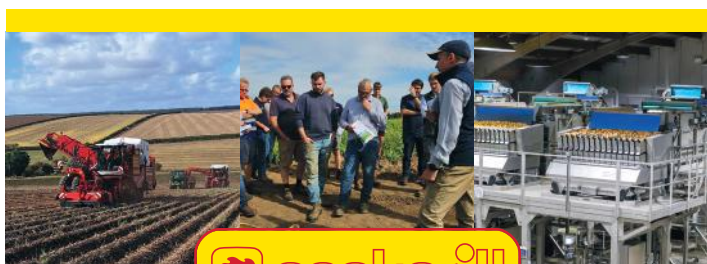
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MACHINERY

Investment in demo machinery, spare parts and more

STANDEN Engineering is strengthening its long-standing relationship with Thomas Sherriff & Co Ltd, with further investment in demonstration machinery, spare parts and technical support for customers across the North East of England and the Borders.

Thomas Sherriff has represented Standen for many years in the region, providing customers with local access to Standen's range of specialist root crop machinery alongside sales, parts and aftersales support.

As part of the continued development of the partnership, Thomas Sherriff will shortly take delivery of three new demonstrator machines: A four-bodied Standen BX Bedformer, a Standen UniPlus Stone and Clod Separator and a Baselier three-bed Haulm Topper.

The addition of the new demonstration fleet will give growers across the region greater opportunity to see the machinery working in their own conditions and assess its performance first-hand before making an investment.

Alongside the new demonstrators, Thomas Sherriff will also be increasing its stockholding of Standen spare parts, helping to improve availability and provide customers with faster access to commonly required components.

Further investment is also being made in after sales support, with fully-trained Thomas Sherriff service technicians providing specialist knowledge and assistance to Standen machinery users throughout the area.

Sales Director at Standen Engineering, Ed Gilbert, said: "Thomas Sherriff has been an important Standen dealer for many years and has built excellent relationships with growers throughout the North East and Borders. We're delighted to be strengthening that relationship further.

"The investment in demonstration machinery, parts availability and technician training means customers will have even greater access to the products and support they need locally. It also gives growers the opportunity to see key machines working on their own farms and in their own conditions."

Xander Donald, Haddington Outlet Manager at Thomas Sherriff and Co Ltd added: "Having these three demonstrator machines available locally will allow us to get out on farm and show customers exactly what the equipment can do in their own conditions. Increasing our parts stock and investing in specialist training for our service technicians also means we'll be well placed to support the machines long after the initial sale."



New tractor features will aid potato applications

MASSEY Ferguson officially unveiled the new MF 7S MARK 2 tractor series on September 30th which offers some key new advantages for potato growers during heavy field operations like potato planting, tillage, and pulling heavy implements.

The 7S Mark 2 is the first Massey Ferguson line-up to come factory-installed with PTx FarmEngage mixed-fleet management software and a Datatronic 6 12-inch touchscreen, helping growers track field tasks, mapping, and telemetry data.

When developing the new MF 7S Mark 2, Massey Ferguson set tyre manufacturer BKT a very specific challenge: Identify a solution that could support the tractor's performance while remaining fully aligned with its technical architecture.

The target was to go beyond the conventional rear tyre diameter of around 1.93m and reach a 2.0m configuration, without compromising the tractor's engineering constraints or the correct balance between rear and front axle fitment. BKT has responded by developing three new AGRIMAX V-FLECTO VF tyre sizes specifically tailored for Massey Ferguson.

The tyre configurations will have several advantages for potato growers.

The rear configurations and front combinations together create a larger overall footprint which spreads the tractor's weight over a wider area, preventing deep rutting and soil compaction that can hurt potato root growth or disrupt drainage in bed systems.

They can carry heavy loads at significantly lower inflation pressures than standard tyres, preserving the loose, aerated soil structure required for high-yield potato seedbeds, while the taller 2.0m rear-wheel height improves the

mechanical radius and traction efficiency, helping the tractor pull heavy mounted or trailed potato machinery without excessive slip.

The tractor's wheelbase and optimised chassis design reduce the need for heavy front ballasting when lifting bulky rear potato implements, further lightening the total footprint on the land while a new front axle design allows a 5.3-metre turning radius, making it easier to turn around cleanly on narrow headlands without gouging or tearing up the ends of potato ridges.



Investment in advanced tube laser technology



TONG Engineering has invested in advanced tube laser technology.

Its new 6kW tube laser significantly increases the speed, precision and flexibility of component manufacture, enabling complex holes, slots and profiles to be cut directly into tubular steel with exceptional accuracy. The machine processes both mild and stainless steel, handling sectional materials up to 200mm and circular sections up to 280mm.

As well as reducing manual drilling operations, the new technology allows Tong to incorporate advanced tab-and-slot locating features into machine designs. This improves manufacturing efficiency, increases assembly accuracy and delivers higher quality finish across the company's equipment.

Operations Director Neil Martin said: "Continually investing in the latest manufacturing technology is central to our commitment to quality. This latest addition not only improves production efficiency but also enables us to manufacture even more accurately, ensuring every Tong machine is built to the highest possible standard."

Chute improvements for processors

FAM STUMABO, which engineers and develops industrial cutting machines for potatoes has released an improved infeed chute for SureTec 240P, replacing the current standard infeed chute.

The new infeed guides potatoes into the drum at the optimal orientation, helping processors maximise throughput and fry length and reducing blockages, particularly when processing sweet potatoes.

The new design increases the maximum product input diameter from 110 to 200 mm, while keeping the same large product length of 240 mm. This expands the range of potatoes SureTec 240P can accommodate.

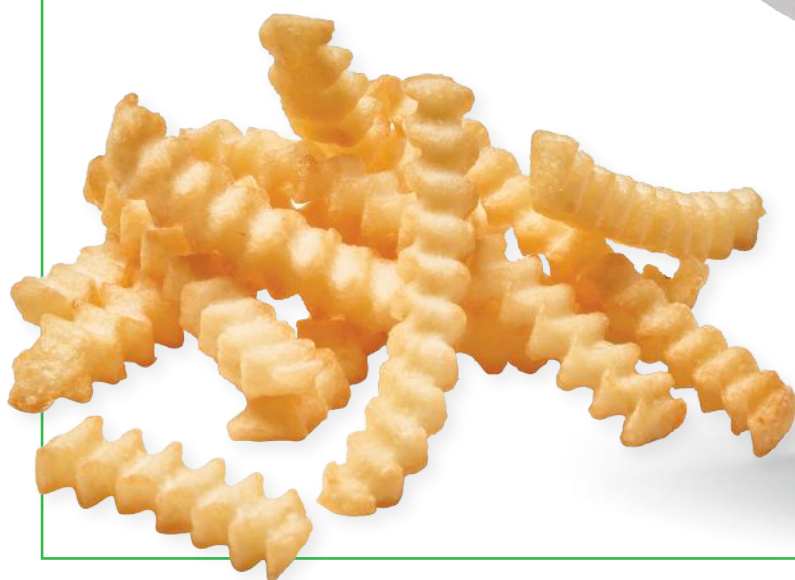
Long potatoes can be cut at full length thanks to the 240 mm-wide drum. The contoured infeed helps maintain high throughput by guiding the product into the optimal position for cutting. SureTec 240P is designed to produce clean, precise cuts while minimising product breakage and feathering.

Recent FAM STUMABO customer projects show that easier setup and consistent results are increasingly important to potato processors, according to Branch Manager FAM STUMABO UK & Ireland, Leighton Banner.

"Skilled technical personnel are becoming harder to find and retain, so processors need equipment that is less dependent on specialist operator knowledge. With SureTec 240P, we have taken away many of the traditional set-up variables," said Leighton.

Cutting components can be pre-assembled and the required cut size preset away from the machine. Spare SCUs can be prepared in advance and kept ready for use. Operators can then install the complete unit quickly, with less adjustment required on the machine and less risk of set-up errors. This simplifies changeovers and helps minimise production downtime.

SureTec 240P can process peel-on, abrasive- or steam-peeled potatoes into flat, crinkle and deep-crinkle French fries, as well as dice and slices.



Irrigation equipment dealer appointment

AGVANTAGE, which is based in Cambridgeshire and Yorkshire, has been appointed as an official dealer of Bauer irrigation equipment.

The new partnership will see AgVantage supply and support Bauer's established range of crop irrigation equipment, bringing together Bauer's specialist irrigation technology with AgVantage's experience in potatoes, vegetables and other high-value crops.

Bauer has a long-established reputation in agricultural irrigation, with its product range including the well-known Rainstar reel irrigators, as well as pivot irrigation systems, pumps, pipework, couplings and digital irrigation management technology. The company has been developing irrigation equipment for more than 50 years, with manufacturing centred at its facility in Voitsberg, Austria.

Managing Director of AgVantage, Andy Carse, said: "We're delighted to be joining the Bauer dealer network. Irrigation is an incredibly important part of growing potatoes and other high-value crops, so Bauer fits extremely well alongside the machinery and services we already provide.

"Bauer is a brand with an excellent reputation for quality, reliability and longevity. Many of our existing customers already operate Bauer equipment, so being able to support them with new machines, parts and service is a very natural progression for AgVantage."

Bauer's UK & Ireland Sales Manager, Adrian Tindall, added: "There is a strong overlap



between AgVantage's existing customer base and users of irrigation equipment, particularly within the potato and vegetable sectors. We believe that makes this an excellent fit for both businesses."

"Andy and the AgVantage team have ambitious plans for the business and we look forward to working closely with them to develop Bauer irrigation equipment sales and provide first-class support to customers."



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New solution for timber potato boxes

ROWLINSON Packaging South, one of the largest manufacturers of potato boxes in the UK, has adopted a new way of applying codes and branding to its customers' boxes.

The company produces thousands of boxes per week and until recently, printing and stacking the side panels had been a manual process, involving stencils and paint rollers.

The new solution provided by Timbermark, an Oxfordshire provider of industrial inkjet marking and coding systems involves a 1800mm x 750mm image to be generated on each box panel using a printer mounted on a robot arm.

Working with integrator Phoenix Robots, Timbermark worked to combine 'image slicing' software with a UV-cured inkjet printer manipulated by the arm. The 125MB bitmap files were segmented to ensure that the printer did not apply ink in the voids between the potato box boards.

The ink is UV cured, giving instant weatherproofing, says Timbermark, and means the ink does not transfer between panels when they are stacked.

Rowlinson Operations Director Steve Jackson said: "Where there are large volumes, it makes sense to automate when possible, not just from a cost-saving perspective, but for increased efficiencies, and in this instance, to be able to offer our customers something not previously available in the marketplace."

The printer uses a recirculating ink system, which rarely needs priming and does not get clogged with dust, says Timbermark. It can print from up to 30mm away, which means it is tolerant of variations in the board panels.



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‘Make a long-term plan to support growers’

Report calls on government to help make transition and reduce reliance on imports.

A NEW report has laid out key actions the UK Government needs to take to provide more support for potato growers using natural fertilisers and reduce dependence on imports.

The report, entitled ‘Building Resilience in UK Food Production’ has been compiled by the Sustainable Nitrogen Alliance (SNA), a UK-based coalition of environmental, human health, animal welfare organizations, and scientists—initially founded in 2021 by the Soil Association, Plantlife, and WWF-UK. It was unveiled at the recent Wild Summit, an annual nature and conservation conference and gathering which was attended by MPs, government officials, and policymakers.

Head of Farming Policy for the Soil Association, Gareth Morgan, said disruption in the Strait of Hormuz this year clearly demonstrated how reliant production systems are on imported fertiliser inputs, with fertiliser costs often making up a significant proportion

of controllable farm expenditure.

“In the long-term, farms moving towards a lower-input or organic system should see more stable income, but they need help to make the change as they can face an income shortfall in the early years,” he said.

The alliance highlights that support for low-input growing, including payments for organic conversion and management through initiatives such as the Welsh Sustainable Farming Scheme and the English Environmental Land Management Scheme, will be crucial if the long-term benefits of reducing dependency on synthetic fertiliser are to be achieved.

But reducing dependence on synthetic nitrogen fertiliser is not a quick fix, the report warns, stressing that the government needs to plan ahead. It points to Sri Lanka’s sudden restrictions on synthetic fertiliser in 2021, as an example of what can go wrong if farmers aren’t supported to sustain productivity in

their operations. The coalition is calling for the following actions:

- Government policy must support nature-friendly practices that help farmers reduce dependence on synthetic nitrogen fertiliser, including mixed farming and greater use of nitrogen-fixing plants, such as peas and beans found in organic systems
- Track nitrogen use annually, to understand better where it is being used and where it ends up in the environment.
- Develop a strategy, informed by this assessment, to help farming reduce its dependence on synthetic nitrogen fertiliser.
- Accelerate action on food waste across the food chain through a combination of incentives and regulation.
- Introduce public health policies that support healthier diets aligned with reduced synthetic nitrogen fertiliser-dependent food production.

Lower-carbon fertiliser sourcing

THE inauguration of Europe’s largest industrial carbon capture facility will bring significant implications for UK potato growers and suppliers in terms of input costs, farm-gate carbon auditing, and future access to lower-carbon crop nutrition, according to those involved in its establishment.

The facility will primarily benefit the UK potato and broader agricultural sectors by enabling supply of low-carbon “Climate Choice” mineral fertilisers.

It was officially inaugurated at Yara’s plant in Sluiskil, the Netherlands, recently, establishing the first complete cross-border value chain for capturing, transporting and permanently storing CO₂ (CCS).

The inauguration was attended by Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, Dutch Prime Minister Rob Jetten, European Commissioner for Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth Wopke Hoekstra, and President and CEO of Yara International, Svein Tore Holsether.



Yara Sluiskil, Europe’s largest ammonia and fertiliser plant can capture and liquefy up to 800,000 tons of CO₂ annually from ammonia production, avoiding carbon taxation on these volumes. The CO₂ will be transported by ship to Norway, where it will be permanently stored beneath the seabed by Northern Lights. The project is expected to capture and store around 12 million tons of CO₂ over the next 15 years.

For UK policymakers and industry, the project shows how international CO₂ transport and storage networks could complement domestic carbon capture infrastructure, Svein said.

Ireland expansion

Yara has also announced a major investment at its Moira fertiliser terminal in Ireland.

The agreement with site operator Power Trac (NI) runs until 2037 and will see Yara consolidate its Northern Ireland operations into a single, expanded and technologically-advanced facility that opens on January 1st.

Strong root systems are fundamental to crop yield and long-term climate resilience.

‘Strong roots are the foundation of crop performance’

During harvesting, it may seem a little early to consider the rooting of forthcoming potato crops, but there are some things it pays to think about in advance, experts say.

STRONG and healthy roots are the key to achieving good establishment, a fertiliser manufacturer and agronomy companies have stated, with growers being advised that it's not too early to think about how to consider this before thinking about spring planting.

British commercial potato growers are being advised that strong root systems are fundamental to crop yield and long-term climate resilience, with industry experts emphasising that growers must prioritise below-ground health to protect future productivity.

The “Prepare and Repair” Method has been emphasised by agronomists at Hutchinsons who advise building soil resilience now through proper structural care before planting potatoes in the spring and repairing the ground immediately afterward, while recent reports from GB Potatoes emphasise maintaining robust, long rotations, stressing that incorporating diverse roots helps build soil resilience, retain moisture, and protect crops from drought stress and environmental limitations.

In preparation for future planting, growers are encouraged to use multi-species cover crops. Deep taproots (like radish) and fibrous roots (like buckwheat or clover) serve to lift compaction layers, improve aggregate structure, and stimulate microbial life.

And with recent seasons experiencing extreme heat and variable conditions, agronomy experts from companies like Omex Agriculture advise active field assessment.

Growers are urged to actively dig up plants during routine crop walking to visually inspect rooting structures and identify active root growth or physical growth barriers. To maximise how deeply roots can explore the soil profile for water and nutrients, advisor

Phil Burrell also suggests using phosphite-based biostimulants to actively boost early root establishment and development.

Understand what's below ground

OMEX Agriculture's Head of Agronomy Phil Burrell, pointed out that when growers assess potato crop establishment, it can be tempting only to focus attention on what is happening above ground. However, some of the most important crop development will be taking place beneath the soil surface during the early phase.

“Strong root systems are fundamental to crop yield,” he said. “The more the crop can explore the soil profile, the greater its ability to access water and nutrients efficiently. This becomes particularly important during periods of environmental stress, whether that's drought, variable establishment conditions or nutrient limitations. Growers must monitor below ground.

“Carrying a trowel when crop walking allows you to remove plants and assess rooting, this can give an indication whether you have active root growth or not. The aim is to understand what is potentially limiting growth and identify opportunities to optimise establishment.”

Strong roots support the biomass required for yield and to boost establishment and Phil recommends using OMEX's Kickstart - a phosphite-based biostimulant with nitrogen and potassium, which is part of the company's Fortiflo portfolio. He said it has improved root development in trials. Specifically, potato growers apply this biostimulant when planting is pushed early after a cold winter, or when specific harvest plans force planting to happen under non-ideal, challenging environmental conditions.

“The first opportunity to influence crop performance with foliar nutrition is often during the early establishment phase,” said Phil. “By focusing on rooting early in the season, growers can help build stronger, more resilient crops that are better positioned to make the most of available water, nutrients and growing conditions throughout the season.”

Advisors at Agrii have also highlighted that while it is easy to judge success by looking at the green canopy, well-developed root systems are what dictate nutrient uptake efficiency and protect the plant against environmental stresses. They specifically advise targeting early phosphate availability to drive root mass rather than top growth.

“Well-developed root systems are better able to access nutrients, utilise applied nitrogen and withstand periods of environmental stress,” a company advisory states.

Hutchinsons' Head of Soils and Farm Resilience Lead Ian Robertson has said that after extreme weather cycles, soils are frequently left in suboptimal, anaerobic states. He cautioned that focusing purely on rapid canopy emergence is a mistake, stating that growers must focus on how the sun's energy links to the soil via early root development to wake up the soil biology and build long-term crop resilience.

Policy and long-term Research

On a structural level, UK agricultural scientists from The James Hutton Institute have stepped up advocacy, briefing policymakers on how a deeper biological understanding of how roots interact with soil organisms will allow potato breeders to develop more resilient varieties capable of surviving extreme weather and poor nutrient availability. **BPR**

‘Avoid a chilling start’

This month, Andrew reflects on the 2026 season, and offers insights on how to give crops the best start in 2027.



Andrew Goodinson.



Leaf Hopper burn.



Varietal differences.

PATIENCE was the keyword for getting this year's potato crop off to a good start, says Andrew.

Soils were wet over the winter, followed by a dry but cold spring. But soil conditions were very good, and in many cases needed less declodding than in previous years. However, they remained cold.

"It is never a good idea to take warm tubers out of store and put them into cold ground as there is no advantage - waiting will more than compensate for any loss of growth."

Creating the best possible conditions for crops to grow proved their worth as the season developed into one of the hottest and driest ever.

"Emergence was slow, and placement fertilisers as well as seed/soil fungicides reduced stress and lowered incidence of little potato and chain tuber tuberisation. Applications of organic manure helped hold moisture in the soil during the hot and dry periods."

He emphasises that crops need the equivalent of colostrum, and preloading them with nutrition and biostimulants helps them produce optimum tuber numbers and maintain them through to desiccation.

"Once the initial phase has passed the onset of tuber bulking, rectifying nutrition can be difficult."

This year higher tuber numbers than normal were produced by many varieties, including some of which do not normally produce more tubers, reflects Andrew. "This may have

"Once the initial phase has passed the onset of tuber bulking, rectifying nutrition can be difficult."

been down to the season, or seed conditions. At tuber initiation (TI) the soil and growing conditions were good and the crops did not abort or reabsorb tubers. This proved to be a mistake as they were unable to then look after them, and also affected crop longevity."

Crops grew well until mid-June, and had larger canopies than at the same time the previous year. "Both irrigated and unirrigated crops suffered from high heat stress, with temperatures barely dipping at night, so they had no chance to take a breath."

Tissue and sap tests taken mid-season, or at tuber bulking indicated phosphate deficiencies, but at that point the crops needed a drink rather than more food, Andrew said.

"Early irrigation helped soil moisture, benefitting yield, but as the warm weather persisted, it did not increase the yields the way we had expected, possibly because the water evaporated so quickly, although there was a certain benefit from cooling the crop."

"This highlighted the benefits of trickle irrigation which keeps the potatoes damper and has a higher water use efficiency."

However, despite irrigation scheduling being in place, the long dry period resulted in abstraction being forbidden.

For weed control, Andrew devised pre-emergence herbicide programmes that combined three actives or more to ensure they covered a broad weed spectrum and lengthened persistence of activity further into the growing season.

"Where possible, I wanted to avoid post-emergence herbicides as they always impact on the crop figure, and this year in particular these effects could have been long lasting."

The strategy was successful, but this was partly because the dry soils also stopped weeds germinating, he observes.

Pests and diseases

The unusual conditions led to some changes in pest and disease pressure, says Andrew, noting that the August report from the James Hutton Institute shows a split between north and south, and while 2026 was a very low risk blight year in England, there were more outbreaks in Scotland, which had received more rainfall.

In the update issued by the Fight Against Blight team, most of the outbreaks in England (and all of those in Wales) had been caused by genotype EU_36. However there were two outbreaks of EU_46 in Shropshire and Lancashire. Blight samples taken in Scotland were also mainly EU_36, but with some other genotypes being detected.

In England, the low pressure was partly because of little carry-over of inoculum from 2025 and also the long dry period. Nevertheless, he insists, crops still needed good protection, particularly during the rapid growth phase.

"One this was over, we were able to move to lower cost programmes, as long as the fungicides are from different groups."

He reports a few cases of *Alternaria* noting that these had been brought on by stress rather than disease pressure.

There was low incidence of blackleg and sclerotinia, as 2025 had been dry, and the only rhizoctonia he saw was where growers had not waited until soils warmed up to plant. Also, as conditions at TI were good, there was little common scab.

However, some new pests were observed in the regions where Andrew works; these included leaf hoppers (which were controlled by contact insecticides) and Silver Y moth appeared in isolated pockets.

"We continued monitoring slugs, especially where cover crops had been grown, because during the dry periods the best food/moisture available to them are tubers."

Andrew also notes that there had been a large number of early season ladybirds in the crop,

and when aphid numbers built up, the predators generally were able to keep on top of them, so aphicide use was lower than predicted.

However, as soils were dry, more wireworm than normal were detected, even where soils had been treated.

"As a result, we lifted those crops early to prevent damage."

"We also noted that potato cyst nematodes (PCN) also had more effect, as plants were stressed and were unable to grow away from damage."

End of season

Many potato crops ended up yielding lower tonnages of 12-20t/ha, with lots of small tubers.

"Towards the end of summer, many crops started to senesce early, as much because of the continued heat as the lack of water, and the haulm started taking moisture from the tubers, increasing dry matter and increasing the risk of bruising."

At the middle of September, desiccation is continuing as normal, reports Andrew, but the as the recent rainfall has resulted in green foliage, he recommends ensuring that skin set has been achieved before lifting.

"In many cases it is assumed that because the crop died off, the skin has set, but this was more of a forced senescence."

Evaluating benefits, costs and risks of building the ideal seed bed

Evaluating and balancing one risk against another is key to getting the most from the crop, says Andrew.

Avoiding overworking soils is one of Andrew's principal messages, and in many cases the depth of cultivations, frequency of bed tilling and destoning can be reduced, and in some cases, destoning operations can be eliminated.

Over-cultivating soils increases wearing of tines and blades, fuel costs, reduces soil organic matter and increases carbon loss, although Andrew notes that there is a tendency for less reliance on ploughing than a few years ago.

However, if you do not destone, and you minimise the bed tilling, when it comes to harvest, you may find more bruising and damaged tubers due to stones and clods, he warns.

"We are moving away from regimented cultivation programmes, and prior to going into the field with machinery, it is a good idea to stop, get your spade out, dig a hole and consider what work needs doing, and how deep you need to go.

"The aim is to create the ideal seedbed while moving as little soil as possible," Andrew said, noting that one-pass machines have become popular with some growers.

Cover crops can be useful in reducing the amount of deep tillage necessary, particularly radish-based cover crops. However, the costs of doing so needs to be the same, or less, than the cost of cultivation.

He observes that the potato plant has a poorer root system than many other crops, there needs to be enough soil around the tubers to prevent greening and the ridge needs to be able to retain moisture.

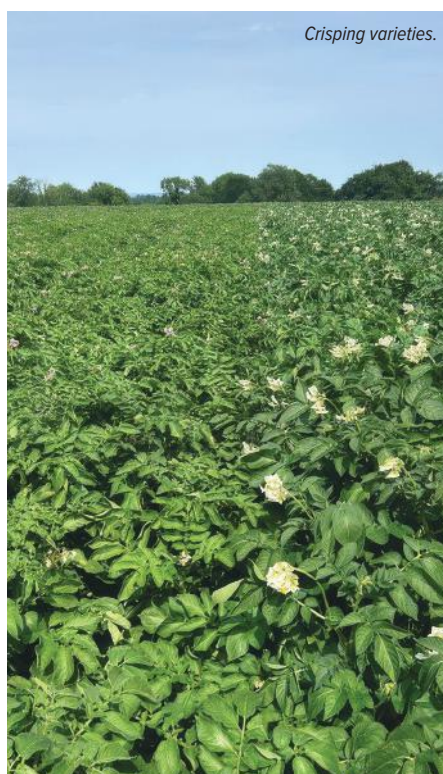
Some varieties set their tubers underneath the mother tuber, while others set them around the tuber, and stolon length, cluster width and depth can all vary.

"We also need to evaluate soil structure, because it affects nutrient availability and uptake, and take into account field aspect, whether it is north or south facing, and whether any remedial cultivations are necessary.

"There are benefits from shallower working in the different soil types, yet many growers still cultivate soils deeper than necessary; reducing cultivation depth from 43cm to 35cm can give a 25% reduction in fuel usage with no impact on yield. This also provides a good start to reducing carbon footprint, particularly as it reduces energy use without taking a toll on yield."

However, growers need to remain flexible with their strategies he cautions, noting there are times when weather and soil conditions dictate strategies.

"There are times when using low disturbance sub-soilers and reducing cultivation depth can pay dividends, but they can still impact on harvesting speed, efficiency and bruising. Also, if you are lifting small potatoes, you may find the clods and stones go up the web as well." →



Knowing what nutrition is already in the soil and ensuring that it is available to the growing potato crop is also crucial.

"Hutchinsons agronomists use the 'Gold Soil' test to see the chemistry, physics and biology of the soil, including ratios and balances between nutrients, so nutrition decisions can be tailored according to need. During the growing season, regular sap and/or tissue testing is also key to understanding plant efficiency and any deficits can be dealt with.

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

Cover crops

Diversity is fundamental to providing maximum benefit when it comes to soil health; single species cover cropping lacks diversity and therefore have fewer benefits, says Andrew, adding that the best cover crops are multispecies, with the added benefit of whatever the weather throws at them, something will thrive.

For Andrew, the advantages of using cover crops far outweigh any disadvantages.

"They improve soil conditions and build fertility, recycle nutrients, reduce soil erosion, help retain water and reduce the impact of rain on bare soil over winter, help suppress weeds, in addition to providing habitat for wildlife.

"However, they can encourage pests such as slugs and wireworm, which will need managing. They are not a magic bullet, and growers need to know what they are trying to achieve, so they can make informed decision on the type of cover crop to plant, and then ensure that it is properly sown.

"It can be hard to assign a monetary value for the overall benefits of a cover crop to justify their use to a landlord, but cutting and measuring the biomass can help to assess the benefits. All the different species do different things, for example rye is a good scavenger, and it grows well and acts as an effective weed suppressant, while vetches provide N and phosphate for the next crop."

Decisions on which mix to buy will depend on the needs of the particular field and conditions and the grower's system, and how it will be destroyed afterwards.

He notes that, in general, root mass is the most important part of the cover crop, as it is a source of active organic matter.

"Soils with the tendency to compact can benefit from mixes which include an oil radish cover crop, particularly if combined with applying gypsum pre-planting. Oil radish establishes and grows very quickly, developing a deep tap root and laterals that extend out and can help to break up near-surface

compaction, helping to improve soil structure as well as scavenging mineral N."

When it comes to cover crops, timing is of the essence as they need to establish while conditions are still good; which is normally in August, but in 2026, it was the second half of August and the beginning of September. This is because by mid-September, there are cooler nights so soil temperatures start to drop, and day length shortens, limiting growth.

The cover crop needs to be competitive, suppressing weeds such as nightshades and chickweed which support pathogens such as those that cause rhizoctonia and free living nematodes (FLN).

Cover crops provide an environment and food source for beneficials as well as non-beneficials, such as wireworm, which need to be managed culturally at different stages in the rotation.

A mixed cover crop can be attractive to beneficial predator insect species, favouring grazing predators like ladybirds.

However, the green cover could result in creating a green bridge transfer in which pests overwinter and are already close by in the spring. This is particularly important when considering the risks posed by the peach potato aphid, (*Myzus Persicae*), which can be a hazard in vectoring virus.

The most important viruses transmitted by aphids to potatoes include potato virus A (PVA), leaf roll virus (PLRV), and potato virus Y (PVYO and PVYN). These problems do not occur, if we have winters with a series of frosts, notes Andrew.

Cover crops should ideally be terminated six weeks pre-planting. Cover crops on heavy land should be destroyed earlier than those on lighter areas because the soil can take longer to dry out before spring cultivations.

Research undertaken by Dr Vongai Chekanai as part of her PhD studies, and supported by Hutchinsons, showed some of the impact cover crop species could have on plant parasitic nematodes.

For example, her research identified that French marigold (*Tagetes patula*) and oilseed radish cover crops can be effective at reducing soil populations of root lesion nematode (RLN) *Pratylenchus* spp., a nematode associated with potato early dying disease.

Interestingly, the trials revealed that Indian Mustard, which is popular as a biofumigant to suppress potato cyst nematodes (PCN), actually increased *Pratylenchus* spp.

"What reduces one soil pest can increase another, so knowing what you are dealing with on your own land is key to cover crop decisions. The key is to know your field, your soil and the pests, so you know what you are up against."



Trials update

This year, Andrew has been doing trials looking at single product multiple treatments to see what each products does, which are currently being analysed.

"We have been doing tissue and sap tests, and Nutriscope leaf tests, and comparing three ways of nutrient levels in plants, results of the tree systems taken from the same row on the same time on the same day."

Tubers have also sent off to have tuber nutrient levels measured and analysed.

"We are measuring dry matter to see how efficient the potato plant has been at getting nutrients into the potato. Looking through the treatments, indications are that earlier treatments at planting and rosette stage, gave a higher concentration of nutrients in the tubers. Later treatments may help keep crop going as much as getting nutrients in to the crop."

The different treatments indicated there more variance in the primary nutrients than the micronutrients, Andrew said.

"Going forward, more trials will be done stacking biostimulants and foliar feeds. This is the first stage, and we need to build a database of optimum levels in tubers." **BPR**

BELGIUM

Working on innovations

BELGIAN family-run business Vanderhaegen Potatoes is working on several new innovations as part of its future business strategy.

In recent years, the company has expanded its range from fresh chips and peeled potatoes to include croquettes, mashed potatoes, stews, various specialties, and stuffed potato products, among other items.

It is now developing potato flowers, new stuffed potatoes, and products suitable for air fryers, among other items.

The company has said it gains its inspiration from customers as well as its own team trying out new methods in the kitchen.



USA

Potato projects benefit from USDA funding

NINETEEN potato-related projects will be supported by new funding by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The projects, addressing crop protection, varietal development, and nutrition, are amongst those to benefit from USDA's \$86.6 million cash injection via the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, which will cover research, marketing, food safety, and pest management.

CEO of the National Potato Council, Kam Quarles, said research priorities will differ between potato-growing states, including Pennsylvania, Idaho, and Montana.

Projects include research into pest and disease resistance, potato varieties, and the role of potatoes in diets involving GLP-1 medications.

Kam said there is also a need to maintain the competitiveness of US potatoes in international markets. Consumer marketing forms another part of the program, with projects examining how different generations access information about specialty crops and their nutritional value.

It may take two to four years before growers see the benefits, according to Kam.

ETHIOPIA

Fact-finding mission

A POTATO sector fact-finding mission recently took place in Addis Ababa.

The event was organised by the Agricultural Team of the Netherlands Embassy in Addis Ababa, with support from the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) and SeedNL. Eight Dutch organisations took part.

The program began with presentations by the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture, Ethiopian Agriculture Authority, and Research Institute. Discussions covered Ethiopia's potato sector strategy, certification requirements, import and export procedures, quality standards, and ongoing research activities.

Dutch companies and Ethiopian stakeholders were then able to discuss potential partnerships and exchange technical information.

Wholesale and retail markets were visited and participants identified opportunities for further cooperation, particularly in the seed potato sector.

Potatoes are increasingly recognised as strategic crops in Ethiopia, with potential to improve food and nutrition security, diversify diets, generate employment, and increase growers' incomes.

Following the mission, the Agricultural Team in Addis Ababa will work with RVO and SeedNL to support participating companies in identifying potential pilot activities, demonstration projects, and feasibility studies.



KYRGYZSTAN

Six-month ban for potato imports

KYRGYZSTAN has introduced a six-month ban on imports of potatoes under a government decree signed on October 15th.

The ban applies to potatoes classified under EAEU customs code 0701 90 500 0. It does not cover potatoes in transit through Kyrgyzstan with supporting documents, consignments dispatched to the country before the ban takes effect, or imports for research, testing, and other special purposes.

The restriction is intended to support domestic potato production and the local market.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Kyrgyzstan is expected to produce around 1.25 million tonnes of potatoes in 2026, compared with annual domestic demand of approximately 800,000 tonnes. The ministry previously proposed restricting imports until March 1st, 2027, arguing that domestic production was sufficient to meet demand and that farmers needed better opportunities to sell their harvest.

Farmers had harvested 965,000 tonnes of potatoes by mid-October, 317,000 tonnes more than during the same period in 2025. Most of the harvested crop came from the Issyk-Kul region.

The government has instructed the customs, agriculture, and border authorities to prevent illegal imports of potatoes covered by the ban. The Ministry of Economy is responsible for notifying the World Trade Organization and the Eurasian Economic Commission, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must inform the CIS Executive Committee.

BHUTAN

Falling prices and unpaid bills leave exporters in debt

POTATO exporters in Bhutan are facing declining prices, unpaid shipments, and limited market access, with approximately 30 truckloads remaining unsold, according to the Asia News Network.

One exporter reported losses of Nu 7.5 million (approximately US\$90,000), of which Nu 4 million (US\$48,000) remains unpaid. Another reported outstanding payment of Nu 2.5 million (US\$30,000) is from Indian buyers.

India remains Bhutan's main potato export market. In 2024, the country exported more than 37,778 metric tons of potatoes to India, generating over Nu 539.4 million (US\$6.47 million).

In Phobjikha and Gangtey, potato cultivation covers approximately 607 hectares, accounting for 53 percent of Wangdue's potato acreage. Around 90 percent of the harvest from more than 1,000 growers passes through the Phuentsholing auction.

The Food Corporation of Bhutan Limited (FCBL) operates potato trade facilitation centers offering washing, grading, sorting, packaging, and online auctions.

FCBL reported potato exports worth Nu 217 million (US\$2.60 million) in 2025, totaling 10,866.65 metric tons.

According to FCBL, reduced Indian demand for smaller potatoes and increased private trading have affected exports. The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock is exploring alternative markets, although no additional export destinations have been secured.

BULGARIA

Tightening checks on imported seed

BULGARIA'S Ministry of Agriculture and Food will increase inspections of imported seed potatoes intended for commercial cultivation and seed multiplication, according to BurgasMedia, an independent media source based in Burgas, Bulgaria.

Agriculture Minister Plamen Abrovski announced during a meeting with potato growers: "We need to improve conditions for producing quality seed potatoes in Bulgaria."

The meeting addressed seed quality, certification procedures, crop protection, marketing challenges, and support measures for the sector during the next programming period.

Following concerns that traders are supplying poor-quality seed potatoes, samples will be tested simultaneously at the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency (BFSA) laboratory and at least one laboratory abroad. The results will be used for information purposes.

Under the new regulation on plant reproductive material, potatoes are now covered by the Official Controls Regulation.

Growers also reported difficulties accessing plant protection products, including treatments previously used in potato cultivation that are now prohibited in the EU. Marketing harvested potatoes remains another concern.

The minister stated that future support measures should address the requirements of potato growers and sustainable cultivation.

Between October 6th and 12th, the BFSA conducted additional inspections of potatoes at five of Bulgaria's largest retail chains and their warehouses, checking compliance with national and EU legislation.

HUNGARY

Acreage falls to 5,065 hectares as European yields decline

Potato cultivation in Hungary has declined to 5,065 hectares in 2026, while reduced acreage and weather-related crop losses are affecting supplies across Europe.

Following earlier oversupply, growers in Germany, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands reduced planting areas for 2026 by 11 to 14%, according to country news platform Hungary Today. Belgium recorded a 16.6%, the Netherlands 15.1%, and France just under 10%.

According to France's National Union of Potato Growers (UNPT), the French table potato harvest is estimated to have fallen 23 per cent year-on-year, equivalent to nearly two million tons. Average yields reached 37.4 tons per hectare, with grower losses estimated at €400 million (approximately US\$470 million).

Heat and drought have also affected yields and tuber quality in Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands, particularly on non-irrigated land.

In Hungary, potato acreage declined from nearly 63,000 hectares in 1997 to approximately 7,800 to 8,000 hectares in 2025. The 2025 harvest totalled 221,000 tons.

Late frosts caused losses of 20 to 30% in Hungary's early potato crop this year, followed by summer drought.

Hungary relies on imports from Western Europe, Egypt, and Israel to supplement domestic supplies. Reduced European harvests are creating additional supply constraints, while growers face increasing pressure to invest in irrigation infrastructure.

BRAZIL

Heavy rainfall delays potato planting in southern Brazil, with only 5% completed

AGRICULTURAL research and market intelligence team HF Brasil, has reported that heavy rainfall has delayed potato planting in Bom Jesus, Rio Grande do Sul.

Waterlogged fields disrupted soil preparation and planting activities, with frequent interruptions continuing until the final week of the month.

Around 5% of the planned area had been planted by the end of September, compared with the initial estimate of 10% and while growers expected to recover some of the delays during October, it was also envisaged that the continued rainfall forecast for the region might restrict field operations.

Planting under wet soil conditions may also affect crop establishment and yields. Growers anticipated that much of the remaining area will have to be planted under conditions that are less suitable for cultivation.

Most planting activities need to be completed by December to allow the crop cycle to finish by the second half of February. This schedule is intended to limit crop exposure to higher summer temperatures.

FRANCE

Spuds top the purchasers' choice

A NEW study by global consumer and shopper insights company, Worldpanel by Numerator, has revealed that potatoes, along with tomatoes and bananas, are the most popular fruit and vegetable consumer purchases in France.

The study showed 91% of households purchased bananas in the 12 months to September 6th, while 93% bought potatoes and 97% bought tomatoes.

SOUTH AFRICA

Research into irrigation and climate change

THE country's Agricultural Research Council is carrying out studies looking at South Africa potato growers' dependence on irrigation and how this is managed.

The council is researching the effects of drought and heat stress on potato yields, productivity, and processing quality. The aim is to understand cultivar responses to water and temperature stress and identify planting material with improved tolerance.

Currently potato cultivation is highly dependent on water, with about 92% of hectares planted under irrigation.

A 2011 study from Limpopo Province linked changing rainfall patterns to more frequent droughts and declines in dryland potato yields. It highlighted adaptation measures such as developing faster-maturing, less water-intensive potato varieties, alongside agroforestry and afforestation to improve moisture retention.

Research using crop modelling, including the LINTUL-Potato model, indicates that rising atmospheric CO₂ concentrations may improve potato yields and water-use efficiency under certain conditions. However, these benefits diminish during hotter periods. Higher temperatures increase evapotranspiration and heat stress, reducing yields. Adjusting planting dates could help crops avoid extreme heat and benefit from favourable growing conditions.

Irrigation management also affects the environmental footprint of potato cultivation, the research team has highlighted. A 2024 meta-analysis covering 119 experimental comparisons examined irrigation, nitrogen use, crop yields, and nitrous oxide (N₂O) emissions (Ball and Hernandez-Ramirez 2025). It found lower N₂O emissions when irrigation supplied approximately 61–90% of crop water requirements, while excessive irrigation combined with high nitrogen application increased emissions. Irrigation and nitrogen management must therefore be balanced to maintain yields while limiting environmental impacts.

KAZAKHSTAN

Partnering up to expand potato processing and exports

KAZAKHSTAN plans to expand its potato processing capacity and exports of value-added products through cooperation with Belgium, according to EastFruit, citing APK Novosti, according to a report by Fresh Plaza.

A memorandum was signed by the Union of Potato and Vegetable Growers of Kazakhstan, Eurasian Group AG, and Belgian company DeWulf NV during the fourth Kazakhstan-Belgium Business Council meeting, attended by Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and Belgian King Philippe.

The agreement covers long-term cooperation in potato cultivation and processing, agricultural technology adoption, and investment.

Kazakhstan intends to adopt elements of Belgium's agro-industrial cluster model, which integrates processing facilities, growers, research institutions, and seed companies to improve yields, product quality, and competitiveness.

Planned activities include establishing potato processing facilities, developing agricultural clusters, upgrading cultivation and storage systems, and expanding domestic seed multiplication.

The cooperation will also focus on introducing higher-yielding potato varieties with resistance to diseases and adverse weather conditions.

These initiatives aim to reduce Kazakhstan's reliance on raw potato exports by expanding domestic processing and increasing the share of value-added products.

The projects are also expected to attract investment and strengthen Kazakhstan's position in international potato markets.

KENYA

Growth in processing sector

KENYA'S potato processing sector is growing, despite supply chain challenges.

Demand for peeled, cut, and ready-to-cook potatoes has risen among hotels, restaurants, and institutions, it has been claimed.

Wedgehut Foods Limited, a potato-processing enterprise based in Ruiru, has increased its processing capacity from 300kg to more than four tons daily since its establishment in 2021, its founder Wanjiru Mambo recently told Fresh Plaza.

The country's potato sector generates US\$400 million annually, but only 6% to 8% of the crop undergoes value-added processing. Post-harvest losses reach 40%, while processors lose at least 15% during processing.

Despite the rise in demand, limited seed potato availability, inconsistent tuber quality, and insufficient cold chain infrastructure limit supply chain expansion. Meanwhile, growers are trialling processing varieties such as Challenger, Markies, Unica, Malaika, and Glen, alongside the widely cultivated Shangi variety.

Coordinated planting schedules and irrigation alongside automation and greater availability of seed are needed if a consistent supply is to be maintained throughout the year, the Wedgehut founder said.

The sector is also exploring opportunities in potato flour, starch, and processed products for domestic and export markets.



INDIA

Smaller European yield could benefit Indian exporters

INDIAN processors could take advantage of low ware crop forecasts in north-west Europe, Chief Coordinator and CEO of the Global Potato Summit, M. B. Naqvi, has claimed.

The 2026 ware potato crop in Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands is forecast at 20.7 million tonnes, down 25.4% from 27.75 million tonnes in 2025, according to the North-Western European Potato Growers (NEPG) forecast.

“For Indian exporters, the potential lies in supplying markets where lower European availability creates a need for alternative sources, the CEO said. “However, the extent of any opportunity will depend on buyers’ requirements, pricing and the ability of Indian suppliers to deliver consistent quality and reliable volumes.”

As well as its fresh potato exports, India’s potato trade incorporates significant french fries and frozen potato products and Naqvi sees scope to build on this trade through greater investment in value-added processing.

“French fries, chips, flakes and granules offer opportunities beyond fresh potato exports, but processors need suitable raw material to meet product specifications consistently,” he said.

“India’s potato production is projected to reach 59.89 million tonnes in the 2025–26 season, compared with 58.57 million tonnes in 2024–25. However, higher production alone does not guarantee export growth. Processors need processing-grade varieties, quality seeds, scientific storage and reliable procurement to produce consistent products and meet international buyers’ requirements.”

These challenges will be discussed at the 2nd Global Potato Summit, which will take place on December 16th and 17th in Gandhinagar, Gujarat. Following its inaugural edition in 2025 at India Expo Centre & Mart in Greater Noida, the event will bring together stakeholders from across the potato industry, including growers, processors, exporters, technology providers and machinery manufacturers.

The 2026 programme will focus on seed development, mechanisation, storage, cold-chain infrastructure, processing, packaging and exports, under the theme “Transforming India’s potato value chain for global competitiveness.”

Potato prices decline

POTATO prices in India have reduced in price over the past year, while its 41 other commodities have increased, the country’s consumer affairs department has revealed.

Food inflation reached 7.74% year-on-year in September, contributing to overall retail inflation of 5.5%, its highest level in nearly two years.

RWANDA

Irish varieties set for release

TWO Irish seed potato varieties have been recommended for release, pending publication in the Official Gazette.

Farmer participatory variety selection has already started for potatoes, with model farmers selected from growing regions. Some will serve as seed multipliers once the varieties receive final approval, increasing the availability of planting material.

The late blight-resistant Irish potato varieties are developed using a 3R gene stack to protect yields and drastically reduce chemical use. develops late blight-resistant Irish potato varieties using a 3R gene stack to protect yields and drastically reduce chemical use.

The biotech crop programme aims to address cultivation constraints associated with pests and diseases, including potato late blight, which affect crop yields and farm incomes.

PAKISTAN

Calls to improve compliance for UAE exports

A FORMER Department of Plant Protection official has called for improved sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) compliance to reduce shipment rejections and increase access to UAE retail channels, the country’s news platform Pakistan Observer has reported.

Pakistan accounts for 6% to 7% of the UAE’s fruit and vegetable imports, representing more than US\$150 million in annual trade. Potatoes and onions remain the main export commodities, although demand is shifting towards produce meeting stricter quality, food safety, and traceability requirements.

Proposed measures include training growers on pesticide maximum residue limits (MRLs), pre-harvest intervals, and hygienic harvesting practices. Organising smallholders into export clusters could also support GlobalG.A.P. certification.

At packing facilities, the recommendations include food safety certification, blast-chilling to remove field heat, and pre-cooled reefer containers. QR codes on cartons could provide traceability covering farm origin, packing batches, and phytosanitary clearance.

The proposals also include electronic phytosanitary certification linked to the UAE’s MOCCA ZAD portal and a national SPS helpdesk.

Improved compliance could help Pakistani exporters secure direct supply agreements with UAE retailers, including Lulu, Carrefour, and Spinneys, rather than relying primarily on wholesale markets, it is claimed.



CANADA

Fuel costs pressure growers

Potato harvesting is nearing completion in Alliston, Ontario, Canada, with P&K Vander Zaag Farms reporting that 92% of its crop has been harvested, according to the country's news platform CTV News.

Operations manager Jessica Vander Zaag said this year's harvest compares favourably with last season, when hot and dry conditions affected crop development and yields.

The farm supplies potatoes to the processing sector, including Frito-Lay and retail brands such as PC Complements and Franks.

Despite the improved harvest, growers continue to face rising operating costs, particularly for diesel. Vander Zaag said the farm is taking measures to reduce fuel consumption, including limiting unnecessary truck idling.

President of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, Keith Currie, said fuel expenses remain a concern during the harvest period. According to Currie, a combine harvester consumes approximately 60 to 70 litres of diesel per hour, with refuelling costs reaching around US\$1,800 per fill-up.

Higher costs for steel and aluminum are also adding pressure on farm margins. Currie said growers have limited opportunities to pass these expenses on to consumers and must absorb them within their existing margins.

FRANCE

LIDL commits to sustainable growers and suppliers

LIDL has entered a three-way partnership involving three suppliers and 10 French growers, in which it has committed to taking a two-year supply and guaranteed purchase volumes as part of a drive to support regenerative agriculture.

As part of its 'Terre de Progrès' range, the plan also includes a set of criteria designed to measure progress in agricultural practices. Lidl thus aims to support farms in their transition, strengthen their resilience to climate-related risks and secure its supply chain.

Launched in 2021, the 'Terre de Progrès' range was initially based on the Sols Vivants program run by the NGO Earthworm Foundation and its Agriboussol tool. Lidl is now developing its scheme around an assessment framework structured around five pillars: Soil health, climate, water management, biodiversity and the socio-economic aspects of farms.

The selected indicators focus in particular on soil cover, tillage intensity, fertility and organic matter content. They also take into account the efficiency of nitrogen fertilization, the carbon footprint, carbon storage in soils, irrigation volumes and the use of plant protection products, measured using the treatment frequency index (TFI). Crop diversification, agroecological infrastructure, farmer training and control of production costs are also among the criteria monitored.

Head of Sourcing at Lidl France, Jean-Christophe Monnez, said: "Securing our supply chain requires a change in the agronomic model. This tripartite partnership on the 'Terre de Progrès' range illustrates our responsible sourcing policy. We are taking concrete action to ensure the resilience of the French agricultural sector and the accessibility of healthy, sustainable food."

PERU

125,000 hectares in Peru under bacteria threat

THE spread of *Bactericera cockerelli*, a psyllid that transmits the disease complex known as "punta morada," threatens 125,000 hectares of potato cultivation in Peru, according to the International Potato Centre (CIP). Potential crop losses are estimated at 98,884 tons, representing US\$109 million in agricultural value.

First detected in Huancabamba in 2021, the pest has spread through Cajamarca, La Libertad, Piura, and Tumbes. CIP monitoring indicates that it has also reached Áncash, with Huánuco, Junín, and Pasco potentially exposed.

The insect, measuring approximately two millimeters, has been detected above 3,300 metres. It causes leaf discolouration, stunted growth, and tuber defects. According to CIP researcher Willmer Pérez Barrera, none of Peru's more than 4,000 native potato varieties or several hundred improved cultivars can maintain yields once infected.

Affected growers face higher pest control costs, with pesticide applications exceeding the usual three treatments per season. The psyllid also threatens tomatoes, chili peppers, and other solanaceous crops.

Since 2025, FONTAGRO, IICA, INIAP, and CIP have been coordinating regional monitoring, molecular detection, and pest management efforts across Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru.

USA/CANADA

Climate pattern's impact on storage costs

THE North America Potato Storage Organization (NAPSO), which operates across the United States and Canada and includes representatives from McCain Foods, Restrain and 1,4Group, has published a bulletin examining the potential impact of a natural climate pattern, El Niño, on potato storage management and costs.

El Niño is a natural climate pattern where sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean rise at least 0.5°C above the long-term average.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) recently reported it being on par to reach historic levels while the World Meteorological Organisation expects it to peak in December and potentially persist through February 2027.

The warming temperatures will increase refrigeration, ventilation, and electricity requirements as opportunities for ambient-air cooling, whereby environmental air is used to remove heat from buildings, reduces.

NAPSO is advising operators to base storage decisions on individual potato lots, local weather conditions, and facility data rather than seasonal forecasts alone. Monitoring priorities include pulp temperature, hydration, bruising, disease incidence, humidity, shrinkage, dormancy progression, and refrigeration demand.

BOX ROTATORS FORWARD TIPPLERS

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RPS Machinery brings advanced grading technology to Confex

RPS Machinery is expanding its offering to the potato sector with machinery supply, project design and management, installation and dedicated aftersales support.

A key focus is U-Vision, an advanced optical grading system for potatoes, using high-resolution multi-camera imaging to grade by size, shape, colour and surface defects. RPS Machinery supports the specification, integration and installation of U-Vision systems in the UK.

Alongside U-Vision, we provide equipment and solutions for washing, peeling, sorting, handling and processing, backed by servicing, repairs, breakdown support and spare parts.

Visit RPS Machinery at British Potato Confex,

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www.rps-machinery.co.uk





Durable potato sacks made for British growers

EAST Riding Sacks has had a productive year in 2026, winning awards, exhibiting at packaging trade shows, and engaging in local community partnerships.



Having operated for almost 60 years, the Yorkshire company started out as a potato sack provider to local growers and has since grown to be the largest paper sack manufacturer in the UK.

East Riding Sacks specialises in producing durable potato sacks which are manufactured using two-ply to three-ply wet strength paper. This means they provide excellent durability and strength throughout handling, storage and transportation.

For added convenience, plastic handles can be incorporated for easier carrying, while mesh window options provide excellent product visibility and ventilation – helping customers see the quality of the potatoes inside.

Available in sizes from 5kg to 25kg, the sacks are suitable for a wide range of growers, packers and agricultural businesses who can choose from sewn or rolled-bottom constructions to suit their packing operations.

The company says its continuing ability to deliver reliable packaging solutions for potatoes and other root crops is made possible because of their quality, durability and its specialist expertise.

Those looking for durable, high-quality paper potato sacks can discuss their requirements and place orders by contacting its team here.

www.eastridingsacks.com/contact/



Meet Optica S: The smart sorting solution

TOLSMA-Grisnich has recently introduced the Optica S, bringing optical sorting into the store-loading process itself. By identifying unwanted material and quality defects before the crop enters storage, the system takes a different approach to how growers can think about space, crop quality and handling efficiency.

With the Optica S, smart sorting starts during store loading. Tolsma-Grisnich's new optical sorter combines intelligent detection, a robust machine design and straightforward operation. The result: cleaner crop in store, more efficient store loading and higher returns from every batch.

The Optica S detects and removes unwanted material and quality defects before the crop enters the store. Stones, clods, rot, Fusarium (onions), major surface defects and foreign objects can all be rejected automatically.

So you store exactly what you want to store: Clean, high-quality potatoes.

www.tolsmagrisnich.com/

Researchers produce guide for assessing the value of nature

RESEARCHERS at The James Hutton Institute, Scotland's pre eminent interdisciplinary research institute for sustainable land, crop and nature management, have produced a practice guide for assessing the types of value associated with nature.

The guide was created as part of a Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services Division (RESAS) project called Bringing in participatory approaches to widen the scope of natural capital valuation. It is intended to help evaluate the economic, social and cultural benefits provided by nature within a landscape. The guide will help land managers, together with other interest

groups, such as local communities and regional land use partnerships, to identify the types of value associated with natural resources on the land they manage.

The methods explained in the guide focus largely on bringing people together and building relationships to better understand the types of value people associate with nature.

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