

SUMMARY OF 68TH MEETING OF AHDB POTATO BOARD HELD ON 13TH NOVEMBER 2018

THE BOARD ROOM, AHDB, STONELEIGH PARK

PRESENT: Sophie Churchill (Chair), Reuben Collins, Philip Huggon (PH), Dan Metheringham, Jonathan Papworth, Bill Quan, Will Shakeshaft, Andrew Skea, Alistair Redpath, Mark Taylor, Michael Welham

IN ATTENDANCE: Rob Clayton, Jagdeep Basi, Phil Bicknell, Derek Carless, Sue Cleaver (Minutes), Anna Farrell, Rebecca Geraghty, Phil Hadley (PHa), Tom Hind, Tim Isaac, Sara Maslowski, Rebecca Miah

WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair, Sophie Churchill, opened the meeting at 8:30am and welcomed those in attendance. There were no apologies.

DECLARATIONS OF BUSINESS INTERESTS

There were no changes declared.

MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY 3 AUGUST 2018

A change to the minutes from the previous meeting was highlighted. Subject to this amendment, the minutes from the 3rd August were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MEETING ON 3.8.2018

Matters arising from the previous meeting were summarised. In addition the following points were made:

- It was confirmed that no changes to the buyer-levy system would take place unless there was support from the Board.
- Forecasting tonnage: 300 out of the required 400 forms had been received so far, and RC hoped that the forecast would be published in mid-December. The Board agreed that this would be a useful indicator of the season. The context surrounding it would be equally important and should cover wastage, rollover from last season, opportunity, fresh trade, other importers such as Israel and Egypt, winter drought, and seed availability.
- A review of the Grow Your Own sponsorship programme plus a review of the year should be included at the relevant Board meeting.
- The Board discussed the possible withdrawal of CIPC and surrounding issues. Some Board members felt it would be useful to signpost more clearly the current information on the AHDB website.
- Board members expressed concern about new instructions regarding the use of Maleic Hydrazide. A new stewardship group was being assembled and although Mike Storey was retiring, he would be retained as a consultant on stewardship matters.

CHAIR'S UPDATE INCLUDING BOARD RECRUITMENT AND REQUEST FOR VIEWS

The Chair highlighted the key points which included an update on LIP, the future direction of the seed and export function and Defra's request for views, as well as meetings and events that had been attended. There was a detailed discussion on the recruitment of new Board members. The Board were asked to get in touch with potential candidates and encourage them to apply.

SECTOR FOCUS FOR 2019/20

The Board examined the priorities of Farmbench, Crop Protection & ICM, Placing SPot Farms at the centre of an innovative and improved KE network, Influencer work and Brexit. The following points were raised:

- Farmbench was discussed in detail. Farmbench V2 must have a successful delivery in order to maintain credibility with industry.
- Loss of herbicides and pesticides remained high priority focus areas.
- It was important to deliver clear messages that linked all the different elements together: change of plant protection products, KE, looking at alternatives, SPot farms, effect on costs, implications of Brexit on pesticides (availability, legislation, CRD), efficiency. ICM as the direction of travel and working with other crop sectors where appropriate were important to join it all up. The review of technical (R and D, KE) should help develop a coherent message.
- The industry should be helped prepare for the potential effects of Brexit.

RM and AF outlined options and likely outcomes for different spend levels of consumer activity.

- The “Bud the Spud” branding and traditional advertising was not considered the best route forward without significant spend. However it was recognised that there was material and routes to consumers created by this campaign and switching the tap on and off was not generally effective, so there are considerations to balance in the debate.
- The Market Development Directorate recommended 3 pillars of activity, rather than a traditional campaign. 1) Policy making advocacy (eg the work with MPs, now in-house); 2) Food advisory panel balancing the media voice with health and nutrition experts; 3) Consumer facing work – acting as a driver to attitude changes resulting in more consumption.
- The Board were asked to consider three options for consumer facing work at three different budget levels.
- The potential of working in partnership with retailers was discussed.
- The importance of the timing of the campaign was raised in relation to quality and availability of produce.
- The Board debated the merits of the outcomes of the different spend levels.
- Board members asked for a modest proposal that would maintain momentum in consumer-facing work for one year, allowing the team to make better assessment of potential retail support and buy-in for longer term activity.

Approval: Board members agreed to the focus areas as laid out and would consider more detailed plans at the next meeting.

KE TEAM DEVELOPMENT, PRESENTATION AND CONFIRMATION OF NEW KE TEAM DIRECTION

TI presented the Knowledge Exchange Team update. The Board made the following points:

- Recruitment of a further KE manager in Scotland was important. The SPoT farm in Scotland had given AHDB a high level of support and credibility, and this should be maintained.
- It was restated that joining with cereals to create the arable KE team was the right move, but across functions, potato expertise is perceived to be at risk of being diluted and is a factor in vfm as seen by levy payers, so we have to protect depth as well as breadth.
- New faces and new agronomists were now being seen at events which was encouraging.
- The research team had a programme of work examining Diquat alternatives, and this would be replicated on SPot farms, which should all have Diquat alternative trials. The results could be aggregated so that all results are available to all across the country. This would give a stronger impact in terms of messaging.

- It was agreed that in order to aid contact between the KEMs and the Board, the relevant KEM in each region would give a brief quarterly email update to the Board member(s) in their region. This model was used in C&O very successfully.
- The KE team had been prepared and briefed for the Farmbench V2 rollout.
- The Board received and welcomed all the change in the KE function.

SEED AND EXPORT PLANS

PH presented an update on Export Engagement. In order to engage the board, increase transparency, improve effectiveness, increase contact and gain greater visibility, a 6 point proposal had been put in place, and a plan for future work was outlined. The Board made the following points:

- It was important not to conflate a decision around the Seed and Export Committee, with a decision regarding AHDB export activities. What was important was that there was proper accountability by AHDB to industry for the activity and spend under export.
- Regarding the Seed and Export Committee, there were differing opinions as to the usefulness of a Committee. It was suggested that the BPTA fulfilled the need to have an industry body that enabled government to engage with industry. AHDB should not try and re-invent the wheel. It was also suggested that a small Committee covering export issues could be useful, as the levy came from growers not exporters.
- The two most important overseas events were Fruit Logistica and Potato Europe. It was important to have a presence at these events.
- The Board discussed the issues surrounding branding, and level of spend.
- Regarding the "... is Great" campaign, PHa. and the export team were working with the Defra team to resolve the issues and get better imagery with a clearer message.
- All levy spend should be justified, appropriate, and demand led. The Board questioned why Cuba was being targeted.
- A key meeting to attend would be the SASA end of season export meeting.
- The Board suggested setting up a meeting on the back of an event attended by all the exporters with the objectives to: make sure the profile of AHDB is high, ask industry what do you want us to do, what targets should be set, and what is missing. It was emphasised that this should have a strong proposal to discuss, rather than being yet more open consultation. Leadership was needed.
- PHa. understood the need to get industry input and support, to make sure people are clear on what they want, and where they want it. In addition he would talk to the Events team to check the cost and scale was appropriate.
- The Chair stated that the Board would not sign off spend without evidence that conversations with BPTA and SASA and other stakeholders had taken place.
- It was agreed to hold the discussion meeting regarding budgets at the end of season exports, i.e. May 2019.
- PH asked the Board if they could provide him with contacts that could he could have useful discussions with on a one to one basis.
- BQ expressed concern that issues were known 12 months ago and a resolution was still to be reached.
- The Board thanked PHa. for his efforts with regard to potatoes.

FINANCE AND LEVY AND PURCHASER PROPOSALS

JB updated the Board regarding potato buying invoicing. The issues related just to buyers within the supply chain. This would bring invoicing in line with SI and would start at the beginning of the

2019 financial year. About 50% of returns were on paper. The Board encouraged JB to move returns online.

Approval: The Board approved the proposals put forward by JB, including moving from quarterly to monthly invoicing.

RC presented the Finance report. The Board discussed central expenditure, overhead costs and reserves.

OPERATIONAL REPORT

The Board discussed the updated KPIs for the operational report.

UPDATE ON FARBENCH

Rebecca Geraghty had taken on the role of Chief Technical Officer for the year.

Derek Carless introduced and demonstrated Farmbench V2. The following points were raised:

- Tesco (and related suppliers) had fed into the upgrade specifications. They were keen to see flexibility around irrigation and storage costs.
- The difficulty of integrating information from different accounts packages was raised. The next phase would be to see if users could export directly from their accounts packages straight into Farmbench.
- The speed of filling in Farmbench, and the motivation required to do so was discussed.
- An AHDB regional team would help with training.

Data sharing:

- DC confirmed that ownership of the data belonged to the user. AHDB would not sell or give away the data.
- AHDB would have a collective view of the data, giving a whole industry picture.
- Nobody else would view the data unless permission had been granted, e.g. for a consultant, and that permission could be withdrawn at any time.
- Any group of growers could be set if requested e.g. if they wanted to compare data with each other.
- Once data was submitted, AHDB would check it and raise any questions if needed. Once validated, the approved data would be added into the dataset. It would be completely anonymised, but enable examination – e.g. to see top 25%, average and bottom 25%, or compare by crop.

Overall the view of the Board was that the development had progressed greatly in the last few months. However until it is launched it is hard to know if it will land well in our sector and the reputational risks are high with grower groups, especially the Tesco group.

MI PRODUCT REVIEW

TH joined the meeting by phone call. PB and SM gave a verbal update on the MI product review.

- 262 responses (potatoes) had been received. The Board were impressed as this represented about 15% of levy payers.
- Costs had been kept down by designing the questionnaire in-house, and having a temp to make the phone calls. A random sample had been used from a list of 600 growers.

Key messages emerging were:

- Over half of growers were using the weekly average price. People that weren't were those growing under contract or for a specific processor.

- Questions also asked what was less important and could be dropped. 30% of respondents said AHDB should keep everything.
- A third of growers were not aware of Potato Weekly.
- There was limited awareness of the Potato Data Centre.
- This raised interesting questions regarding communications channels – although AHDB are producing the information, others are packaging it as their own.

The results would be examined in more detail with the working group.

BREXIT SHOWCASE AND POTATO SECTOR – SECTOR ENGAGEMENT AND NO DEAL DISCUSSION

PB presented “Making Sense of Brexit”. Overall the view of the Board was that there was some potential to sharpen the Brexit analysis and rebalance it for the sector but there was not anything conclusive that could be done about a no-deal scenario at present.

AOB

Succession planning for Mike Storey’s replacement was discussed. The Board were invited to attend the leaving presentation for Mike on 20th December at 2:30 in the AHDB Boardroom.

The Chair closed the meeting at 3pm.