



# **Report on the Inward Mission from Morocco on Scottish Seed Potatoes 15 - 17 January 2007**

## **Executive Summary**

An inward seed potato mission from Morocco was organised by the BPC and SASA with the aim of improving contacts with Moroccan officials and of showing them in person how classification, testing, handling and inspection of seed potatoes in Scotland are conducted in practice. The delegation consisted of four high-ranked plant health officials from the Moroccan Ministry of Agriculture and a senior trade adviser from the British Consulate in Casablanca. The delegates visited SASA headquarters to attend seminars and discussions, and to take part in a tour of facilities related to the Seed Potato Classification Scheme (SPCS). They were also shown how different parts of the Scottish seed potato industry meet the requirements of the SPCS during visits to three different potato businesses. The inward mission complemented the outward mission to Morocco undertaken by SASA and the BPC last year, which together have led to greatly improved relationships with Moroccan officials and a vital increase in the understanding of the Scottish seed potato production system in Morocco.

## **Purpose & Objectives**

The purpose of the inward mission was to further improve contacts with Moroccan plant health officials, in particular those involved with import inspections, and to show them in person how classification, testing, grading and inspection of seed potatoes in Scotland is conducted. The objective was to prevent future rejections of Scottish seed potato consignments by Morocco and to avoid a permanent decline in the current level of trade due to misunderstandings of the quality and health status of Scottish seed potatoes.

## **Background**

By volume, Morocco has long been one of Scotland's biggest export markets for seed potatoes. After some problems with delays and rejections at Moroccan ports last season, SASA and the BPC visited Morocco in September 2006 to improve relationships with Moroccan plant health officials and to increase the understanding in Morocco of the Scottish SPCS and plant health inspection procedures. The outward mission was given a high profile by the British Embassy in Morocco and discussions were held with high-ranked officials from all Ministry Departments involved in potato import and production in Morocco. In addition, a seminar on Scottish seed potatoes was organised for Moroccan potato growers, importers and transporters. Great interest in the visit and eagerness for closer cooperation was shown by all parties involved, resulting in a list of suggested improvements for all parties involved in Scottish seed exports to Morocco.

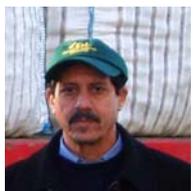
During the outward mission, an interest was expressed by most of the Moroccan plant health officials visited in a trip to Scotland to experience at first hand how the Scottish seed potato classification system works in practice. Most other exporting countries organised similar visits for Moroccan officials previously. Four senior Moroccan plant health officials, those most closely involved in seed potato import in Morocco, and a leading member of the Commercial Section of the British Consulate in Casablanca were subsequently invited on an inward mission to Scotland funded by the BPC. Four of the officials had previously met Dr Pieter van de Graaf (SASA) and Mr Iain Dykes (BPC) during the Outward Mission to Morocco in 2006.

## Moroccan Inward Mission Delegation members



**Mr Allal Chibane**

Chef du Service des Cultures Maraîchères, Direction de la Production Végétale, Ministry of Agriculture, Rabat – *responsible for Moroccan policy on market crops including potatoes*



**Dr Saïd Id Boubrik**

Directeur, Direction du Contrôle et de la Qualité aux Postes Frontières de la Wilaya du Grand Casablanca, Ministry of Agriculture, Casablanca – *responsible for all aspects of animal and plant imports into Morocco*



**Mr Salah Ritoune**

Chef du Service de Contrôle des Semences et Plants, Division de la Protection Végétal, des Contrôles Techniques et de la Répression des Fraudes (DPVCTRF), Ministry of Agriculture, Casablanca – *responsible for all phytosanitary aspects (incl. official documentation) of plant imports into Morocco*



**Mr Mohammed Boukantar**

Chef de l'Antenne de Contrôle des Semences et Plants, Division de la Protection Végétal, des Contrôles Techniques et de la Répression des Fraudes (DPVCTRF), Ministry of Agriculture, Casablanca - *responsible for all non-phytosanitary aspects (e.g. size, packaging) of plant imports into Morocco*



**Mr Driss Amal**

Vice-Consul (Commercial), British Consulate General, Casablanca – *senior trade adviser*

## **Summary of visits**

### **Scottish Agricultural Science Agency – 15 & 17 January 2007**

The Moroccan delegation was received at SASA Headquarters by Dr Pieter van de Graaf, Export Liaison Officer, for the first day of the visit.

The programme started with an official welcome to Scotland by Mr Charles Greenslade, Head of EPHAS, in presence of Mr Peter Johnston, Head of SEERAD Rural Delivery Division, and Dr Kevin O'Donnell, Head of Potato & Plant Health Division at SASA.

The Moroccan officials then attended three seminars:

- An introduction to SASA (Dr Kevin O'Donnell)
- Scottish seed potato classification and inspection (Dr John Kerr & Dr Pieter van de Graaf)
- Potato variety testing in the UK (Dr Stuart Carnegie)

A translation into French of the text of the seminars was provided to the visitors by SASA.

In the afternoon, the delegates were given a tour of SASA facilities related to the SPCS. Staff from different sections within SASA briefed the visitors on nuclear stock, virus testing, PCN testing, molecular diagnostics and SPCS administration.

A discussion of a range of topics (see below) took place throughout the visit, in particular during a final meeting at SASA on the third day.

### **Issues discussed regarding Scottish seed potato consignments to Morocco**

#### **in relation to phytosanitary certificates:**

- Several Scottish phytos were rejected by Morocco during this season. This was the result of minor typing errors (variety name, tonnage in letters), or because the phyto stated “to order” instead of the consignee details.
- The Moroccan officials asked for a list with the names, functions and signatures of all Scottish plant health officials authorised to sign phytos.
- The Moroccans reiterated that each phyto should state the exact quantity of the consignment it relates to, and that all consignments should arrive accompanied by a phyto (i.e. parts of a consignment broken up after the issue of a phyto and arriving separately in Morocco will need a phyto each). In cases where this is not possible, the exporter should send the port authority in Morocco a written justification for the anomaly.
- Any official copies of phytos for Morocco should state the word “DUPLICATE” rather than “COPY”.
- Upon request from SASA, the Moroccan officials agreed that phytos may be issued one or two days after shipment if issue on the day of shipment is not practically possible (e.g. in weekends). However in these cases, the inspection date on the phyto will have to be officially stamped (in blue ink) in addition to the stamp in the usual place on the certificate.

### **in relation to phytosanitary standards:**

- One Scottish seed potato consignment was officially rejected by Morocco during this season, for bacterial soft rot.
- Another consignment was over the tolerance for silver scurf but allowed to pass.
- Despite this, the Moroccan officials indicated that the health standard of Scottish seed imported into Morocco was generally much higher than that from other major exporting countries.
- Rejections take place on a container basis, even if a container holds lots from different crops, growers or exporters.
- The Moroccan law on phytosanitary standards for imported seed potatoes is to change this year. The tolerances for common scab and silver scurf will be further restricted. For Scotland, this will only affect the silver scurf tolerance because the Moroccan common scab tolerance will still be within the Scottish minimum export standard. The new tolerance for silver scurf will be 2% (currently 5%) with max. 33% surface area cover. The changes are in response to problems with these diseases in Morocco and will bring the standards for imported seed in line with those for domestically produced seed. Powdery scab will remain a quarantine disease with a nil-tolerance.

### **in relation to non-phytosanitary regulations:**

- The colour of the label of Scottish class A seed remained a topic of discussion. Although the Moroccan officials accepted that Scottish class A has to bear white labels, they remained adamant that the label colour issue causes confusion with Moroccan farmers and that a solution has to be found. Several options were suggested, including changing the name of the class, adding information on the minimum tolerances for severe virus at growing crop inspection onto the label or phyto, and producing information leaflets for farmers.
- No container size for imported seed potatoes is specified by Moroccan law. Both 25 and 50 kg containers are acceptable. It was seen as unlikely that Moroccan importers would accept tonne bags.
- The size of seed potatoes exported to Morocco should be within the range 28 – 55 mm for oblong varieties and 30 – 65 mm for round varieties (incl. Argos). Labels should always state the exact size range present in the lot.
- The Moroccans promised to provide an updated list of varieties allowed for importation into Morocco. Non-listed varieties may only be imported for specific markets. New varieties can be imported in lots of up to 3 t for trials.

## **Seed Potato Industry – 16 January 2007**

On the second day of the programme, the Moroccan delegates visited three industry locations and met with representatives of the trade. They were accompanied throughout their tour by Mr Iain Dykes (BPC) and Dr Pieter van de Graaf (SASA).

The officials were shown how different parts of the Scottish seed industry meet the requirements of the SPCS and Morocco. They were informed how microplant and minituber production is conducted by officially approved companies during a visit to GenTech Propagation Ltd in Dundee.

They further visited stores of Caithness Potatoes Ltd and Grampian Growers Ltd. A demonstration of an official inspection of a consignment of Desiree was organised by Mr Graham Kerr of SEERAD Central Area Office at one of the stores.

## **Conclusions & Implications**

The combination of an outward mission to Morocco followed by an inward mission shortly afterwards proved to be a very effective method for improving the relationships with Moroccan plant health officials and of informing them about the different aspects of Scottish seed potato production.

The outward mission to Morocco was dominated by two issues that were brought up repeatedly by those visited: the label colour of class A seed and the need for new varieties from Scotland. The confusion about label colours was addressed during the outward mission as well as in subsequent written communications from SASA to Moroccan officials. During the Inward Mission, the delegates showed to have gained an understanding of why Scottish seed always has to bear white labels and that Scottish class A was of much higher health standard than class A from other countries. However, they repeated again that the labelling of class A remained difficult to understand for Moroccan farmers. The production of an explanatory leaflet in Arabic and French aimed at growers in Morocco might be the most practical solution to this dilemma.

The Moroccan delegation made clear that there were, apart from one rejection, no major problems this season with Scottish seed potato exports to Morocco. However, the Moroccan officials remained insistent on phytosanitary documentation being correct in every detail. This does not need to lead to problems or delays as long as all parties involved in the issue of phytos in Scotland ensure that all certificates are produced as required by Morocco.

It became apparent from the reaction of the delegates that the Inward Mission fulfilled its aim of showing them how the SPCS works in practice in Scotland. The visit to the nuclear stock laboratory and administration at SASA followed by visits to a minituber producer and potato stores dealing with exports to Morocco gave a clear image of the practical seed potato production chain in Scotland. In addition, the tours of the SASA testing laboratories combined with attendance of an official inspection, underlined to the Moroccan officials that the phytosanitary status of Scottish seed is strictly controlled. The Inward Mission also strengthened the personal relationships between Moroccan and Scottish plant health officials making it easier to solve any future problems with Scottish seed potato consignments in Morocco quickly and amicably.

**As a result of the Inward Mission, it is proposed that:**

**SASA/SEERAD should:**

- continue to increase the understanding in Morocco of the labelling and health status of Scottish class A seed, and produce a leaflet on this issue aimed at Moroccan farmers;
- maintain the relationships with Moroccan phytosanitary officials through regular contact and by supplying them with the information they have requested.

**SEERAD Area Offices should:**

- issue Phytosanitary Certificates only according to the guidelines issued by Morocco;
- meticulously double-check every detail on Phytosanitary Certificates for Morocco before issue.

**Scottish exporters should:**

- always ship consignments within 14 days after inspection;
- ensure that the tonnage of the consignment arriving in Morocco agrees with the details on the paperwork, or else inform the Moroccan authorities;
- never apply for Phytosanitary Certificates which do not state the full name and address of the consignee.

If you would like to discuss this mission from Morocco please contact:

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Iain Dykes, BPC, tel. 0131 472 4062