

EXPORT OF SCOTTISH SEED POTATOES TO CHINA: REPORT OF SEERAD/SASA VISIT TO BEIJING – AUGUST 2006

Purpose

1. To hold face-to-face discussions with officials from The General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ) of the Peoples Republic of China with a view to achieving the lifting of the ban on the importation to China of UK seed potatoes.

Visiting Team

2. The visiting team comprised:

Charles Greenslade, Head of EPHAS, Agriculture & Food Division, SEERAD
Dr Kevin O'Donnell, Head of Potato & Plant Health Division, SASA, SEERAD.

Programme

3. The programme for the visit is set out in Annex A.

Summary of outcome

4. Following a protracted period of correspondence with AQSIQ, via Defra and the British Embassy in Beijing, arrangements were concluded for SEERAD/SASA officials to travel to China in an attempt to resolve in face to face meetings outstanding issues preventing the export of Scottish seed potatoes to China.

5. AQSIQ signalled its desire for progress on the matter of seed potato exports from the UK, by preparing at very short notice a draft protocol on mini tuber production for discussion at the meeting and by extending the discussion on field-grown seed potatoes well into the evening. It demonstrated a willingness at all times to find pragmatic solutions to difficulties, rather than stand firm on previous positions e.g. by agreeing to equivalent measures to pest-free area status. As such, the outcome was much better than the visiting team had hoped for, with the result that there is a very real prospect that the protocol on mini tubers might be signed when Premier Wen visits the UK on 13 September 2006. Better still, there is a belief that an agreement on field-grown seed potatoes might follow soon afterwards, as there remains only 3 relatively minor issues that require resolution.

6. Detailed reports of meetings held and contacts made are recorded in Annex B.

SEERAD

8 September 2006

**EXPORT OF SCOTTISH SEED POTATOES TO CHINA: VISIT TO BEIJING – AUGUST 2006
PROGRAMME**

Date	Time	Venue	Event
Monday 28 August	1055 1710	Edinburgh Airport	Flight: Edinburgh – Amsterdam (KL 1280) Flight: Amsterdam – Beijing (KL 897)
Tuesday 29 August	0835 1500	CBBC Office	Arrive: Beijing Airport met by BE car to hotel Meeting: Holly Chen (CBBC) & Jane Zhang (BE)
Wednesday 30 August	0930 1200 2000	AQSIQ Office Yue Hao Shi Fu Hotel Yue Hao Shi Fu Hotel	Meeting: AQSIQ Lunch hosted by AQSIQ Dinner hosted by SEERAD (sponsored by British Potato Council)
Thursday 31 August	0930 1300	CAAS Office	Meeting: China Academy Agricultural Science Available for further meetings with AQSIQ
Friday 1 September	0930		Available for further meetings with AQSIQ
Saturday 2 September	1035 1900 1930	Beijing Airport	Flight: Beijing – Amsterdam (KL 898) Flight: Amsterdam – Edinburgh (KL 1289) Arrive: Edinburgh Airport

Meeting with British Embassy and China-Britain Business Council – 29 August 2006

Officials met:

Carol Hinchley*, Head of Trade & Investment Section and Deputy Director of Trade & Investment China

(Tel: +86 10 5192 4205, Fax: 86 10 5192 4000, Email: carol.hinchley@fco.gov.uk)

Jane Zhang, Senior Trade & Investment Officer at British Embassy (BE), Beijing

(Tel: +86 10 5192 4237, Fax: 86 10 5192 4000, Email: jane.zhang@fco.gov.uk)

Brian Outlaw, Director, China at China-Britain Business Council, Beijing

(Tel: +86 10 8525 1111 Ext 305, Fax: 1001, Email: brian.outlaw@cbbc.org.cn)

Holly Chen, Agri-Food Executive at China-Britain Business Council, Beijing.

(Tel: +86 10 8525 1111 Ext 331, Fax: 1001, Email: holly.chen@cbbc.org.cn)

*Carol Hinchley was not present at the meeting but joined the party for dinner with AQSIQ on the Wednesday evening.

Location:

The British Centre, China Life Tower, 16 Chaoyangmenwai Avenue, Beijing

Report on Discussion

1. Mainly preparatory for the meetings with AQSIQ and the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences which the BE had arranged for the following days. AQSIQ had presented the BE with a draft protocol of phytosanitary requirements for the export of potato mini tubers from Britain to China. This had been produced at short notice and involved a concentration of resources by AQSIQ. This strongly suggested an eagerness on its part to conclude an early agreement on mini tubers, perhaps in time for the Chinese Premier Wen's visit to the UK on 13 September. The draft protocol was examined line by line and a number of issues were highlighted as requiring discussion during the meeting with AQSIQ. A copy of the draft protocol was faxed to SASA for further technical consideration and comment prior to the AQSIQ meeting.

2. The arrangements for interpretation, transport and hospitality were also reviewed and agreed.

Meeting with AQSIQ – 30 August 2006

Officials met:

Dr You Zhongming, Director of Bio-Security Division,
Department for Supervision on Animal & Plant Quarantine, AQSIQ
(Tel: +86 10 82261910, Fax: 82260158, Email: youzm@aqsiq.gov.cn)

He Pengfei, Bio-Security Division
Department for Supervision on Animal & Plant Quarantine, AQSIQ
(Tel: +86 10 82261664, Fax: 82260158, Email: hepf@aqsiq.gov.cn)

Dr Li Ming Fu, Chief of Bio-Safety Division (National Post-Entry
Quarantine Station – Centre for Plant Virus Testing Centre) Animal & Plant
Quarantine Institute, Chinese Academy of Inspection & Quarantine, AQSIQ
(Tel/Fax: +86 10 85390628, Email: limf9@sina.com)

Dr Wu Xingxia, WTO/SPS National Notification Authority & Enquiry Point,
AQSIQ

(Tel: +86 10 82262426, Fax: 82262449, Email: wuxx@aqsiq.gov.cn)

Sun Shuangyan, WTO/SPS National Notification Authority & Enquiry Point,
AQSIQ

Location:

AQSIQ HQ, No. 9 Madiandonglu, Haidan District, Beijing.

Report on Discussion

1. The visiting team, accompanied by Jane Zhang, BE, Holly Chen, CBBC and an interpreter, were welcomed by Dr You who emphasised that AQSIQ was pleased to receive the visit from UK experts to discuss seed potato import conditions. AQSIQ had prepared carefully for the meeting and had re-ordered its priorities in order to accommodate the visit. Dr You emphasised the importance of the potato to China and that other countries – Holland, USA and Canada – had to wait over 10 years to commence trade in seed potatoes including the planting of experimental plots in small island locations.

2. In reply, the visiting team thanked AQSIQ for agreeing to meet at short notice and for the warmth of the welcome received. The recent meeting between UK Trade Minister McCartney and AQSIQ Minister Li was recalled and their agreed aim of resolving the seed potato issue prior to Premier Wen's UK visit was noted. The visiting team was available for subsequent meetings during the week, if required. Dr You responded while there was a political desire for early resolution, AQSIQ's first responsibility was to protect China against quarantine organisms. He regretted that other business would preclude further opportunities for discussion later in the week.

3. The visiting team briefly rehearsed the background to the meeting, emphasising Scotland's position as the substantial grower of UK seed potatoes and its track record in exporting quality seed potatoes around the world. This was why SEERAD had been asked by Defra to conduct face to face discussions with AQSIQ. Much progress had been achieved by correspondence – in narrowing the pest and disease issues of concern and in identifying the rationale behind the separation of consideration of the phytosanitary conditions between

pathogen-free mini tubers and field-grown seed potatoes – but it was considered by both sides that face to face iteration was required to reach agreement.

4. The visiting team showed a DVD on the production and certification of seed potatoes in Scotland. From this it was apparent that Dr Li and Dr Wu understood English very well and Dr You and Mr He were also able to follow the narration. The DVD gave rise to a few questions. Dr Wu wished to know which varieties the UK wished to export, to which the visiting team replied that this was a commercial decision. Dr Li was interested whether the varieties would attract Plant Variety Rights to which we replied that this would depend upon the variety and the arrangements agreed between the parties. Dr Li confirmed that China was a signatory to the UPOV Convention. Dr Wu asked about the planting practices between peat-based and hydroponic mini tuber production systems and about the relative size of tubers produced. We confirmed that tubers for hydroponic systems are initially grown in peat or other soil-free growing medium, that mains water rather than rainwater is used for irrigation in mini tuber production, that a variety of mini tuber sizes are produced depending on commercial requirement, that 6 mini tuber producers operate in Scotland, that mini tuber production is under greenhouse or other cover, that a minimum of 2 official inspections are undertaken and that this is of 100% of plants in mini tuber production units, that peat is used only once, that the units are disinfected between crops, and that packaging is of an approved type.

Mini tuber draft protocol

5. This question and answer session led onto discussion of the various clauses within the draft protocol of phytosanitary requirements for the export of potato mini tubers from Britain to China, which AQSIQ had prepared for the meeting in both Chinese and English texts. We noted from Article 1 that the protocol was limited to mini tubers produced in Scotland. AQSIQ made clear that if the UK wanted to export mini tubers from other parts of the country, then that would require to be the subject of a separate approach. Given this restriction on coverage, we pointed out that in many places within the draft the references to Defra would need to be replaced by SEERAD. For example in Article 3 producers of mini tubers in Scotland were required by law to be registered with SEERAD and not Defra. AQSIQ accepted this distinction and agreed to insert in the Introductory section that for the purposes of this protocol Defra would authorise SEERAD to meet the UK obligations. The following other issues arose:

Article 2 AQSIQ agreed that the stipulation within the Protocol of the names of the varieties authorised for export to China, was unnecessarily limiting and, subject to an addition to Article 13 on collaboration on biological characteristics and cultural descriptions of varieties, agreed to omit this requirement.

Article 5 AQSIQ sought assurances regarding the sterility of peat and measures to limit contamination with soil. It seemed surprised that SEERAD did not regulate peat producers in some way. The draft protocol required that the growing medium i.e. peat should be sterilised. While we were sure that at least one mini tuber producer in Scotland sterilised peat on receipt we were uncertain about the position in others or that sterilisation was necessary given the nature of peat. It was agreed that the draft protocol should be amended to read that the growing medium had to be approved by SEERAD as pest-free. We can expect AQSIQ to wish to validate that SEERAD has an appropriate approval process in place. This is likely to

take the form of obtaining written confirmation from peat producers that they have systems in place to prevent contamination with soil.

Article 6 The draft protocol contained a requirement that only one variety can be grown in the same compartment of a greenhouse and that growers had to conduct at least 3 inspections of growing crops. In discussion we persuaded AQSIQ that this restriction was unnecessary and clarified that the growing crop inspections should be official ones and not by the grower. That said AQSIQ agreed that SEERAD's standard of a minimum of 2 growing crop inspections was adequate.

Article 8 We were able to convince AQSIQ that SEERAD's current tuber inspection rate of 5% was preferable to its 400 samples of each consignment as some consignments might be of a small number and 400 tubers could represent a substantial proportion of this. It was good to clarify that the sample was for a visual inspection and not for laboratory analysis for quarantine organisms. We also established that AQSIQ was content for the crop certification number and not the container number appearing on the phytosanitary certificate as was currently drafted.

Article 11 We failed to persuade AQSIQ to reduce the number (400) of mini tubers from each lot of each variety that it would sample for quarantine observation. AQSIQ stated that this was standard practice for mini tuber imports from other countries. There was therefore little prospect of any immediate change.

Article 12 We welcomed AQSIQ's intention to despatch 2 quarantine officials to Scotland to review and retest the production management system for mini tubers. We agreed a compromise form of words for who would be expected to meet the costs of such a visit. I explained that SEERAD would expect these costs to be met by commercial interests. We suggested that the AQSIQ team might be strengthened by the inclusion of someone to look at field-grown seed potatoes in addition to mini tubers and AQSIQ agreed that that might be possible.

Article 13 As indicated above (Article 2) a phrase was added on collaboration on biological characteristics and cultural descriptions of varieties.

Field-grown seed potatoes

6. Throughout the discussion on mini tubers, the visiting team reminded AQSIQ that it wished to discuss field-grown seed potatoes as well. As the day progressed we had become concerned that time would not be found for this. We reminded AQSIQ that we were available for further meetings that week but were told that that would not be possible. However we were encouraged to begin the discussions despite the late afternoon time and were pleasantly surprised to conclude matters, albeit late into the evening.

7. We agreed to work from the outstanding Chinese concerns outlined in the table attached to Lu Houlin's letter of 29 May 2006.

Synchytrium endobioticum (Potato wart disease)

AQSIQ sought Pest Free Area (PFA) status but we said that we were unable to meet this strict requirement, although we could offer measures which gave an equivalent level of

security (in general, throughout the discussions, we offered Pest Free Production Sites in place of the Pest Free Area status initially requested by China). We reminded AQSIQ that potato wart disease had not been found in a potato crop in Scotland in over 30 years, that no potatoes are grown on scheduled land and that it is a quarantine pest throughout the EU. SEERAD inspectors look for the easy-to-find symptoms in growing crop and tuber inspections. We proposed as an additional safeguard to preclude potatoes grown within 1 kilometre radius of previously infected fields. AQSIQ sought a copy of the schedule of affected fields and a map plotting their location. This we agreed to and with that a potential major deal-breaker was resolved.

Globodera pallida and *G. rostochiensis* (Potato cyst nematode)

AQSIQ again sought PFA status. We said that we could not meet this strict requirement although we believed that we could provide an equivalent level of security through other measures. These are accepted by several countries that import successfully Scottish seed potatoes. In addition to the standard pre-planting soil test, we offered to conduct a post-harvest consignment test and also to impose a nil tolerance for soil in shipments to China. AQSIQ accepted this proposal though it was sceptical about our ability to deliver a soil-less sample. We agreed that should an AQSIQ official visit Scotland we could demonstrate what we mean by a 'nil tolerance' for soil.

Potato mop top virus (PMTV)

Once again AQSIQ had sought PFA status and again we said that we could not meet this in its strict terms but that we could offer measures that offered an equivalent level of security. We proposed a nil tolerance which would be checked at growing crop and at harvest by cutting a proportion of tubers (100) to confirm absence of spraing symptoms. After further discussion we agreed to source seed potatoes for China only from fields that had previously no record of affected crops.

Colletotrichum coccodes (Black dot)

We reminded AQSIQ that in an earlier letter it had indicated a willingness to agree to a tolerance for black dot and therefore it was disappointing that it was now seeking a nil tolerance for this skin blemish. AQSIQ acknowledged that this had been an error on their part. They agreed to establish the tolerance used for imports from other countries and to include that in their revised response.

Potato viruses A, Y (N strain), V, Tobacco rattle virus & Tomato black ring virus

AQSIQ agreed to accept post harvest testing by the ELISA method, in addition to growing crop inspection. In addition, tubers would be cut to confirm absence of spraing symptoms resulting from Tobacco rattle virus.

Phytophthora erythroseptica (Pink rot)

We reminded AQSIQ that pink rot is rare in Scottish potatoes and proposed a nil tolerance at tuber inspection. We also proposed that seed destined for China would not be inspected until at least one month following harvest, in order to allow any pink rot symptoms to become visible. AQSIQ said that it would reflect on this and reply in due course.

Potato witch's broom phytoplasma

AQSIQ accepted our proposal to ensure freedom from this rare problem by inspecting for a 'nil tolerance' at growing crop.

Tobacco ringspot virus (TRV)

We reiterated our view that this virus is absent from the UK and had only been intercepted on imported Pelargonium (and even that not the strain known to infect potato). We proposed a 'nil tolerance' for this virus at growing crop. AQSIQ had claimed that it had read in scientific literature that this virus was present in the UK. AQSIQ agreed to recheck its sources.

8. At the conclusion of the discussion we had made remarkable progress in reducing AQSIQ's concerns about the phytosanitary condition of Scottish field-grown seed potatoes. Agreement had been reached on pest free production sites status in respect of Wart, PCN and PMTV, albeit with the need to supply information on previous outbreak sites for Wart and agree upon what constitutes soil freedom for PCN. For its part AQSIQ agreed to reflect upon or reconsider its position with regard to Black dot, Pink rot and TRV. We are very hopeful that this will lead to early agreement on phytosanitary measures for these relatively minor diseases. It will very likely prove necessary for a further mission to Scotland to allow AQSIQ to verify our ability to meet these phytosanitary requirements. AQSIQ agreed to consider whether such a mission could be combined with the visit planned to verify mini tuber production arrangements.

Meeting with Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS) – 31 August 2006

Officials met:

Professor Liu Guangshu, Deputy Division Chief, Division for Scientific Management, Institute of Vegetables and Flowers, CAAS

Bian Chunsong, Potato Export, Institute of Vegetables and Flowers, CAAS

Location:

12 Zhongguancun Nandajie, Haidian District, Beijing

Report on Discussion

1. The purpose of the visit was to establish contact with Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS) for an exchange of technical information and views. Professor Liu explained that the Institute of Vegetables and Flowers (IVF) was established in 1958 and comprised 188 staff (114 scientists and technicians including 67 research professors). IVF was involved in several key national research projects. It had overseen 29,629 accessions of vegetable germplasm and was a partner of the Dutch Wageningen University in developing potato genetic resources. Potato is the IVF's largest breeding department. There are at least 9 potato breeders in IVF. Interestingly, IVF is also responsible for DUS testing in support of Plant Breeders Rights. They mentioned that the question of protection of IPR was now not only a problem for foreign companies but also Chinese plant breeders like themselves.
2. Funding from central government is small but stable and private income is of necessity used to supplement research work. IVF operates 60 hectares of seed potato production and has hydroponic systems. Atlantic is the favoured variety in China. CAAS used transgenic potato for research purposes only – there is no commercial GM potatoes grown in China but this is under discussion. The Government encourages research on transgenic technology. The price of seed potato in China was described as being very low. Major multiples such as McCain and Pepsico were now very active in China.
3. For our part we explained the purpose of our visit to China and showed the DVD on seed potato production in Scotland. This was well received and provoked a number of questions.
4. The visit concluded with a tour of IVF laboratories and greenhouses involved in seed potato breeding and testing.