



# **Report on the Outward Visit to Turkey on Seed Potatoes 7 - 8 April 2009**

## **Organisations visited**

- Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, General Directorate of Agricultural Research (TAGEM), Ankara
- Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Variety Registration and Seed Certification Centre (TTSM), Ankara
- Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, General Directorate of Protection and Control (KKGM), Ankara, Turkey
- Sub-Union of Seed Industrialist and Producers (TSÜAB), Ankara, Turkey
- Secretariat General for EU Affairs, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Ankara

## **Executive Summary**

Following a similar visit in June 2008, a second outward visit to Turkey was undertaken by Dr Pieter van de Graaf (SG-SASA) and Mr Mark Prentice (Potato Council) with the aim of discussing with the Turkish plant health authorities, progress made regarding changes to the status of a range of common potato viruses currently on the Turkish quarantine list required to ensure future trade. Discussions were held with several departments of the Turkish Ministry of Agriculture & Rural Affairs involved in seed certification and quarantine matters. During the visit, it became clear that Turkey is currently in breach of international rules on non-discrimination between imported and domestic produce as Turkish seed crops are allowed to have some virus symptoms whilst imports are tested to a nil tolerance in the laboratory. The Turkish Plant Quarantine Department agreed to look into this matter at a meeting in May 2009.

## **Purpose & Objectives**

To discuss the progress made with reviewing the status of a number of potato viruses on the Turkish quarantine list which currently form a barrier to the import of British seed potatoes into Turkey, and to collect information regarding Turkish seed certification regulations and potato production in Turkey in general.

## **Background**

Turkey is one of the largest ware potato producing countries in the Mediterranean region and has a demand for 450,000 t of seed per year. Only around 50,000 t of classified seed is produced in Turkey itself, meaning that more than 80% of Turkish potato crops is grown from farm-saved seed. In addition, many Turkish farmers do not adhere to sensible rotational intervals.

This has naturally led to many phytosanitary problems with potatoes in Turkey, including regular outbreaks of wart disease and high levels of virus. To address these problems and increase the use of classified seed in Turkey, the Turkish Government has set up a project on the development of a National Potato Seed Production System (see below).

Until this season, Turkey was a growing market for UK seed potatoes. The volume traded to this country increased from 520 t in 2002 to more than 2000 t in 2008. However, a rejection of 250 t of Scottish seed potatoes in the Turkish port of Mersin last year revealed that Turkey has been applying nil tolerances for imported seed potatoes for some viruses which are very common in the EU.

During a visit to Turkey by Dr Pieter van de Graaf (SG-SASA) and Mr Mark Prentice (Potato Council) in June 2008, it became evident that these nil tolerances are also being applied during laboratory testing, hugely increasing the risk of rejections. The viruses on the Turkish quarantine list include Potato Mop-Top Virus (PMTV), Tobacco Rattle Virus (TRV), Potato Virus A (PVA), Potato Virus M (PVM), Potato Virus X (PVX), Potato Virus Y (PVY) and Potato Leaf Roll Virus (PLRV).

During discussions of the UK delegation with the Turkish Plant Quarantine Department last year, Turkey proposed to carry out a new Pest Risk Analysis (PRA) for the viruses in question and to make a decision on their future status on that basis. Soon after the UK visit, Turkey officially requested scientific information on the viruses from different exporting countries, including the UK, Canada and the Netherlands, to enable the PRA. SASA supplied information on the status of a wide range of potato pathogens in Scotland to Turkey, via Defra, in July 2008.

In addition to this, the Scottish Government issued an official invitation to the Turkish Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs after the Potato Council agreed to fund an inward mission from relevant Turkish officials to the UK to support the PRA process. However, although Turkish quarantine officials were keen to take up this invitation, a visit was not approved by the Under-Secretary for Agriculture in Turkey.

As a result of the high risk of rejection for latent virus infection, seed potato exports from the UK to Turkey this year have strongly declined. Indications are that the same is true for exports from other seed producing countries.

In order to find out what progress has been made on revising the status of potato viruses in Turkey and find out more about seed potato inspection and certification in Turkey itself, a second Outward Visit from Britain to Turkey of representatives from the Scottish Government (Dr Pieter van de Graaf, Export Liaison Officer) and the Potato Council (Mr Mark Prentice, Head of Seed & Export) took place from 7 - 8 April 2009.

## **Summary of visits**

In the meetings listed below, Dr van de Graaf and Mr Prentice were supported by Mr Taylan Atakan, Senior Trade and Investment Manager, British Embassy, Ankara.

Meetings held:

### **Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, General Directorate of Agricultural Research (TAGEM), Ankara**

Officials present: Prof Dr Masum Burak, Director General

Prof Burak explained that his directorate covered 60 agricultural research institutes around Turkey including three Plant Health Institutes and the Potato Research Institute in Nigde. The Directorate carries out a wide range of research projects, including a project on “The development of a National Potato Seed Production System”.

This project was set up to give Turkey more autonomy regarding seed potato production, and to address some of the existing plant health problems. The project was an initiative principally taken by the Turkish government without much commercial input. It has so far involved three major areas of work:

1. The creation of a seed potato production chain including the establishment of several government micro-propagation laboratories. Commercial support is now sought from eight companies to take further the current technology developed by the government to bridge the production gap between *in vitro* culture and Certified seed. Prof Burak indicated that the project can currently produce about 10% of the *in vitro* material needed to produce the existing area of classified seed produced in Turkey.
2. The development of potato varieties in Turkey. This is purely a government (Potato Research Institute) activity which is supported by the International Potato Centre (CIP). Until now, all potato varieties have been imported. Any newly developed Turkish varieties will have to undergo DUS and VCU testing for the Turkish National List in the same way as foreign varieties. Only a few new Turkish varieties are being tested so far but many more breeding lines exist. Prof Burak made it clear that commercial factors would determine which varieties would succeed in Turkey and that domestic breed varieties would not be favoured.
3. The establishment of new potato growing areas in Turkey (mostly in the East) with the plan to enforce the limitation of seed production to these areas in the future. Only classified seed (both from imported and domestic sources) will be allowed to be used for seed production and rotational intervals will be better controlled. At the moment, these issues are addressed in the traditional growing areas through subsidies for the use of classified seed and for leaving land fallow after potato production.

This project is very much in its infancy and not in a position to seriously contribute to Turkish seed requirements as yet. The next steps are to seek commercial partners to try and develop seed production in Turkey. It did not appear that this project was being set up to exclude imported seeds, but rather to complement it.

Prof Burak indicated that 60% of all crop breeding in Turkey is carried out by the Government, 35% by private companies and 5% by universities. Plant Breeders Rights laws were amended in 2004 to allow staff involved in breeding new varieties to receive part of the royalties. It was hoped this would reward plant breeding and encourage innovation.

### **Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Variety Registration and Seed Certification Centre (TTSM), Ankara, Meeting 1**

Officials present: Mr Nazim Uysal, Agricultural Engineer  
Mr Saffet Bakir, Agricultural Engineer

Mr Uysal and Mr Bakir are seed certification experts who previously met Mr Prentice at the UNECE Seed Potato Workshop in Cairo in March 2009. They agreed to meet in Ankara to explain the Turkish seed potato classification system in detail.

Turkey currently has two pieces of legislation covering seed potato certification, including disease tolerances (one for protected production and one for field production).

Since January 2008, the seed potato classification chain in Turkey is as follows:

<b>Class</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Production</b>	<b>Tolerance for all virus symptoms</b>
Super Elite	Nuclear stock	<i>In vitro</i>	0%
Pre – Elite	PBTC	Protected	0%
Elite I	PBTC	Protected	0%
Elite II	PBTC or Pre-Basic	Protected or Field	0%
Original	Basic	Field	0%
Certified I	Certified	Field	1% - 0% <sup>a</sup>
Certified II	Certified	Field	2% - 1% <sup>a</sup>

a = first and final inspections respectively

Mr Bakir highlighted that this classification scheme is very different from that in EU countries and that there is therefore a major problem with the lack of class equivalence (in most European countries, Super Elite and Elite are Basic category, field-grown seed).

He clarified that the growing crop virus tolerances in the Turkish SPCS are implemented on the basis of visual symptoms only and that laboratory tests are not carried out on a routine basis. Only if virus symptoms are seen which can not be easily identified, are leaf samples despatched to a laboratory. Post-harvest tuber samples are taken only for brown rot and ring rot testing, not for virus testing. Inspections are carried out by local government staff in 81 provincial directorates. Inspectors are trained at least once every two years.

Mr Bakir explained that Turkey has an internal demand for seed potatoes of around 450,000 tonnes per year but produces only around 10 to 20% of this as classified seed; the rest is farm-saved seed.

Classified seed potato production has increased in Turkey from around 29,000 t in 2006 to around 50,000 t in 2008. Most of this, if not all, is produced from around 10,000 t of imported high-grade seed.

Further information the Variety Registration and Seed Certification Centre can be found on-line at: [www.ttsm.gov.tr/en](http://www.ttsm.gov.tr/en)

### **Sub-Union of Seed Industrialist and Producers (TSÜAB), Ankara**

Officials present: Mr Tayfur Gaglayan, Assistant General Secretary  
Dr Mehmet Uyanik, Technical Affairs Specialist

All seed potato producers, growers, dealers and breeders in Turkey are required to be registered with the Union of Seed Producers and Nurseries in Turkey (TÜRKTOB), which was established in 2008 in accordance with Seed Law No 5553 (2006).

TÜRKTOB consists of seven sub-unions:

- 1- Sub-Union of Fruit and Grapevine Nurseries (FÜAB)
- 2- Sub-Union of Plant Breeders (BİSAB)
- 3- Sub-Union of Seed Suppliers (TDAB)
- 4- Sub-Union of Ornamental Plant Growers (SÜSBİR)
- 5- Sub-Union of Seedling Producers (FİDEBİR)
- 6- Sub-Union of Seed Growers (TYAB)
- 7- Sub-Union of Seed Industrialist and Producers (TSÜAB)

The Sub-Union of Seed Industrialist and Producers (TSÜAB) was formerly known as TÜRKTED and represents importers and seed producing companies. TSÜAB has 220 members covering all crops. The Sub-Union represents its members' interests by liaising with government and lobbying for changes to regulations.

The British delegation explained the current problems experienced with seed potato imports. Dr Uyanik said that they had not had any complaints from their members about this. TÜRKTED had previously successfully lobbied the Turkish Government on relaxing the strict powdery scab tolerance and said TSÜAB would do the same again for viruses if requested by a member. Dr Uyanik suggested that British exporters encourage their customers in Turkey to make representations to their union.

### **Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, General Directorate of Protection and Control (KKGM), Ankara**

Officials present: Mr Şaimiriz Hikmet Er, Head of Quarantine Department  
Ms Hulya Akyuz, Head of External Quarantine Group  
Dr Birol Akbaş, Virologist, Plant Protection Central Research Institute  
Dr Üftade Güner, Phytopathologist, Plant Protection Central Research Institute

The General Directorate of Protection and Control (KKGM) is the main department dealing with quarantine issues and was visited by Dr van de Graaf and Mr Prentice in June 2008 to discuss the problem of routine laboratory testing for common potato viruses on the Turkish quarantine list. At

the time, they were promised by Dr Ahmet Arslan, Deputy General Director of KKGGM, that a new Pest Risk Analysis (PRA) for the viruses in question would be carried out.

The British delegation enquired about the progress made with the PRA on the viruses. Mr Hikmet Er answered that a PRA had been conducted for Potato Mop Top Virus (PMTV) only. Ms Akyuz and Dr Güner insisted that this was what had been previously agreed, although the British delegation had had a very different impression. Dr van de Graaf explained that he had been asked to supply PRA information on all viruses, not just PMTV, but Mr Hikmet Er said that another official request would have to be submitted if the UK wanted a PRA to be conducted on the other potato viruses as well.

He then explained that, on the basis of the PRA on PMTV, his department had decided to retain this organism on the Turkish quarantine list and continue laboratory testing to a nil tolerance. The main basis for this was the fact that the virus may possibly cause symptoms under cooler conditions in the Turkish highlands. The British delegation asked to see the technical details of the PRA, as prescribed in International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) standards, in order to establish which sources had been used to come to a decision. Dr Akbaş insisted the PRA had been conducted according to international protocols but could not provide any detail on sources. The British delegation asked whether economic impact data had been taken into account and whether a survey had been conducted in Turkey to determine whether PMTV was already present latently. Dr Akbaş admitted that neither of these had been included but promised to provide a summary of the PRA outcome.

Mr Hikmet Er and his colleagues were then asked whether they were aware that Turkey was in breach of non-discrimination rules of the IPPC and WTO. IPPC International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPM) No 1 states that “contracting parties should apply phytosanitary measures without discrimination between comparable domestic and international phytosanitary situations”.

Mr Hikmet Er said that all countries exporting seed potatoes to Turkey were being treated the same and gave the example that his department had only recently rejected a consignment from Canada for latent infection with PVX. The British delegation explained that this was not the issue. Although the Turkish Quarantine Service was applying a nil tolerance for viruses to all *imported* seed potatoes based on laboratory testing, the Turkish seed potato certification scheme allowed a certain percentage of these “quarantine” viruses to be present in Certified seed crops in Turkey and inspected higher grade seed crops to a nil tolerance only visually, not by laboratory testing.

Mr Hikmet Er and his colleagues indicated that they had been unaware of this. Ms Akyuz insisted Turkish seed was also being laboratory tested but Mr Hikmet Er had to admit to the contrary after checking this over the phone with the director of the Variety Registration and Seed Certification Centre (see below).

He said the issue would be raised at a meeting of the Agricultural Quarantine Committee in May if Scotland provided further detail on the issue and the relevant international standards. Dr Akbaş asked to be personally copied into any such communication so that he could prepare comprehensively for the meeting.

The British delegation finished the meeting by stating they hoped a solution acceptable to both parties could be found soon and by pointing out that the UK, together with most other exporting countries, would be unlikely to be able to supply Turkey with a substantial amount of seed potatoes

in future if no changes were made to the quarantine list, to the long term detriment of potato production in Turkey.

**Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Variety Registration and Seed Certification Centre (TTSM), Ankara, Meeting 2**

Officials present: Mr Kamil Yilmaz, Director  
and others

After the Quarantine meeting, a meeting was set up with the Director of the Variety Registration and Seed Certification Centre to explain to him the discrepancy in the approach of Turkey to virus in imported and locally produced seed potatoes and to ask further questions on seed potato policy.

Mr Yilmaz confirmed his department was not using laboratory virus testing to certify seed potatoes in Turkey and said that he had already arranged to meet Mr Hikmet Er on the 11<sup>th</sup> April to discuss the virus issue. He agreed that Turkey should not apply different rules to imported and locally grown seed.

Mr Yilmaz confirmed that the Turkish Government was trying to stimulate the use of classified seed and for that reason had identified new areas in Turkey suitable for seed potato production. He indicated that it was Turkey's ambition to eventually become a seed potato *exporting* country. The reason that Turkey applied very strict virus tolerances within its certification scheme was to safeguard the new regions from disease.

The British delegation asked how an increased demand for classified seed in Turkey could be met as Turkey itself would be unable to meet an additional demand for up to 400,000 t of classified seed. Mr Yilmaz stated that, although Turkey is setting up its own seed potato production chain, imported seed would, for the time being, remain the starting point of most seed potato multiplication in Turkey. It was explained to him that the current problems with the quarantine viruses had led to a drop in seed potato exports to Turkey this season (in the case of Scotland from more than 2,000 tonnes to less than 1,000 tonnes) and that this could eventually have a serious impact on Turkish potato production. Turkish growers would have to use more, rather than less, farm-saved seed which would lead to an increase in virus health problems. Mr Yilmaz agreed to address this issue with his colleagues in the Quarantine Department.

Mr Yilmaz was asked about variety registration in Turkey and the requirements surrounding it. Plant Breeders Rights will be granted for any variety that is less than four years old and on the EU Common Catalogue. He also explained that a Turkish 'partner' (importer) is required to get a variety registered in Turkey. This partner will act as the applicant for the registration.

A link to the current Turkish National List was provided (Click on "Tescilli Cesitler Listesi" to download the list as a Microsoft Word file):

[www.ttsm.gov.tr/TR/Genel/BelgeGoster.aspx?F6E10F8892433CFFAAF6AA849816B2EF85E8AF C7A1B9BEFB](http://www.ttsm.gov.tr/TR/Genel/BelgeGoster.aspx?F6E10F8892433CFFAAF6AA849816B2EF85E8AF C7A1B9BEFB)

## **Secretariat General for EU Affairs, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Ankara**

Officials present: Dr Fatma Can, Head of Department

Dr Can is responsible for the department that checks all drafts of primary, and some secondary, legislation on agriculture and fisheries, submitted to the Prime-Minister's Office in Turkey by government departments, for compatibility with relevant EU directives. She explained that EU member states' associated legislation is also regularly checked to see how EU directives are interpreted and implemented. Scottish and other UK legislation is often consulted in this context as it is in English and therefore easily understood.

If Turkish draft legislation is found not to comply with EU equivalents, a negative advice is given by her department to the PM's Office. In many cases, the legislation is then returned to the relevant government department for amendments. However, this is not always the case and, if there are political reasons or time restraints, legislation will be submitted to Parliament despite not meeting EU requirements. Turkish Parliament seldom rejects legislation for this reason.

Dr Can said that she had previously been given the drafts of both the Agricultural Quarantine Regulation and the Seed Certification and Marketing Regulations and had in both cases advised the PM's Office that they were out of line with EU equivalents. However, both pieces of legislation had been passed to and approved by Parliament regardless.

She explained that there is currently no harmonisation strategy in Turkey for alignment of agricultural legislation with the EU, and that the relevant Chapter of the EU Acquis (no 12 on Food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy) is one of many that have not been officially opened yet with Turkey. However, in some cases, the industry in Turkey pushes for alignment if practical problems become insurmountable (e.g. in the case of legislation on plant protection products).

The British delegation explained the issues specific to seed potato imports and asked Dr Can to keep an eye out for potato viruses in future drafts of the Agricultural Quarantine Regulation. Dr Can said that now that she is aware of this specific problem she would be able to advise the PM's office in detail if non-alignment with the EU on this issue continues in redrafts of the legislation.

### **Conclusions & Implications**

The Turkish government previously agreed to review the status of the potato viruses on its quarantine list. However, it has done so only for PMTV and has decided to leave its quarantine status unchanged without providing further details.

At the same time, it has become clear that, although Turkey is developing its own seed potato production chain, demand for imported seed potatoes in Turkey will remain high, and may even increase in the longer term if the use of classified seed is made compulsory.

The problem in Turkey has mainly been the fact that the Turkish Quarantine Department has been oblivious to the impact of the current Agricultural Quarantine Regulation, and the way it is implemented, on Turkey's overall plans for setting up a National Seed Potato Production System. The latter is unlikely to succeed without the continued input of high health imported seed, at least for the several more years to come.

A lack of communication between the different parts of the Turkish Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs has also meant that tolerances for diseases in seed potatoes grown in Turkey itself,

which came into force last year, are out of line with the Agricultural Quarantine Regulation. This means Turkey is now in breach of IPPC and WTO-SPS rules on non-discrimination between phytosanitary measures applied to imported and domestic produce. Routine laboratory testing of Turkish seed does not seem practical and would undoubtedly lead to high rejection rates. The only alternative is therefore for Turkey to change the way it treats imported seed.

In addition to the above, it has become very obvious that both phytosanitary and seed potato certification regulations in Turkey are not aligned to EU directives and that there are few immediate plans to rectify this. In the 2008 EU Enlargement progress report on Turkey, it is stated that progress on alignment of phytosanitary policy in Turkey remains limited and that considerable efforts are still required to effect transposition and implementation of EU Acquis Chapter 12 in Turkey.

A lot will now depend on the outcome of the forthcoming Turkish Agricultural Quarantine Committee meeting. The Scottish Government has already provided the Turkish government with the requested information (translated into Turkish), including details on the breaches of international protocols by Turkey. Hopefully, the support of the Turkish Variety Registration and Seed Certification Centre, which is more aligned with EU practices than the Turkish Quarantine Service and is fully aware of Turkey's dependence on imported seed, will help to affect changes as well. At least, the Scottish visit to Turkey achieved the initiation of dialogue on seed potatoes between these two Turkish organisations.

Depending on the outcome of the meeting, an official invitation might be reconsidered for an inward mission from Turkey to help progress the issues. This very much depends on Turkey acknowledging the inconsistencies that exist and indicating an appropriate plan to remedy the situation.

**If you would like to discuss this visit to Turkey in more detail please contact:**

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Pieter van de Graaf, SG-SASA, tel. 0131 2446354.