



# Report on the Inward Mission from Egypt On Scottish Seed Potatoes 8 – 10 November 2010

## Executive Summary

An inward seed potato mission from Egypt was organised by the Potato Council and Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA). Representatives from Egypt were:

Dr. Salah Youssef, Head of Agricultural Services & Follow up Sector and Director of Potato Brown Rot Project,

Dr. Ali Soliman, Head of Central Administration of Plant Quarantine (CAPQ),

Mr. Islam Ewis, Phytosanitary Specialist, CAPQ.

The delegates visited SASA headquarters to attend discussions around seed potato certification and export related issues. Tours of facilities at SASA related to the Seed Potato Classification Scheme were also undertaken. Visits to company premises demonstrated the quality and professionalism of our export community. Egyptian concerns relating to in-country inspections were allayed, with their importance now better understood. The difficulties that Scottish growers face were also easily demonstrated and discussed. A framework for partnership working was agreed between Scotland and Egypt to facilitate joint projects and improve knowledge exchange.

Given the importance of this market, it will be vital that this dialogue and sharing of information continues.

## Purpose & Objectives

Dr Salah had been recently appointed as the new Head of Agricultural Services, and it was felt important to help promote the security of Scottish seed to the new figurehead. Although Dr Ali visited Scotland in 2007, direct contact between CAPQ and SASA had not been fully established. The purpose of the inward mission was to further improve relationships with the Egyptian plant health officials, and their knowledge of how



classification, testing, grading and inspection of seed potatoes in Scotland is carried out, and to discuss possible partner working.

The objective was to build on the current level of understanding and to improve trade between the two countries.

## Background

Egypt is the largest export destination for seed potatoes from Great Britain, taking around 35,000 tonnes per year. Egypt is also a major exporter of speciality potatoes to EU countries during our spring when fresh small salad potatoes are unavailable from local suppliers. Historically Egypt and Scotland have enjoyed a good working relationship although in recent years there have been tensions as a result of EU rulings on ware imports from Egypt in light of findings of *Ralstonia solanacearum*. However, import conditions to Egypt are extremely strict, which results in increased costs for both Scottish growers, exporters and Egyptian growers. The visit by Egyptian officials was a further opportunity to build on our relationship with Egypt, discuss the issues present, to promote our world class seed potato industry and see export taking place first hand.

## Summary of the visit

### Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture – 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> November 2010

Dr. Salah Youssef, Head of Agricultural Services & Follow Up Sector and Director of Potato Brown Rot Project, Dr. Ali Soliman, Head of Central Administration of Plant Quarantine (CAPQ) and Mr. Eslam Ewis, Phytosanitary Specialist, CAPQ were received at SASA Headquarters by **Mr Robert Burns**, Export Liaison Officer, for the first day of the visit.

The programme started with an official welcome to Scotland by **Prof Gordon Machray**, Head of SASA, also present were **Mr John Speirs**, Senior Policy Analyst, Plants, Horticulture and Potatoes, Scottish Government - Rural Directorate, **Mr Alan Napier**, Potato Inspection Co-ordinator, Central Area, Scottish Government - Rural Payments & Inspections Directorate, **Dr Jon Pickup**, Head of Virology and Zoology Branch, SASA, **Ms Anna Krakowska**, Potato Co-ordination Officer, SASA and **Mr Mark Prentice**, Potato Council.

A discussion of a range of topics (see below) took place throughout the visit. With specific items and actions discussed during a final meeting at SASA on the third day.



## Issues discussed regarding Scottish seed potato consignments to Egypt

### General

- Direct dialogue between SASA and CAPQ on seed potatoes. Historically communication flowed through Defra, as the recognised plant health authority in the UK. Given that practically all seed potato exports from the UK are from Scotland, it is very important to establish consistent direct contact.
- Restrictions imposed by EU on Egyptian ware imports. This is causing some frustration with the Egyptians, and makes arguing for more relaxed conditions for seed potatoes difficult. The Egyptians again expressed their disappointment with the EU for its insistence of having Brown Rot regulations for only Egyptian ware potatoes. They felt this unduly penalised their production.
- Role of SASA as the lead plant health authority on seed potatoes.
- Seed potato –imports – the season 2010/2011.

### Plant health legislation

- Scotland's high health status within the EU. The High Grade region status that Scotland and Northern England was again explained and reiterated. Restrictions of seed and ware production within these areas was discussed;
- The UNECE standard for seed potatoes was explained as a very good base for countries to use as a base for production standards. It was explained that the UNECE standards are incorporated into Scottish legislation. However some standards are set even higher to protect quality;
- Scotland produces only highest classes of seed Pre-basic and Basic only (no certified class);
- Limited import of seed into Scotland;
- UK potato quarantine sits in SASA (recognition of SASA's status);
- The Plant Health Scotland Order 2005, covers 4 key pests: brown rot, ring rot, wart, PCN;
- The new PCN directive from EU was discussed. It was explained that this will provide even higher levels of quality;
- The requirement for Statutory notifications of all potatoes entering Scotland that will be planted was explained and the increased risk assessment this provides;
- The existence of a voluntary ban on imported seed into Scotland;
- Separation that exists between seed and ware potatoes due to risk of cross contamination;
- The changes to the 2006 Plant Health Potato Order: including the introduction of notification by all growers in Scotland of where they are planting seed and ware potatoes. This will result in detailed knowledge of all potato crops. The new SPUDS computer system was demonstrated to the Egyptians;
- Dickeya was discussed, particular interest in the reasons for the new zero tolerance in Scotland.

In the evening the delegation attended a dinner with representatives of the seed export community. Several of the Egyptian inspectors who were in Scotland inspecting seed potatoes also attended the dinner.



## Seed Potato Industry Visits – 9<sup>th</sup> November 2010

On the second day of the programme the Egyptian officials visited seed potato production farms and met with representatives of the trade. They were accompanied throughout their tour by Mr Robert Burns (Export Liaison Officer), Mr Mark Prentice (Potato Council) and Mr Alan Napier (SG - RPID).

The officials had expressed some concern about the reason why seed potatoes needed to be inspected prior to shipment. This process results in senior CAPQ inspectors being overseas for up to 8 weeks, which puts undue pressure on CAPQ's other functions.

The officials were able to see seed potatoes being prepared for export to Egypt, and the stringency of grading required to make the standards. They expressed satisfaction with the continuing value of holding inspection for large tonnages in Scotland, and also saw many tonnes of seed potatoes that could have been sent to Egypt with slightly less strict tolerances.

It became apparent that Mr Islam has come from a pathology background, and his knowledge of potato diseases, particularly skin conditions, was very good. It was concerning, that he took a very strict approach to disease inoculum as a tool to help prevent commercial problems with disease in the growing crop. Significant discussion around the need for tolerances that are achievable took place, and that managing disease inoculum was only one part of crop management.

It became clear that the inspectors that were present in Scotland, have to return to Egypt in time for the receiving of shipments at the ports. This was one of the main restrictions in the granting of extensions to the stay of any inspectors.

In the evening the delegation attended a dinner hosted by Scottish Government



## Final discussions – 10<sup>th</sup> November 2010

Full and open discussions took place between Scottish Government, Egyptian Government officials and Potato Council representatives on the last day of the mission. Much of this focused on building on our already excellent trading relationship, and a proposal for partnership working.

### Specific areas that were discussed were:

- More direct contact on seed potato plant health issues directly between CAPQ and SASA. Especially in the event of any problems.
- Provision of training for Egyptian Inspectors in growing crop disease identification;
- Knowledge Exchange activities between Egypt and Scotland with a view to use the Scottish experience of *Ralstonia solanacearum* eradication to help with management of this organism in the Nile delta;
- Development of electronic certification in Egypt (using knowledge from the Scottish system);
- Pest Risk Analysis training for Egyptian officials to improve interpretation of evidence when formulating policy and legislation; It is hoped that this will allow a greater input to the formation of tolerances for specific pests and diseases.
- Partnership working between Scotland and Egypt

### Outputs:

- **Mr Islam and Mr Burns will develop a partnership working document to cement the agreements made on future partnership working;**
- **Mr Burns would investigate PRA training in Egypt for officials;**
- **Egyptian inspectors would visit Scotland in 2011 to attend growing crop inspection course;**
- **SASA would participate in Knowledge Exchange activities on brown rot eradication in Nile delta;**
- **SASA / PCL would visit Egypt in February/March 2011.**

### Conclusions:

Egypt is the most important market for seed potato exports. It accounts for nearly 40% of total seed potato exports. This increasing reliance on one market, and Egypt's requirement for knowledge and help, means that engagement at an official level is increasingly important.

Strict tolerances and risk supplying the Egyptian market remain. However, it is clear that to help secure current conditions and hopefully influence future ones, will require investment of time and resource. The Egyptians are keen to see the flow of knowledge and partnerships to facilitate this.

The ongoing issue surrounding Brown Rot and EU restrictions for it's ware, is a major factor in how Egypt deals with the import of seed potatoes. Better relations between the EU and Egypt on this matter will help discussions about seed potato import conditions.