



Report on the Inward Mission from Turkey on Scottish Seed Potatoes 8 – 10 March 2010

Executive Summary

An inward seed potato mission from Turkey was organised by the Potato Council and Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA). This followed two previous outward missions in 2008 and 2009 to seek amendments to Turkish laboratory testing to a zero tolerance for many common viruses. The aim of the mission was to highlight the strict controls that exist in Scotland to control viruses, and try to explain that adopting a zero tolerance was not practical. Previously Turkey has shown reluctance to change, but the significant potential size of this market necessitates the ongoing work. The delegation consisted of three high-ranked plant health officials from the Turkish Ministry of Agriculture and a Trade & Investment Manager from the British Embassy in Ankara. The delegates visited SASA headquarters to attend seminars, discussions around the issues, and tour facilities related to the Seed Potato Classification Scheme (SPCS). Field visits also showed how different parts of the Scottish seed potato industry meet the requirements of the SPCS during visits to four different potato businesses. Several areas were discussed with Turkey to try and resolve the issues and reduce the risk of rejection in Turkey of Scottish seed potatoes. Actions were agreed and dialogue is ongoing to reach a resolution.



Purpose & Objectives

The purpose of the inward mission was to further improve contacts with Turkish plant health officials, show them in person how classification, testing, grading and inspection of seed potatoes in Scotland is conducted, and to discuss the progress made with reviewing the status of a number of potato viruses on the Turkish quarantine list which currently forms a barrier to the import of Scottish seed potatoes into Turkey.

The objective was to reduce the risk of rejection of Scottish seed potato consignments by Turkey and to improve the current level of trade.

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 50,000t of classified seed is produced in Turkey itself, meaning that more than 80% of Turkish potato crops are grown from farm-saved seed. In addition, many Turkish farmers do not use rotational intervals.

This has naturally led to many phytosanitary problems with potatoes in Turkey, notably outbreaks of wart disease. 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.

The volume traded to Turkey increased from 520 tonnes in 2001/2002 season to nearly 2098 tonnes in 2007/2008. However, a rejection of 250t of Scottish seed potatoes in the Turkish port of Mersin in 2008 revealed that Turkey is applying nil tolerances for imported seed potatoes for some viruses which are very common in the EU.

These nil tolerances are being enforced through laboratory testing on arrival in Turkey which significantly increases 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).

As a result of the high risk of rejection for latent virus infection, seed potato exports from the UK to Turkey have strongly declined. The final Scottish export tonnage in 2008/2009 season decreased by nearly 44% in comparison to the previous season and was just 1175 tonnes. Whilst the 2009/2010 exports have increased from last year (with 1372 tonnes exported over the season to date) the risk of rejection significantly holds back the potential export of Scottish seed potatoes to Turkey.



Turkish Inward Mission Delegation members



Mr Serkan Soykan
Head of External Quarantine
General Directorate of Protection and Control
Ministry of Agriculture, Ankara



Mr Kemal Degirmenci
Virology Expert
Plant Protection Central Research Institute
Ministry of Agriculture, Ankara



Mr Nazım Uysal
Seed Certification Expert
Variety Registration and Seed Certification Central Directorate
Ministry of Agriculture, Ankara



Mr Taylan Atakan
Trade & Investment Manager
British Embassy, Ankara



Summary of the visit

Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture – 8 & 10 March 2010

The Turkish delegation was received at SASA Headquarters by **Dr John Kerr**, Head of Potato Section, for the first day of the visit.

The programme started with an official welcome to Scotland by **Prof Gordon Machray**, Head of SASA, in presence of **Dr Kevin O'Donnell**, Head of Rural Scientific Services, SASA, **Mr John Speirs**, Senior Policy Analyst, Plants, Horticulture and Potatoes, Scottish Government - Rural Directorate, **Mr Duncan MacRae**, Head of Crops & Plant Health Branch, Scottish Government - Rural Payments & Inspections 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, **Dr Colin Jeffries**, Head of the UK Potato Quarantine Unit and Plant Health Consultant - Plant Health Branch, SASA, **Ms Anna Krakowska**, Potato Co-ordination Officer, SASA and **Mr Mark Prentice**, Head of Seed and Export, Potato Council

The Turkish officials then attended three seminars:

- An introduction to SASA (Dr Kevin O'Donnell)
- An introduction to the Potato Council (Mark Prentice)
- Presentation on Scottish seed potatoes and seed potato classification (Dr John Kerr)

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.

The UNECE seed potato standard was presented by Dr John Kerr on the last day of the delegates visit.

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 Turkey

Turkish Seed Potato Classification Scheme

Turkey currently has a seed potato classification scheme, but historically domestic production has been focused in the ware growing regions. A new, Government-led national seed potato production system is being set up to identify 'new' areas that can be designated seed production areas. Input seed from this would come from both domestic tissue culture and imported high quality seed.

There is some confusion with the Turkish SPCS and the nomenclature it uses (see figure 1). EU Basic class seed (SE and E), has to comply with the same virus levels (zero by laboratory test) as the Turkish "Elit II" class and above. The Turkish "Orijinal" class also has to meet a zero tolerance, but this is based on visual symptoms at first and second crop inspection in the field. Certified I and Certified II are permitted to have up to 1% virus after second inspection.

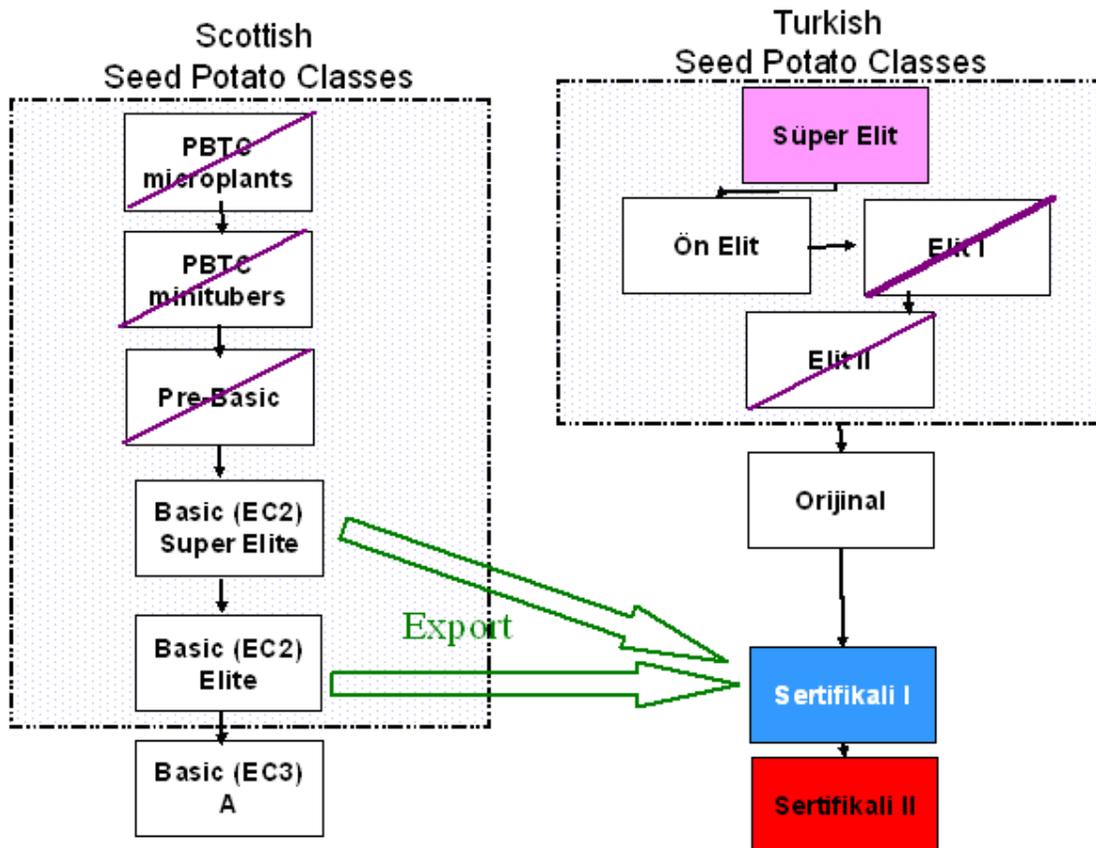


Figure 1: Scottish and Turkish SPCS



The UNECE seed potato standard

Dr John Kerr presented the UNECE seed potato standard and explained the importance of a global trading standard and description of commercial quality. It was explained that this standard is used as the basis for all seed potato standards in the EU. Harmonisation with this would enable free trade with the EU. This would include managing viruses by seed classification and not through quarantine status. It was also suggested that Turkey was very welcome to participate in the UNECE standard review meetings. The principle of the standard is that stricter measures are only justified to prevent introduction or spread of those diseases or pests which do not exist in the country. Or, which seem particularly injurious to the crops in that country. Tolerances should be the same for domestic and imported lots.

Quarantine organisms

International definition of quarantine organisms was discussed. The Turkish domestic potato classification scheme allow virus in lower classes of seed potatoes. This was not compliant with international protocols. For an organism to appear on a quarantine list, it must be absent or the country must have a reasonable chance and be taking measures of eradication.

The following proposals were put to the Turkish delegation:

- Scottish Basic seed should be treated the same as Turkish "Oriijal" class (both were used to plant Certified I in Turkey).
- Having viruses on the Turkish quarantine list was in breach of international plant protocols, including the UNECE standards, which insist that regulations should apply to both domestic production and imports in the same way. UNECE standards also highlights clear guidelines if a country wants to implement stricter tolerances.
- Using the UNECE tolerances and guidelines would bring Turkey in line with the EU.

Although there was some acceptance by the Turkish delegation to the points raised, there was resistance to radical change. Mr Kemal Degirmenci had great difficulty agreeing that the Scottish method of inspecting over 10,000 plants per hectare in the growing crop, gives more robust virus control than a 200 tuber sample of the daughter crop receiving a laboratory post-harvest test. This issue reoccurred several times during the visit. There was also concern that the viruses being discussed weren't the same strains as those found in the EU, or were commonly found in Turkey. Mr Degirmenci advised that Turkish officials are reviewing PVX and PVY with the possibility of changing their status to regulated non-quarantine pests. It was clear that here will be no quick removal of these viruses from the Turkish quarantine list.



In the medium to longer term, it was agreed that Turkey needed to fundamentally review the status of viruses and its quarantine list. It was also agreed that more immediate measures should be explored to enable Turkey to have access to more Scottish seed potatoes, but reduce the risk to exporting companies and growers. Three proposals were suggested by Mr Degirmenci:

1. Scotland has high quality production and should be capable of designating zero tolerance fields where seed potatoes for Turkey can be produced.
2. Scottish companies work in partnership with Turkish companies to send mini-tubers for further multiplication in Turkey.
3. Exporters carry out pre-shipment laboratory testing.

Pre-shipment tests proposal

The principle of temporary pre-shipment laboratory virus tests was agreed. It was also agreed that SASA would submit a proposal to the Ministry of Agriculture to enable this to be carried by a Turkish virologist using SASA facilities. The cost of the travel and accommodation would need to be met by exporters. It was discussed that any testing carried out in Scotland would need to result in no subsequent testing in Turkey. This was agreed in principle (subject to agreement by the Ministry of Agriculture). To help get agreement it was suggested that the SASA proposal should offer additional training/sharing of knowledge when the virologist is in Scotland. The British Embassy would facilitate to reach an agreeable protocol.

Virus information

Mr Serkan Soykan asked if information on viruses which occur in Scotland could be provided by SASA. Dr Christophe Lacomme agreed to provide this data.

Further co-operation

Mr Taylan Atakan underlined the importance of the official documentation to be sent from Scotland to Turkish officials soon after the mission end. Dr Kevin O'Donnell expressed his willingness to co-operate and communicate also in less formal summaries via e-mails.

***In vitro* propagation standards**

Mr Serkan Soykan raised a question about the detail of international tissue culture standards. It was agreed that Scotland would provide the relevant references. (IPPC standard, EPPO standard and Scottish NSIU position as outlined in the Potato Section Nuclear Stock Leaflet)



Seed Potato Industry Visits– 9 March 2010

On the second day of the programme, the Turkish delegates visited mini-tuber production facilities, seed potato production farms and met with representatives of the trade. They were accompanied throughout their tour by Mr Mark Prentice (Potato Council) and Mr Alan Napier (SG - RPID).

The officials were shown how different parts of the Scottish seed industry meet the requirements of the SPCS and the Turkish phytosanitary requirements. They were informed that micro-plant and mini tuber production is only conducted by officially approved companies during a visit to GenTech Propagation Ltd in Dundee.

They further visited premises of Mrs Mary Brown Dowell & Son, Whitewater Potatoes Ltd and Robert J S Doig Ltd. A demonstration of an official inspection of a consignment of seed potatoes was organised by Mr Alan Napier.





Conclusions and implications

During the visit a number of issues relating to virus were discussed, with an apparent 'easing' of the Turkish stance. However, there was no willingness to immediately remove the viruses from the quarantine list. It was pleasing regarding opportunities to improve the potato trade between Scotland and Turkey. The main difficulty for Scottish exporters is that agreement was reached on the principle of virus testing in Scotland rather than Turkey. This is subject to full agreement from the Ministry of Agriculture in Ankara, which has a history of being slow.

Due to the potential for rejection created by the current virus testing requirement the Turkish market is considered prohibitively risky for most Scottish exporters.

During their visit the Turkish delegates were able to see that Scotland takes virus levels in seed crops very seriously, and that the Scottish climate is naturally hostile to virus-spreading aphids. In addition to the growing conditions they could see that the Scottish Government has a number of measures in place to maintain the health status of crops, including the power to destroy seed and ware crops which pose a virus risk to seed crops during the growing season. As a result of the climate and regulations, seed from Scottish crops will have the highest health available to Turkish importers.

It is hoped that the message will be understood that no country or exporter can guarantee to meet a nil tolerance, based on laboratory techniques for viruses which are openly transmitted in the environment.

It has to be recognised that the intention of the Turkish Government is to create high quality seed production areas in Turkey and their desire to ensure the potatoes planted in these areas are of a quality consistent with this objective. There is an opportunity to help broaden the Turkish knowledge in this area and position Scotland as an ideal partner. The Turkish seed demand is significant, and it was stated by Mr Uysal that input seed for these new areas will need to predominantly come from imported seed.

In the medium to long term Dr John Kerr suggested that Turkey consider moving to the UNECE tolerances for domestic and imported seed. The standard is sufficiently strict to maintain production of high quality seed without inhibiting trade by being excessively restrictive on producers.

In the short term the possibility of Scotland supplying seed lots tested free from viruses to meet the current Turkish requirements was agreed. SASA will formulate proposals to allow this to be done by Turkish officials testing the crops in Scotland using the SASA virology laboratories. This would only be on the understanding that the lots would not be retested on arrival in Turkey. It is hoped that this process would be temporary like it has been in other markets like Thailand, where testing requirements for certain viruses were removed after several seasons. Longer term removal of viruses from the quarantine list would also negate the need for testing.



This approach would both meet the current Turkish import requirements and give confidence to the Scottish exporters to market a greater tonnage as they would not incur the financial risk of rejection on arrival in Turkey. It was proposed that if Turkey could

agree to this proposal the Scottish exporters would pay the costs of travel and accommodation for the officials visiting Scotland to conduct the testing.

It became apparent from the reaction of the delegates that the Inward Mission fulfilled its aim of building confidence in the Scottish system and illustrating how the SPCS works in practice in Scotland.

The visit to the nuclear stock laboratory and administration at SASA followed by visits to a mini tuber producer and potato stores dealing with exports to Turkey 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 at an official inspection, underlined to the Turkish officials that the phytosanitary status of Scottish seed is strictly controlled.

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

SASA / Scottish Government should:

- draft proposal of pre-shipment virus testing to be done by Turkish officials of the crops in Scotland using the SASA virology laboratories;
- maintain the relationships with Turkish Ministry of Agriculture officials through regular contact and by supplying them with the additional information they have requested;
- provide any assistance to Turkey in the project to improve the Turkish domestic seed production chain and certification process;
- consider the possibility to include molecular genotype characterisation of Turkish PVY strains in a forthcoming project we are conducting into UK PVY strains;
- continue to increase the understanding in Turkey of the labelling and health status of Scottish seed.

PCL should:

- subject to official Turkish agreement to laboratory testing in Scotland, liaise with exporters and SASA about the practicalities and costs of doing this.



If you would like to discuss this mission further please contact:

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