



AHDB



AHDB Potato Lifting Report

Report 3

Week Ending – 12 November 2019

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National Overview

As of 12 November, 89% of the GB potato area had been lifted. The [MetOffice](#) rainfall anomaly maps show that during October, much of Yorkshire and the East Midlands had over 175% of 'normal' rainfall. Most of the rest of England received 125% or more of normal rainfall, as did the southern parts of Wales where potatoes are grown. In Scotland, rainfall was close to or slightly below average for October. Actual monthly rainfall ranged from 75-100mm in the East of England to 200-300 mm in parts of Yorkshire, the North West and Southern Wales. Wet weather persisted into November, with saturated fields and flooding affecting much of the country. The River Don and surrounding areas were particularly affected by heavy rain, where there has been widespread flooding.

Saturated ground was a feature of lifting during the later parts of October and early November, with ground conditions being a key determinant in lifting progress. On well drained soils it was possible for farmers to access crops in the occasional gaps between bands of rain. Here lifting took place, with most crops on well drained land now lifted. It is the land with poorer drainage that has caused the major problems, with wet soil conditions often preventing the machinery from accessing the field (especially where separate trailers are used). As a result, there are increasing reports of crops being abandoned, or farmers halting lifting, but remaining hopeful that they might salvage something in the spring once ground conditions improve. The risk with this strategy is that skin finish and fry colour could well be affected, resulting in potatoes having to find different markets to those for which they were grown.

There remains a great deal of uncertainty over the fate of the remaining 11% of the crop area yet to be lifted. A small proportion of this area is expected to be lifted if there are any breaks in the weather over the next few weeks. Some will aim to do a salvage job in the spring and see what they can get. An estimated 2-3% of the area is expected to have to be completely written off, as the quality of the crop (incidence of rots) is such that it is unlikely to find a market, even if it could be extracted.

Yields decreased slightly for those crops harvested in late October and early November, attributed to waterlogging in fields and increased losses to rots. The current estimated national average yield is 47-49t/ha. Farm yields range from 17-75t/ha, with the lowest yields reported from fields where there were whole or partial abandonments. Where wastage occurred due to rots, greens and machinery, there were also lower yields.

Quality over the last month was variable with rots the main concern across all regions. Crops that were affected by standing water prior to harvest are particularly high risk, as well as those that were put into storage wet. Some growers have chosen to leave crops in the ground where risks to quality may be affected by attempting to lift (e.g. risk of rot spreading in store). Those crops that were lifted in wet conditions brought high levels of soil contamination and rots into store, but this is being managed by vigilant ventilation. Fry qualities are still holding, with occasional reports of numbers rising to 1 following the recent period of colder weather. Despite the difficulty in lifting, bruising has remained at average levels for the year.

Regional Overview

Scotland

An estimated 93% of the regional potato area in Scotland was lifted by 12 November. Despite the stop/start conditions since lifting began, most growers are nearing completion. There is still 7% of the regional crop area left to lift, which will be gradually harvested over the next few weeks. Rate of progress and proportion lifted will be dependent on frost levels and soil conditions.

Overall the quality of crops lifted earlier in the season was good. Those lifted in late October and early November have shown some deterioration in quality, due to difficulty of lifting or from disease issues, increased by the recent heavy rains. In Scotland there are occasional reports of rots appearing, but with no major concerns as of yet. Growers are being vigilant when it comes to storing on farm to reduce the risk of rots being carried into store and contaminating the rest of the crop.

To date farm yields in Scotland range from 33-68t/ha, with poorer yields coming from those crops that were lifted out of wet conditions.

North West

An estimated 67% of the regional potato area was lifted by 12 November. There are reports of whole crop abandonment in areas that have experienced repeated flooding. However, some may still try and lift outstanding crops if conditions allow.

Quality is variable. There are reports of increasing amounts of rot where crops were stood in water for a period of time before lifting. Skin set is reasonable, having benefited from the slow lifting progress. There are concerns over storing potatoes which were lifted in wet condition. As a result, growers are keen to get crops sold and off farm to prevent quality from deteriorating in storage. Where crops are to be stored, growers have tried to avoid lifting areas where water has been standing overly long to avoid bringing rotting tubers into store.

To date, farm yields in the North West have ranged from 40-55t/ha. This does not include crop losses and partial field harvest. Still, farm yields are slightly better than average despite weather issues.

North East

An estimated 85% of the regional area has been lifted to date. The most progress was made on better draining soils. Those on soils with poorer drainage were only able to lift parts of fields where ground conditions allowed. Abandonment rates are estimated to be between 2-3%, with many choosing to leave crops in the ground until conditions improve and hope they can go back and lift later. Storage of wet crops is a real concern. This is driving some to delay harvesting high risk crops to reduce the risk of rots spreading in store. The assumption being that the losses in the field will be less than if rots become established in stores. Those that have stored damp crops are now attempting to dry them out or risk losses.

To date, regional farm yields range from 45-60t/ha. Higher yields are from areas with well drained soils and lower yields from those still struggling to lift crops.

Yorkshire & Humber

An estimated 79% of the regional area has been lifted to date. Wet weather continued to hamper progress, with southern areas of the region experiencing severe flooding issues in early November. Heavy rain has washed some ridges down leaving tubers exposed. This has resulted in an increase in greening and many growers are choosing to abandon areas of crop over storage concerns.

On crops lifted in wet conditions, soil is being taken into store and increasing amounts of cleaning and grading is required. Rots and greening are currently the main cause of wastage on farm.

Farm yields ranged from 35-75t/ha, with weather being the main cause of lower yields. Despite challenging conditions, there were some good farm yields reported in the last few weeks.

East Midlands

An estimated 92% of the regional area was lifted by 12 November. Weather remains the main challenge to lifting, with many areas experiencing heavy flooding since the end of October and into the beginning of November. Those on better land managed to make progress in between showers. Trailed harvesters becoming increasingly difficult to operate on heavier land, adding to the risk of tuber damage and this hampered completion of lifting.

Abandonment estimates are variable depending on areas that are more at risk to flooding in the region. The area comprises of whole fields and partial fields, these abandonments are mostly due to unsuitable storage conditions, waterlogged areas and inaccessible fields.

As harvest is delayed further there are increasing concerns over quality on the 7% of the area left to harvest. Black dot and other skin blemish diseases are increasing in later lifted crops. Risk of bruising is markedly increasing due to lower soil temperatures and the intense grading that is now required. Storage concerns are growing around crops currently being lifted.

Excluding earlies there is still 13% of the maincrop area left in the ground. The situation in Lincolnshire is particularly challenging with significantly more rainfall recorded than in the neighbouring counties. There may be attempts to lift unflooded fields in the spring, but many are expecting to abandon these areas.

Farm yields in the East Midlands remain good, although there are occasional low yields where partial crop failures or abandonment have occurred and range from 15-75t/ha. Poorer yields are from crops which suffered from harvest losses due to cuts and slicing of potatoes as operators struggled to lift crops.

West Midlands

An estimated 94% of the West Midlands area had been lifted by 12 November. Soils are now largely saturated and so even small amounts of rain have a more significant impact on the field conditions. Clearance rates are variable and generally much lower than expected. At this stage most harvestable fields have been cleared leaving the more challenging soils to lift.

Despite the weather issues, quality has held up. There have been no negative impacts on fry qualities, but the risk of deterioration is likely to increase on the small area of crop left to harvest. Rots are now believed to have decayed tubers in the field, which are not surviving the lifting process. There are no significant storage issues, but there are growing concerns over the higher soil loading and rots coming into store. Growers are tackling this through good ventilation, although humidity remains high.

Yields remain consistent with, or slightly above, average from the region despite weather issues. Farm yields range between 32-72t/ha, with most crops yielding close to the farm average.

East

Lifting is near completion now at 95% complete by 12 November. Work rates were slow due to the heavy nature of the wet soils, with larger growers yet to lift some substantial areas. Rainfall made lifting challenging from the end of October and into November, with heavy rain significantly damaging soil structure. Lifting was complicated by compaction to soils due to machinery movement on wet ground. It is unclear at this stage just how much will be abandoned, as most growers are still hoping to clear unharvested areas. The expectation is that abandonment will be lower in the East than elsewhere.

Skin set remains good despite the challenge to lift tubers and bruising has remained at average levels. For crops in storage, rots are being identified and managed accordingly with high airflow and ventilation practices.

Farm yields are tending to be slightly above average, ranging from 34-71t/ha.

South West

The majority of potato crops in the South West are now lifted, with most of the area consisting of earlies lifted before the wet weather set in. Those lifted later experienced some quality issues and wastage due to growth cracks and seed borne viruses, but most met specifications.

Farm yields were close to or slightly above average.

South East

Progress was hampered slightly due to saturated fields, with machinery struggling to access crops on heavier land. Those that were lifted earlier in the season on lighter lands showed above average yields and good quality. Those that were delayed due to wet weather experienced issues with rots and bruising, especially those in waterlogged fields. Crops that are still in the ground will typically be abandoned due to quality not meeting specifications.

Wales

Lifting is nearing completion for those able to get crops out of the ground. Like many regions wet weather has been a challenge for growers, with many struggling to get machinery onto fields and lift without impacting quality. Those with smaller areas progressed well and overall yields are good. Lower yields are from fields where crops were partially abandoned in November, whereas those lifted in October tended to yield better.

Quality was affected by wet weather, with increasing reports of rots where fields are in standing water or where crops have been stored damp. Black spot is increasingly prevalent where storage is humid and soil has collected on the tuber.

Sector Overview

Fresh Chipping

Yield

Fresh chipping potatoes are predominantly grown in the East Midlands, West Midlands and East of England. Better crops for this sector were lifted in October, with yields being maintained despite the challenging conditions. The GB yield estimate is currently 46-48t/ha to 12 November.

Farm yields range from 15-75t/ha, with higher yields from crops that were grown on free draining soils and lifted out in good ground conditions. Lower yields came from those crops affected by seed borne viruses and cracking, as well as in locations where partial abandonment of crops occurred.

Quality

Quality remains good despite the wet weather conditions across the country. Dry matters remain within specification. Fry colours on early harvested crops were typically 00-0, but the recent wetter weather meant that those later harvested crops saw a slight deterioration with an increasing

proportion scoring 1. There are some internal issues with spraing and brown centres where crops were stood over long periods of time in water before harvest.

Dry Matter: Range from 20% in Yorkshire, through to 22% in East of England.

Fry colour: Still meeting specification between 0-1, cooler weather has meant that some samples are coming in at 1.

Size: Overall tuber size and number is variable, but above average. The 10kg samples remain unchanged from our last report with counts ranging between 50-63 tubers.

Wastage: Typically between 5-7%, occasionally rising as high as 20%. Blackleg and greening are the main causes of wastage on farm, with reports that slug damage is beginning to increase.

Processing

Yield

Later lifted processing crops saw increased wastage and losses to rots compared to those harvested through to mid-October. In addition, these late harvested crops had increasing levels of partial crop abandonment. As a result, the average yield of crops lifted in late October and early November reduced compared to those lifted earlier in the season. The current GB yield estimate is within the range of 46-49t/ha.

Farm yields ranged from 37-72t/ha. Higher yields are from crops lifted in better conditions earlier in the season.

Quality

The shape of lifted potatoes is generally good, with some cracking associated with virus or turgor cracking in Piper and Royal. Fry colours remain good throughout, but may deteriorate on any unharvested crops once frosts begin to set in.

Internal Issues: More than usual internal issues are arising in later lifted crops, but these are mostly contained within expected varieties, such as Shepody and Dell in the West Midlands.

Dry Matter: The majority of crops continue to meet specification, with an average dry matter content of 21%, ranging from 20% in Yorkshire to 23% in the East of England.

Fry colour: Colours remain good across all regions with scores ranging from 0-1. The expectation is that fry colour will deteriorate on the small area of crop that is left to harvest, especially if there is a prolonged period of frosty weather prior to lifting.

Size: Size and number continue to be variable, but overall good. Samples for crisping (10kg) are ranging from 62-85 tubers per sample.

Wastage: Typically between 7-10%, with reports of up to 20% in the East Midlands. Wastage was mostly attributed to greening, slug damage and rots made worse by tubers in standing water. Wastage has increased in the East of England, where mechanical damage is reflecting the challenging lifting conditions.

Packing

Yield

Crop abandonments in fields and challenging lifting conditions across GB have caused a slight reduction in yield across later lifted crops. Current estimate of GB national yield is between 45-47t/ha.

Farm yields ranged between 15-62t/ha. Lifting of only partial crops is still an option most growers are choosing to take due to waterlogged areas in fields.

Quality

Quality deteriorated slightly over the last 3 weeks as a result of the poor lifting conditions for most of GB. In the West Midlands, few of the remaining crops harvested in late October and early November met market specification. Tubers harvested with soil clods are becoming challenging for the washed packing sector. Soil is reluctant to loosen when in store, creating potential issues for the washing process later.

Skin finish: Skin finish is variable across regions, with areas worst affected by flooding lifting tubers where skin finish has been compromised. Further south skin finish remains good, with average levels of scab found.

Internal issues: There remains no significant issues. There are occasional reports of issues with Nectar and many are concerned how this variety will fare when stored.

Size: Generally sizing is good, with reports that tubers under 45 mm are not currently being lifted. This is due to field conditions and the need to set the webbing on machines to reduce soil collection. Baker content remains variable, ranging from 10% in the North West to 60% in Yorkshire, with an average of 38%.

Wastage: Out grades are variable, but have increased slightly as lifting progressed into November. Wastage averaged 20% in the last month, mostly due to greens, rots and machinery damage as growers attempt to reduce soil intake when lifting. The East of England estimates up to 7% of the crop is going to waste due to increasing slug and wireworm damage, whilst the East Midlands saw an increase to up to 30%.

Fresh Bags

Yield

As with most of the other sectors, yields declined slightly due to weather conditions and partial crop abandonment. The current GB estimate is 45-47t/ha, although this does not account for areas of crops still to be lifted due to waterlogging.

Farm yields ranged between 35-71t/ha. The East of England and West Midlands reported the lowest yields, where crops were affected by seed borne viruses resulting in cracks.

Quality

Overall quality remains good, despite poor lifting conditions. There was an increase in internal issues and more spraing than usual is being seen. There was a slight increase in bruising as crops were lifted out of saturated soils and increased cleaning was required.

Internal issues: Increasing issues with brown centre and spraing are reported especially in Piper and Cabaret varieties.

Size: Size and number variable, but overall about average. The 25kg sample bags typically contain 140-150 tubers.

Wastage: Typically between 10-20% on farm due to weather conditions, blackleg, greening and slug damage.

Report Information

This lifting report has been prepared by ADAS for the AHDB, using data supplied by regional reporters (mostly independent potato agronomists). It focusses on main crop potatoes from the main potato growing regions in GB (c.88% of the GB area). Main crop progress is reported against total area of surveyed regions, including earlies but excluding seed. For regions including the South West, North West, Wales and the South East, where crop areas are smaller, or there is a focus on early potato production, the information provided is qualitative. Lifting progress, quality and yields are reported as current, so subject to change as lifting progresses.

For more information please contact the MI team by emailing potatoes.mi@ahdb.org.uk.