



AHDB



AHDB Potato Lifting Report

Report 1

Week Ending – 29 September 2020

Prepared by ADAS



Overview

This potato lifting report covers lifting throughout September with reporting weeks ending on a Tuesday. The main focus of the report is on the lifting of maincrop potatoes. However, the lifting of earlies is included in the area harvested and some information on earlies is included in the commentary. Seed potatoes are not included.

By 29 September, 38% of the total GB potato area had been lifted. The majority of earlies were harvested across all regions and the lifting of maincrop varieties now underway.

The lifting conditions during September were generally good, although on the dry side early in the month. The dry conditions affected most regions, with little rainfall seen through to WE22 September. WE29 September saw a change in weather, with many regions receiving rainfall. Average rainfall for September was 70mm, which was enough to make lifting conditions a little easier for many. However, rainfall was patchy in nature, with some areas receiving localised heavy downpours, whilst others saw very little.

The overall quality of crops is good, with few reports of issues.

Based on crops lifted to date, the national yield estimate is currently between 46-50t/ha. Early indications suggest maincrop yields are slightly above the five-year average in most regions.

National

Lifting update

To WE29 September, the total potato area lifted is estimated at 38% of the national area. By WE15 September, 16% of the national area had been lifted (including many early varieties). A good start to lifting was made in the East of England, West Midlands and Scotland. Steady progress was made through WE22 September, with a further 8% of the area lifted. Conditions for lifting in the first three weeks of September were mostly dry, increasing the risk of bruising for many. However, some regions were suffering from waterlogging left over from August rains. WE29 September saw an increase in the rate of lifting on the previous week (15% of the area cleared), with more crops ready and recent rain improving lifting conditions in most areas. Very high rainfall in parts of the East of England and the South East in WE29 September and forecasted rain for WE06 October may result in lifting delays over the coming weeks.

Yield

The estimated national average yield (across all sectors) is currently 46-50t/ha, although it should be noted that this includes yields from early varieties, which are lower than maincrop yields. Farm yields range from 20-90t/ha. Some of the poorest yields were reported in the East Midlands. Here, some crops were affected by heavy rainfall in June resulting in partial crop failures and high levels of defects. Most regions are reporting that yields are close to, or slightly above, average.

Quality

Overall quality of potatoes lifted to WE29 September was good, with decent skin set and low levels of wastage. In most regions the level of bruising experienced in September was relatively low, although dry conditions did increase the risk. Higher levels of bruising were reported in the East of England, where soils were driest. However, showers during WE29 September reduced the risk and growers are

now able to progress at pace. Overall blight pressure was low, with dry conditions during September minimising the risk of spread and infection.

The turn to more unsettled conditions in late September has instigated a number of Hutton periods, so vigilance is needed. Occasional infections were observed on dumps and susceptible varieties during late September. There are low levels of black leg present, affecting crops across the regions. Also, there have been occasional reports of rots, especially where crops were waterlogged during the summer storms in August.

Regional Overview

Scotland

An estimated 26% of the potato area in Scotland was lifted by WE29 September. Lifting has accelerated with the favourable conditions during the latter part of the month.

Overall, the quality of crops lifted to date is good. There was a perceived high risk of bruising during the early part of September due to dry soils. This resulted in some growers pausing lifting awaiting forecast rain to moisten soils and lower the risk. Overall disease pressure in Scotland was low, with occasional reports of rots and scab appearing, but with no major concerns yet.

To date, farm yields in Scotland range from 30-65t/ha. Average to below average yields are forecast.

North West

An estimated 14% of the regional potato area was lifted by WE29 September.

Quality is variable, with reports of rot where crops were stood in water for a period of time before lifting. Skin set is good, with sufficient time allowed between desiccation and harvest to allow skins to set well. Few potatoes were put into storage, with some growers still attempting to sell 2019 crops.

The overall levels of disease reported remain low. Occasional pockets of blight on the foliage (but not in tubers) and occasional rots where crops were waterlogged in August are the only reports.

Spring was initially dry, but localised flooding in August affected a small number of crops, with some lost to standing water. To date, farm yields in the North West ranged from 40-50t/ha. This does not include crop losses and partial field harvest. Farm yields are slightly better than average.

North East

An estimated 14% of the regional potato area has been lifted to date

Favourable lifting conditions minimised the risk of bruising. Skin sets are good, especially on soils that were more moisture retentive during the dry periods experienced in the spring. Disease levels remain low throughout the region, with just the occasional report of black leg and associated rotting tubers.

To date regional farm yields range from 30-54t/ha, with the typical yield average in line with the last five years.

Yorkshire & Humber

An estimated 47% of the regional area has been lifted to date.

At the start of harvest there were concerns over bruising as soils had rapidly dried during early-September. However, recent rainfall has improved soil moisture and reduced the risk of bruising. The

previously dry conditions resulted in very good skin set, with just the right level of rain during September to manage common scab. There are very few reports of disease.

Farm yields ranged from 30-55t/ha, with the typical yield of 44t/ha slightly below the five-year average.

East Midlands

An estimated 26% of the regional potato area was lifted by WE29 September.

There were occasional reports of bruising in early harvested crops. Some growers irrigated in the run-up to harvest to reduce damage and also used watering systems on harvesters to help break up clods. Recent rainfall has now reduced the risk though.

Very little blight has been reported with occasional reports of black leg being present, but not widespread. The majority of crops show good skin set. However where harvest was brought forward, on occasional crops there are reports of light skin scuffing.

Farm yields in the East Midlands remain good, although there are occasional low yields, and range from 20-65t/ha. The typical yield is close to the five-year average.

West Midlands

An estimated 42% of the West Midlands potato area had been lifted by WE29 September.

Soil moisture and temperatures were favourable for lifting, with only a few very sensitive crops reporting bruising. There are isolated reports of tuber blight, black leg and pink rot, but these are not widespread. Skin set is also generally good.

Yields are consistent with the five-year average from the region. Farm yields range between 25-70t/ha.

East of England

Lifting is progressing well at 50% complete by WE29 September.

Overall lifting conditions across most of the region were very good, allowing for good rates of clearance. There was localised heavy rain in the area around the Cambridgeshire / Lincolnshire border on 26/27 September, which has caused a pause in lifting as growers wait for fields to dry.

High risk of bruising was reported up until 22 September due to the dry conditions. However, following rainfall in WE29 September, this risk is now considered to be moderate.

Blight control was generally good. Black dot was noted in a number of crops at harvest and will require careful store management to minimise storage losses. In addition, wireworm, watery wound rot and pink rot were reported at higher than normal levels across the region. Skin set is generally good, with a low incidence of scuffing reported.

Farm yields are tending to be above average, despite some areas of low yield ranging from 20-90t/ha.

South West

Due to smaller crop areas and reduced coverage, the information provided for the South West is qualitative only.

Lifting is progressing well in the South West. The rain in WE29 September brought moisture back to the soil, which has reduced the risk of bruising. Yields are slightly up on last year.

South East

Due to smaller crop areas and reduced coverage, the information provided for the South East is qualitative only.

Lifting in the South East is progressing well, although heavy rain in WE29 September and the forecast rain next week is predicted to cause issues. Yields are average and potatoes show little sign of blight, although slugs are causing problems in some areas.

Wales

Due to smaller crop areas and reduced coverage, the information provided for Wales is qualitative only.

Lifting has been progressing apace in Wales, with relatively dry weather so far. Lifting progress is reportedly ahead of this time last year, with few quality issues. Growers currently report average yields.

Sector Overview

Fresh Chipping

Yield

Yield estimates are from the main regions that grow potatoes for the fresh chipping market. These are predominantly the North East, East Midlands, West Midlands and East of England.

The GB yield estimate is between 48-50t/ha, with farm yields ranging between 24-80t/ha. Higher yields are reported from the East of England where crops are particularly good on free-draining soils.

Quality

Quality of fresh chipping potatoes to WE29 September was typically good, with few disease and internal issues reported. Dry matter was dependent on variety and maturity, but these were generally within specification of 20-25%. Fry colours also met specifications.

Dry Matter: Typically, between 19-22%, but averaging 20%. Low dry matters are reported on some later maturing varieties. There is some variability reported in dry matters depending on level of maturity at harvest and variety with reports ranging from 18-24%.

Fry colour: Meeting specification of 00-1 with no reports of rejections.

Size: Tuber sizes were variable, but generally good with even size fractions reported. Overall tuber numbers are slightly down, but those tubers that were set tended to be of a good size. Those planted early showed good tuber set especially where soils were moisture retentive but drained well.

Wastage: The overall level of waste was low. Causes of out grades included internal issues such as hollow heart, slug damage, greens and misshapes. There were occasional reports of wastage up to 10% in some areas of the West Midlands, where crops were either misshapen or tubers were green.

Processing

Yield

The GB national yield estimate for the processing sector is currently between 48-50t/ha. This is in line and slightly above the five-year average for the sector, of 48t/ha. Farm yields generally ranged between 26-55t/ha, with occasional reports of yields as high as 90t/ha in the East of England. The best yields were reported where soils were heavy enough to retain moisture during the periods of dry weather earlier in the season, but also drained well during wet weather experienced in June and again in August. Lower yields were from patches in fields that became waterlogged during rains in June and tubers rotted, but overall these incidences were rare.

Quality

Quality of processing potatoes up to WE29 September was good, with tuber sizes either close to, or above, average and meeting market specification. Fry colours and dry matters are generally good, with no issues reported. There were occasional reports of growth cracks, but these were not at significant levels and with overall tuber size good they did not cause issues with rejections.

Internal Issues: Very few reports of internal issues, just occasional internal defects reported on susceptible varieties.

Dry Matter: Averaging 21%, with a range between 19-23%. Some crops, particularly in Yorkshire, were desiccated early to prevent dry matters from rising too high. Earlier maturing crops are tending to have higher dry matters, while some later maturing crops (e.g. Markies) are lower than expected.

Fry colour: Fry colours are meeting specification (00-1) with no issues or rejections reported.

Size: Tuber sizes are good, tending towards the larger end of specification. There were occasional growers who desiccated earlier than planned to prevent tubers from growing too big. The majority of processing potatoes lifted so far are meeting market size specifications.

Wastage: To date, little wastage (less than 5%) has been reported. Where crops were wasted, this tended to be due to either slug damage or misshapen tubers. Where slugs were an issue, there are occasional reports of wastage up to 10%.

Packing

Yield

The average yield for the GB packing sector is currently between 48-50t/ha, which is in line with the five-year average of 48t/ha. Farm yields range from 25-85t/ha. Yields in Yorkshire and North West are lower than other regions, typically between 42-44t/ha. This is mostly due to areas where crops were affected by heavy rain in June and late into August. The best yields are from the West Midlands, where crops yielded up to 70t/ha. Better yields have been reported typically from those on peatland and in the East of England (up to 85t/ha) where soils drained well.

Quality

Overall quality of packing potatoes lifted to WE29 September was good, with most crops meeting market specifications. Salad and baker fractions were better than normal. Skin finish is generally good, although there are a few reports of bruising in the East of England from crops lifted before the recent rainfall. Maris Piper and other susceptible varieties were most affected

Skin finish: Skin finish is good, with very few reports of out grades due to scab or bruising. However, there were occasional reports of skin diseases causing issues where crop senescence occurred prior to desiccation.

Internal issues: The level of internal defects overall is very low. However there are occasional reports of hollow heart reported in susceptible varieties (e.g. Maris Piper).

Size: In salad varieties the proportion of tubers under 45mm was typically 80-90%. In maincrop ware potatoes, the baker fraction (65mm or more) in the Midlands and East of England was typically 50-57%, whilst in Yorkshire and Northern England the fraction ranged from 10-25%.

Wastage: Out grade levels are fairly normal, with greens at expected levels. However, there are pockets of increased wastage, e.g. in the North West, where poor skin finish and growth cracks have increased wastage to 20-25% on the worst affected crops. Other causes of wastage include pest damage from slugs and wireworm.

Fresh Bags

Yield

Yield estimates for fresh bag potatoes are ranging between 47-49t/ha. Recent dry weather has meant that there were no impediments to lifting and as a result, yields were above the five-year average of 44t/ha. Farm yields are typically between 40-55t/ha, with some as low as 20t/ha in Yorkshire where internal rots were present. The higher yields were reported in the East of England where land retained moisture, but also drained well during wetter periods. Here, yields reached up to 85t/ha.

Quality

Quality of potatoes lifted to date was good, with little wastage. Tuber numbers were lower in some areas of the Midlands, with some crops abandoned due to significant growth cracks (only a very small area in the East Midlands). Good soil conditions meant there were few challenges to lifting and as a result there were very few reports of bruising when potatoes were lifted.

Internal issues: There were little to no reports of internal rots, with some issues of hollow heart in susceptible varieties.

Size: Size was variable across all regions, with some reports of oversized tubers in the East of England with baker percentages above average (around 50-55%).

Wastage: Levels of wastage are low (typically below 5%). The most common reason for wastage is skin finish and green tubers.

Report Information

This lifting report has been prepared by ADAS for the AHDB, using data supplied by regional reporters (mostly independent potato agronomists). Maincrop progress is reported against total area of surveyed regions, including earlies, but excluding seed and covers c.88% of the potato growing area. Qualitative and quantitative data is collected from the main potato growing regions (Scotland, North West, North East, Yorkshire, East Midlands, West Midlands, and the East of England). For regions including the South West, Wales and the South East, where crop areas are smaller, the information provided is qualitative only. Lifting progress, quality and yields are reported as current, so subject to change as lifting progresses.

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