



AHDB



AHDB Potato Lifting Report

Report 2

Week Ending – 20 October 2020

Prepared by ADAS using information provided by independent agronomists

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Overview

This potato lifting report covers lifting in the first three weeks of October, reporting weeks end on a Tuesday. The main focus of the report is on the lifting of maincrop potatoes, although the area of earlies is included in the percent area lifted. Seed potatoes are not included.

The start of October saw a change in the weather, from the settled dry conditions experienced for much of September, to a period of intense rainfall as Storm Alex passed through. The most intense rain fell between 3-6 October – with parts of the south (including South East, South West, West Midlands and southern parts of East of England) receiving 60-100mm, during the week, whilst elsewhere rainfall ranged from 35-50mm. These heavy downpours caused some localised water logging where field drainage was poor and also caused a pause in lifting. Although conditions remained unsettled into WE13 October, rainfall was patchier and fields were able to drain allowing lifting to resume across all regions, WE20 October was drier and ground conditions improved further allowing for a greater rate of clearance.

By 20 October 77% of the total GB potato area had been lifted. The overall quality of crops is good, with few reports of issues and yields remain close to or slightly above the five-year average. Potatoes produced are generally at the higher end of size specifications, with plants tending to produce fewer but larger potatoes this season.

There are limited options available for potato desiccation following the withdrawal of diquat in February 2020. Growers used a range of approaches instead, with growers in Scotland favouring a flail and spray approach. The alternative approaches take longer to act, as a result, growers are tending to leave crops in the ground for longer following desiccation to ensure good skin set.

National

Lifting update

Up to 20 October an estimated 77% of the national potato area (including both early and maincrop potatoes) had been lifted, with the harvest of earlies now complete and maincrop harvest well underway. Despite heavy rain in WE06 October approximately 11% of the national area was cleared (mostly in the first half of the week before the rain hit). In the early part of WE13 October progress was limited by wet soil conditions in many regions, however fields gradually drained and lifting was able to resume by the end of the week with a further 12% of the area cleared. Better conditions in WE20 October allowed for an increased rate of clearance with a further 16% of the national area cleared.

In most regions 70-90% of the potato area had been harvested, although progress in the North East and North West was lower with just 40-60% of the regional area cleared.

Yield

Potato yields to date have been good, with most regions reporting close to or slightly above average yields. The estimated national average yield (across all sectors) is currently 46-50t/ha, including both maincrop and early varieties. Most regions are reporting that yields are close to or slightly above average. Farm yields range from 20-90t/ha. The poorest yields reflect occasional crops that were affected by waterlogging during establishment and again close to harvest, whilst the best yields occurred on land that drained well enough to avoid waterlogging, but was moisture retentive enough to be unaffected by the dry weather earlier in the season.

Quality

Overall quality of potatoes lifted to WE20 October was good. Skin set is generally good, and the risk of bruising has decreased in most areas with the increased soil moisture. Bruising levels are reported to be higher in the East of England and Scotland. Overall disease pressure remained low throughout the season and as a result the incidence of blight and black leg is low with just isolated reports of issues.

The growing conditions this season favoured the production of smaller numbers of tubers but of a larger size. This is beneficial to some sectors such as processing and fresh chipping, but has led to challenges in the packing sector finding sufficient volume of the smaller fractions of salad potatoes.

No major storage concerns were reported, although incidences of sprouting and bacterial rot were reported in the East of England.

Regional Overview

Scotland

An estimated 72% of the regional potato area in Scotland was lifted by 20 October. Lifting progress has accelerated, despite being slightly hampered by outbreaks of rain, particularly around 03 October. For WE06 October, 12% of the crop area was cleared, while WE13 October saw increased speed of clearing with an additional 21% cleared. WE20 October saw a further 13% cleared, with this drop in pace likely due to some growers having now completed lifting. Despite recent rainfall bruising remains higher than anticipated, particularly in Maris Piper, due to wet soils clogging webbing on harvesting equipment.

Overall, the quality of crops lifted to date is good. Disease risk is generally low, despite sporadic reports of scab and rotting in waterlogged areas. Skin set is average, with slower set in varieties such as Charlotte.

To date, farm yields in Scotland range from 30-70t/ha, with most farmers reporting that yields are close to average or even slightly above average.

North West

An estimated 59% of the regional potato area was lifted by 20 October.

Progress in the early part of October was hampered by excessive rainfall in the wake of Storm Alex. However, despite the challenges presented by heavy rainfall, 10% of the areas was cleared in WE06 October, a further 15% in WE13 October and 20% in WE20 October. Localised flooding was an issue for some crops, with farmers avoiding hollows where water pooled when harvesting fields. It remains to be seen if these patches will be harvested later in the season.

The risk of bruising reduced as soils wetted up in October, although increased agitation was required to loosen wet soil from the webs on the harvester. Overall disease levels remain low, with just the occasional report of foliar blight and some rots where potatoes had been in waterlogged soils for a prolonged period prior to harvest.

To date, farm yields in the North West have typically ranged from 40-50t/ha. Farm yields are slightly better than average.

North East

An estimated 40% of the regional potato area was lifted by 20 October. Progress was steady during October, with about 10% of the area harvested in each of the last three weeks.

Skin set in the North East is very good. Favourable conditions have seen little risk of bruising or disease.

To date, regional farm yields range from 30-55t/ha, with yields close to average.

Yorkshire & Humber

An estimated 82% of the regional potato area was harvested by 20 October. 13% of the area was harvested in WE06 October, 12% in WE13 October and 10% in WE20 October. The declining rate of progress over the last three weeks reflects the fact that some growers have now completed lifting.

The risk of bruising reduced as soils wetted up during October, whilst disease levels remained low. Skin set was good.

Farm yields ranged from 20-55t/ha, with regional yields close to or slightly below the five-year average.

East Midlands

An estimated 85% of the regional potato area was lifted by 20 October.

Although rain in the East Midlands was persistent, the volume received was lower than in some parts of the country. In most cases the rain received improved lifting conditions, with harvesting activity possible most days. As a result an estimated 14% of the regional area was cleared in WE06 October, 12% in WE13 October and as conditions improved, 32% was cleared in WE20 October.

There are no widespread reports of disease, although there are occasional issues with blackleg in susceptible varieties such as Melody. There are no reports of storage issues to date.

Farm yields in the East Midlands remain good overall, with most yields close to the five-year average. However, there are occasional low yields where crops were adversely affected by the summer storms in August. As a result, farm yields range from 20-65t/ha.

West Midlands

An estimated 88% of the West Midlands potato area was lifted by 20 October. Progress was good despite rainfall in early October with 14% of the area cleared in WE06 October, 13% in WE13 October and 18% in WE20 October.

Following the rain, potatoes have required more cleaning, but the risk of bruising was reduced compared to supplies harvested in September. Overall disease levels remain low, with just isolated reports of tuber blight, blackleg and pink rot. Skin set is generally good, with only late maturing varieties such as Markies and Royal having occasional issues.

Yields are consistent with the five-year average from the region. Farm yields range between 25-85t/ha.

East of England

Lifting was 73% complete by 20 October, with good progress made in the drier parts of the region such as Cambridgeshire. However, in wetter areas, such as Norfolk, lifting was more stop/start due to challenging conditions. Across the region an estimated 6% of the area was cleared in WE06 October, 8% in WE13 October and 9% in WE20 October.

Where crops were stressed and either senescing early or dehydrated at desiccation, they remain vulnerable to bruising. Disease levels remain relatively low, although there are occasional reports of issues with black dot in packing crops and blackleg in Markies. Wireworm damage is present in a small proportion of crops. Potato virus symptoms have also been reported in occasional crops.

Skin set is good, with a low incidence of scuffing.

The wet conditions at harvest have resulted in potatoes being harvested damp which is also causing difficulty with sprout control and increased incidence of bacterial rots.

To 20 October, farm yields were reported in the range from 20-90t/ha. Yields are currently slightly above average. However, there are a number of wet patches in fields that are currently unharvested and the final field yields will be dependent on what proportion of these patches can be harvested as they dry out.

South West

Potato lifting in the South West is progressing smoothly and is about 80% complete, with the remainder expected to be lifted next week. No quality issues have been reported.

South East

Some issues with on-going dampness, but quality and yields are both good.

Wales

Most Welsh growers have finished lifting, with the remainder expected to finish by the end of October weather permitting. Yields were variable, with typical yields for maincrop varieties ranging from 50-56t/ha. Local rain has caused stop/start progress meaning that some potatoes have sat waiting for lifting longer than they should have been.

Sector Overview

Fresh Chipping

Yield

The national yield estimate for the fresh chipping sector is between 48-50t/ha. Yields held up well in the East of England on well-draining soils and here, farm yields ranged between 45-80t/ha. Yields in the North were typically lower. Here, yields were reportedly between 30-55t/ha, with occasional reports of yields as low as 24t/ha in Yorkshire where waterlogging led to occasional crops standing in water for extended periods during establishment and again near to harvest.

Quality

Quality remains good across GB for crops lifted to 20 October. Dry matters are still within specification of 20-25% and fry colours are good (typically within 00-1) with no significant issues reported. There were occasional internal issues with spraing and brown centre where crops were lifted after a period in standing water. But these were predominantly isolated reports from Yorkshire and the North West.

Dry Matter: Typically, between 20-21%. Overall, the dry matters reported to date were good. However, there are occasional reports of lower than expected dry matters in late maturing varieties, such as Markies, that are just starting to be harvested.

Fry colour: Currently meeting specification of 00-1 with no significant issues reported.

Size: Tuber sizes are generally good, with the majority of crops producing smaller numbers of large tubers, which is favourable for the fresh chipping market. The proportion of tubers that were too small to meet specification is overall low. The West Midlands is the possible exception, with a few reports of large tubers and greater variability in both size and numbers from samples.

Wastage: The overall level of waste was fairly typical. In the West Midlands there were reports of up to 10% wastage with a variety of contributing factors including greens and misshapes. Since the last report there was also an increase in slug activity due to recent rain.

Processing

Yield

The national yield estimate for the processing sector is currently between 48-50t/ha which is in line with or slightly above the five-year average of 48t/ha. The better yields were from earlier lifted crops, predominantly those in the East of England where ground conditions were better on lighter soils. Where areas were negatively impacted by heavy rainfall, this led to occasional patches of crops sitting in standing water, which increased tuber rots and lowered the overall yields.

Farm yields typically ranged between 35-70t/ha, with yields as high as 90t/ha in the East of England where crops were particularly good, and soils easily drained. The poorest yields, dropping to 26t/ha, were reported from isolated poorly drained fields that were adversely affected by heavy rain during crop development, and more recently, as the crops awaited harvest.

Quality

Quality of processing potatoes is good with no significant issues reported. Tuber sizes are good, and shapes are considered sufficient with no reports of rejections. Dry matters are within specification and fry colours are between 00-1.

Internal Issues: Very few reports of internal issues, with just the normal occurrence of occasional internal defects on susceptible varieties.

Dry Matter: Dry matters are averaging 20% with a range between 19-22%. There were occasional reports of low dry matters from later maturing varieties, with the odd report as low as 14% in the North West.

Fry colour: Fry colours are meeting specification (00-1) with no issues or rejections reported. To 20 October temperatures remained mild for this time of the year with no frosts to cause a deterioration in fry colour.

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: Levels of waste are reported to be around average, with a slight increase since the last report due to slug damage, but this is predominantly limited to heavier soils. Other wastage was due to growth cracks, greens and misshapen tubers but rarely exceeded 5% of the volume.

Packing

Yield

The current yield estimate for the GB packing sector is between 47-49t/ha which is in-line with the five-year average of 48t/ha. Farm yields ranged between 25-85t/ha. The highest yields were reported in the East of England from soils which drained well. In the East of England, Midlands and Scotland yields were typically between 45-55 t/ha, whilst in Yorkshire and the North West the recent heavy rain and issues associated with waterlogged areas of fields reduced the regional averages to 40-45t/ha. The lowest yields were reported in Yorkshire where some areas were left in standing water during recent wet weather, and as a result suffered tuber rots.

Quality

Quality of the packing sector up to the 20 September remains good. Overall size of potatoes is large with some issues with over size salads and good proportions of bakers in ware crops. Skin finish is generally good with only occasional reports of black dot and powdery scab on later harvested crops.

Skin finish: Skin finish is good with some low levels of common scab, black dot and powdery scab now reported. This has occurred in crops where lifting was delayed due to rain but were not significant enough for crops to be graded out.

Internal issues: The level of internal defects remains low with occasional reports of tobacco rattle virus (TRV) in susceptible varieties.

Size: The majority of salad crops were harvested during September with high proportions meeting the specification for under 45mm (80-90%). Those harvested more recently have been towards the high end of the specification with about 70-80% achieving the less than 45mm specification. The less than 35mm fraction is reduced with the tendency for larger potatoes this season. There were reports of increased amounts of oversized tubers in later planted salad crops in Scotland. In maincrop ware potatoes, the baker fraction (65mm or more) in the Midlands and East of England was typically 50-60%, whilst in Yorkshire and northern England the fraction ranged from 10-25%.

Wastage: Out grades were average (typically 5%), although levels were starting to increase due to increased slug activity and incidents of bruising, with reports of out grades as high as 15% on the worst affected crops. In the North West where crops suffered heavily from growth crack issues and rough skins, waste occasionally rose as high as 25%.

Fresh Bags

Yield

The GB yield estimate for the fresh bags sector is between 48-50t/ha which is 9-13% above the five-year average of 44t/ha. Despite unsettled weather, yields remained high with farm yields typically between 40-55t/ha. Higher yields were from crops in well-draining soils, here yields were as high as 85t/ha in the East of England. Lower yields were predominantly from Yorkshire where tubers suffered rot issues (whole tuber rot) where waterlogging had occurred in either rains in June or recent rain in October, here yields dropped as low as 20t/ha.

Quality

Overall quality of potatoes lifted to WE20 October was good with very few reports of internal defects. Tuber size was variable tending towards the larger side with occasional samples showing tuber numbers lower than normal. Levels of wastage remain average (below 5%).

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

Size: Tubers were generally on the large side, which was linked to tuber numbers lower than usual on some crops. Baker percentages in the East of England were reportedly higher than average (55%).

Wastage: Levels of wastage are around average (typically below 5% of the sector lifted). The most common reason for wastage is green tubers or 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). Maincrop progress is reported against total area of surveyed regions, including earlies, but excluding seed and covers 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.

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