



AHDB



AHDB Potato Lifting Report

Report 3

Week Ending – 10 November 2020

Prepared by ADAS using information provided by independent agronomists

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Overview

This potato lifting report covers lifting from the 20th October- 10th November, with reporting weeks ending 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 end of October saw variable rainfall, with WE27 October below average in most areas while WE03 November saw all areas receiving higher than average rainfall for the week. Lifting progress in WE27 October was good, although rain in the later part of the week and into WE03 November caused some disruptions. As conditions improved into WE10 November, fields were able to drain, facilitating lifting for the majority of the remaining potato area. By 10 November 96% of the total GB potato area had been lifted.

Frost became a risk as temperatures dipped in early November. Despite this, there were no reports of fry colours being affected and the majority were still within specification.

National

Lifting update

Up to 10 November, an estimated 96% of the national potato area (including both early and maincrop potatoes) had been lifted. The main areas of crop left to lift are in the East of England, where 2,100ha of the national area remains unharvested. There are also small areas in the other production regions (less than 500ha). Wetter conditions WE03 November caused delays in several regions, notably in the East of England where lifting was stop/ start. This remained until the drier weather in WE10 November allowed rate of progress to increase, with large areas cleared. The period of dry weather in WE10 November allowed some of the wet pockets that had been left in fields unharvested to drain, and many farmers were then able to return and lift these patches of crop.

Yield

Yields throughout the lifting period were maintained, with the estimated national average yield (across all sectors) between 48-50t/ha, including both maincrop and early varieties. In the last three weeks, all regions reported yields close to or above the five-year average. Particularly good yields were reported in Scotland and the East of England, where yields were typically between 50-53t/ha. Yields increased slightly in Yorkshire as later crops were harvested. Regional average yields range from 44-53t/ha, whilst farm yields range from 20-90t/ha. This wide range in farm yields reflects the best and the worst yields, with lower yields from fields that were affected by waterlogging, both during establishment and close to harvest. The best yields came from crops grown on land that drained well, without over drying.

Quality

Overall quality of potatoes lifted to WE10 November was good.

Bruising was an issue in the early part of the potato lifting period, due to the dry soil conditions in September. Heavy rain in October increased soil moistures and reduced risk of bruising. However, as soils gradually become wetter towards the end of October and into November, there was an increased volume of soil lifted with potatoes. This required increased levels of agitation to remove and sometimes resulted in increased bruising. The drop in temperature during early November also increased risk of bruising slightly.

In crops lifted over the last three-week period, there was an increase in the level of soft rots appearing, though overall levels remain low. Black dot issues were reported in tubers where harvest was delayed due to poor weather. However, overall incidence and severity of disease remains low across the regions.

Storage

Sprout suppression has been a key focus for many over the last month. The 8th October was the last date on which CIPC could be used for sprout suppression. This leaves maleic hydrazide, ethylene and spearmint oil as the main alternative sprout suppressants available. As this is the first season with no CIPC available (during the main storage period), attention to detail with regards to store management has been increasingly important.

Crops lifted in the last three weeks tended to be harvested wet. With mild temperatures for much of the period, tubers needed to be dried and cooled before ethylene treatments could be made. Some processing stores were treated with ethylene, as well as the more traditional use in packing stores. There are reports of occasional issues with spearmint oil causing damage to potatoes where conditions at application were not right.

The levels of storage rots are starting to increase, especially with a higher proportion of wet crops harvested in late October and November. However, levels remain close to what is expected for the time of year.

Regional Overview

For this final report we have compared farm yields to what the farm would normally expect to see, using a 5-year average baseline. This information helps to give a better feeling as to whether yields are up or down and by how much compared to normal in that region.

Scotland

An estimated 98% of the regional potato area in Scotland was lifted by 10 November. Progress over the last three weeks ranged from 8% harvested in each of WE27 October and WE03 November, while drier conditions in WE10 November saw a slight increase in rate of clearance, with 10% lifted.

Overall, the quality of crops lifted this year is good. Disease risk was generally low, despite sporadic reports of scab and rotting in waterlogged areas. There was a slight increase in the risk of black dot for some late lifted, susceptible varieties. Skin set was average, with varieties like Charlotte continuing to take longer to set than other varieties.

Farm yields in Scotland ranged from 30-88t/ha, with most farmers reporting that yields are about 10% above the five-year average.

North East

An estimated 81% of the regional potato area in the North East was lifted by 10 November. Progress has varied, with 15% lifted WE27 October and 21% lifted during favourable dry weather in the WE03 November. Progress slowed to 5% lifted in WE10 November, due to the heavy rainfall causing waterlogging and making travel difficult. This rainfall also caused more soil stick in potatoes lifted WE10 November, so there was a higher risk of bruising due to the agitation required to remove soil.

The overall quality of crops lifted this year has been good, with few incidences of disease reported and very good skin set.

Farm yields in the North East ranged from 30-55t/ha, with most farmers reporting yields aligning with the five-year average.

North West

An estimated 94% of the regional potato area was lifted by 10 November.

Heavy rainfall in late October and waterlogged soils resulted in slow progress, with just 3% of the area cleared in WE27 October. However, as conditions improved and fields dried out, rate of progress increased to 11% cleared in WE03 November and 21% in WE10 November. Localised flooding had previously been an issue for some crops, with farmers avoiding hollows where water pooled when harvesting fields. Some of these patches rotted, but most have since been lifted, with the potatoes being sold straight off-farm as they are unlikely to store well.

Overall disease levels remained low, with just the occasional report of blight. There is some rot present where localised flooding occurred and potatoes were in waterlogged soils for a prolonged period prior to harvest. There are now increased reports of growth cracks due to the sudden increase in rainfall. This has slightly increased the proportion of the crop being graded out.

Farm yields in the North West typically ranged from 40-50t/ha. Reports indicate that farm yields are about 1% above the five-year average.

Yorkshire & Humber

Harvest was well progressed in Yorkshire up to 20 October, with 82% of the area already cleared. Wet conditions across much of the region slowed harvest progress and have dragged out the end of harvest, with an estimated 96% of the regional potato area harvested by 10 November. In total 6% of the area harvested was in WE27 October, 3% in WE03 November and 5% in WE10 November.

Disease levels remained low and skin set was good.

Farm yields ranged from 30-55t/ha, with regional yields in line with the five-year average.

East Midlands

Lifting is now said to be complete in the East Midlands.

Rainfall in October slowed lifting progress on final areas, but as conditions improved into November the remaining 6% was cleared in WE10 November.

There were no widespread reports of disease, although there were occasional issues with soft rot.

Farm yields in the East Midlands remained good overall, with farm yields mostly aligning with the five-year average. However, there were 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

Lifting is now said to be complete in the West Midlands. There was only 12% of the area left to harvest as at 20 October. Conditions were such that the majority was cleared in WE27 October (8%). However, a return to wetter conditions in WE03 November slowed the end of lifting; 2% was lifted in WE03 November and the remaining 2% lifted in WE10 November.

Overall disease levels remain low, with just isolated reports of tuber blight, blackleg and pink rot. Skin set is generally good, with only a low incidence of scuffing reported.

Reports indicate that farm yields are about 2% higher than the five-year average, although yields range between 25-85t/ha.

East of England

Lifting was 93% complete by 10 November. Wetter conditions have meant that lifting was stop/start in the latter part of October and early November. Progress has been fairly slow since the start of October. Across the region, an estimated 3% of the area was cleared in WE27 October, 3% in WE03 November and finally a needed boost of 14% in WE10 November. There were differences across the counties, with lifting almost complete in Suffolk, though in Norfolk there was still 10% of the crop area left to lift as of 10 November.

Disease levels generally remain relatively low, although there are increasing reports of issues with black dot where harvest has been delayed due to weather conditions. Wireworm and slug damage are present in a small proportion of crops.

Skin set is good, with a low incidence of scuffing. The wet and colder conditions at harvest resulted in control of bacterial rots becoming more challenging.

To 10 November, farm yields were reported in the range from 25-90t/ha. Farm yields are typically about 11% above the five-year average.

South West

Relatively light rains in late October facilitated potato lifting in the South West, with most growers completing lifting by WE20 October. No quality issues have been reported.

South East

The on-going rain has perpetuated problems with dampness, but quality and yields remain good.

Wales

Most Welsh growers had finished lifting by WE20 October, with the remainder completed by WE27 October. Maincrop yields were variable.

Sector Overview

Fresh Chipping

Yield

The national yield estimate for the fresh chipping sector is between 48-50t/ha. Yields remain slightly above the five-year average (45t/ha) and that of 2019. Yields in the North were typically lower, especially on light land where crop establishment suffered in the dry spring and or on heavier soils where water logging in the summer hampered growth, with yields as low as 24t/ha in Yorkshire. Here, occasional patches of crops began to rot in the ground leading to slight increases in wastage. Yields for fresh chipping were highest in the East of England, where the majority of the crop was lifted before October rainfall. Here the best yields reached as high as 80t/ha.

Quality

Despite delays to harvest, quality remained good with fry colours still within specification (00-1) towards the end of lifting. Tuber shapes are generally good and were throughout the lifting period.

Dry Matter: Typically between 19-22%, but averaging 21%. Overall, dry matters this season in fresh chipping were good, with only occasional reports of low dry matters in some later maturing varieties (Markies).

Fry colour: Fry colours were still within specification on the final areas of potato crops (00-1), with no significant issues reported throughout the lifting period.

Size: The majority of crops produced smaller numbers of large tubers, which is favourable for the fresh chipping market. Overall, the proportion of tubers that were too small to meet market specification was low.

Wastage: Wastage levels were close to average this season, with a slight increase towards the end of lifting due to tubers rotting in wet soils whilst waiting to be lifted. Other typical causes of out grades included growth cracks, greens and bruising, as potatoes lifted later in the season had to be agitated to loosen soil as they were lifted.

Processing

Yield

The national yield estimate for the processing sector is currently between 49-51t/ha, which is above the five-year average of 48t/ha. Yields in Yorkshire and West Midlands rose slightly on later lifted crops, mainly due to delays in lifting meaning crops were in the ground for longer than planned. The best yields were from crops lifted before heavy rain came in October, mainly in the West Midlands and the East of England where yields were as high as 85t/ha and 90t/ha respectively. The lowest yields were from the North West and Yorkshire, where tubers degraded in wet soils. Here yields were as low as 26t/ha.

Quality

Quality towards the end of the lifting period remained good, despite wet weather in October and early November. Tuber sizes and numbers were around average, with fry colours still meeting specification (00-1). Shapes remained good and numbers of tubers was around average.

Internal Issues: Despite wet weather, there were very few internal issues reported, just occasional reports of tobacco rattle virus (TRV) on susceptible varieties (such as Maris Piper and Markies).

Dry Matter: Dry matters averaged 21%, with a typical range between 20-22%. Dry matters fell slightly towards the end of lifting on later maturing varieties.

Fry colour: Fry colours were still meeting specifications on later harvested crops (typically 00-1), with no issues or rejections reported.

Size: The size and numbers of tubers were around average and remained so throughout the season. There were occasional growers who desiccated earlier than planned to prevent tubers from growing too big. The majority of processing potatoes lifted towards the end of the period were still meeting market size specifications.

Wastage: The overall level of waste this season was fairly typical, with a slight increase in out grades towards the end of harvest. The main contributors to wastage were from slug damage, bruising and

tuber rots, with reports as high as 10% where pest damage was significant (mostly in the West Midlands).

Packing

Yield

The current yield estimate for the GB packing sector is between 49-51t/ha, which is above the five-year average of 48t/ha. Later lifted crops in the East Midlands and Yorkshire had slightly better yields than those harvested earlier in the lifting period, bringing up the national average slightly. Yields were variable across the regions, with higher yields from Scotland and the East of England. Here the best yields were as high as 85-88t/ha. The lowest yields were reported on fields where crops were stood in water for prolonged periods. Here yields were as low as 25-30t/ha.

Quality

Overall, quality of packing potatoes is good. There was an increase in bruising as a result of increased soil stuck to potatoes over the final stages of lifting, requiring greater agitation to remove. This resulted in a small proportion of packing potatoes being rejected, due to excess bruising and going for livestock feed.

Skin finish: Delays to lifting in the East of England increased the levels of black dot in packing crops, however this was not widespread. The majority of crops in Scotland are reportedly very clean, with little incidence of skin disease despite wet conditions.

Internal issues: The level of internal defects this season was average, with no significant issues reported. Internal issues in Scotland were reportedly sporadic and variety specific.

Size: Timely desiccation of salad crops meant that most crops had good size fractions during the lifting period. Across the season, the proportion of crop meeting specifications for less than 45mm ranged from 70-90%. For main crop ware potatoes, the baker fraction (65mm or more) in later harvested crops from Yorkshire and Scotland increased slightly, with a range between 40-50%, whilst in the Midlands and East of England it held firm at 55-60%.

Wastage: Out grades increased slightly towards the end of lifting (typically between 15-20%), with the main reasons attributed to rough skins, bruising and slug damage. There were also reports of increased wireworm activity towards the end of the period.

Fresh Bags

Yield

The GB yield estimate for the fresh bags sector is between 48-50t/ha, which is above the five-year average of 44t/ha. Yields remained above average for the majority of the lifting period. The best yields were from crops in the East of England. Here yields were as high 85t/ha. Yields were slightly lower in the North East and Yorkshire where soils became waterlogged, with the worst yields in Yorkshire as low as 20t/ha. This was not widespread enough to cause any significant issue to overall regional yields.

Quality

Overall quality throughout the lifting period was good, with few internal issues and good tuber sizes. Occurrences of bruising increased slightly towards the end of lifting, due to the need to clean tubers

coming out of wet and cloddy soils. Levels of wastage are around 5-10%, with slight increases reported in later harvested crops where slug damage increased in wet soils following the October rain.

Internal issues: Levels of internal issues were fairly typical, with no major concerns.

Size: Tubers this season were on the larger size, linked to a lower tuber set this year. Baker percentages in the East of England were reportedly higher than average (55%).

Wastage: Levels of wastage remained around average (typically 5% -10% of the proportion lifted), main causes of rejection were slug damage, bruising and rots.

Report Information

This lifting report has been prepared by ADAS for the AHDB, using data supplied by regional reporters (mostly independent potato agronomists). Main crop 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.