



AHDB



# AHDB Potato Lifting Report

Report 2

Week Ending – 22 October 2019

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## National Overview

As of WE22 October, 70% of the GB potato area (excluding seed) had been lifted. Following a sustained period of heavy rain in late September, the soils moved from being too dry to too wet in just a few days. The unsettled weather persisted throughout early and mid-October resulting in challenges to potato lifting, especially for those on heavier land. Where weather and ground conditions allowed, lifting progress was steady and growers on well-draining soils cleared good areas. On heavier soils and in wetter regions lifting was stop-start, with only small areas cleared at any one time. Access to the field with large machinery was the main limiting factor. There are reports of crops in the North in standing water that have been written off due to the inability to access the field. Despite the challenges thrown at growers in the first part of October, the rate of progress increased from that seen in late September. Improved conditions in WE22 October saw the progress rate further extend, with more fields becoming accessible and easier to work.

Quality has been variable over the lifting period. The main issues have arisen from crops that have been in standing water or have been challenging to lift. Standing water has been an issue in the bottom of ridges for those in the North West and Scotland. Above average levels of black leg and associated rots are reported on particularly saturated soils. There are occasional incidences of tuber blight, even where no foliar blight was seen. Recent heavy rain has caused issues with soil clods and excess soil on the lifted crop. Although the overall risk of bruising is relatively low, growers are having to handle potatoes carefully when removing excess soil. This is especially the case in higher dry matter varieties. The overall skin set on potatoes to date is good across GB.

More of the better crops were harvested in the period since our last lifting report, with better yields reported across all regions. As a result, the current estimated national average yield is 48-50 t/ha. Yields are tending to be close to, or slightly above, average. However, these yields reflect the harvested area, and do not take into account the areas that remain unharvested due to waterlogging. Once these areas are included, it is expected that national average yields will be slightly below average.

Typically farm yields range from 32-75t/ha. However, there are reports of some particularly poor yields and partial crop failures dropping occasional fields down to 15t/ha. Northern regions have reported the poorest yields from heavier soils where growers can only lift the drier parts of fields. Bad ground conditions resulted in partial crop failures for some and a high level of wastage where tubers have begun to rot.

Concerns over storage issues are prevalent across all regions. Higher soil loading on crops going into store is slowing the drying process and reducing airflow through the crops. There are also increasing reports of rots in lifted crops, which combined with wet crops going into store increase the risk of rots spreading. At the moment there are no widespread reports of storage issues, but crops are only just being loaded.

## Regional Overview

### *Scotland*

An estimated 73% of the regional potato area (excluding seed) in Scotland was lifted by WE22 October. Scotland has experienced stop-start progress during October, due to intermittent heavy rain. Progress is slower for those on heavier land. Growers are concerned as to how many crops are still in the ground.

Overall quality remains good. There are occasional reports of high dry matters and a slight increase in watery wound rot, but these have been mostly from potatoes where skin set was slow to form.

To date, farm yields in Scotland range from 33-68t/ha, with reports that the best yields have come from earlier lifted crops.

### **North West**

An estimated 45% of the regional potato area (excluding seed) was lifted by WE22 October. Wet conditions and waterlogged soils are a concern in this region, with a number of crops lost due to persistent standing water on the field. In some cases whole fields were written off. In others it is parts of fields, with sections in the drier parts of the field being lifted out of poor conditions. To date those crops that have been lifted have shown good quality, with good skin set. There remain concerns about crops still left to be lifted deteriorating in quality. Risk of bruising is low despite soils sticking to potatoes and needing extra cleaning. There are increasing reports of black leg within the region and many are concerned as to how crops will fair when in storage.

To date farm yields in the North West have ranged from 40-55t/ha, although this does not include areas of crop losses. Overall it is estimated that farm yields are slightly better than average.

### **North East**

An estimated 29% of the regional potato area (excluding seed) has been lifted to date. Easier to access fields have seen the most lifted to date, with only occasional areas of crops lifted from wetter soils. Fields which could be easily accessed (lighter soils) were lifted with quality meeting specifications. A period of more settled weather is needed to allow growers to access some of the heavier land. There were occasional reports of late blight and alternaria in the crop, but not sufficient to cause regional yield issues.

Yields in the North East are close to the farm average. To date regional yields ranged from 45-60t/ha, with higher yields from crops lifted earlier and lower yields from fields where growers have struggled to lift the whole crop.

### **Yorkshire & Humber**

An estimated 45% of the regional potato area (excluding seed) has been lifted to date. Rate of progress was hampered by wet weather conditions. Where soils were saturated, growers found lifting challenging. Heavy showers meant that lifting periods were limited, with only small areas cleared when labour and ground conditions allowed for it.

Bruising remains low. However, as crops are lifted from cloddy soils more cleaning is required, increasing the risks. Black leg has been prevalent in crops, with reports that this is the main cause of wastage.

Farm yields range from 35-70t/ha, with the highest yields from well drained soils and lower yields from fields where there were partial crop losses due to water logging and inaccessibility. Farm yields are slightly above average at this stage in lifting.

### **East Midlands**

An estimated 65% of the regional potato area (excluding seed) was lifted by WE22 October. Despite the challenges posed by the change to wetter weather, most growers were able to lift at least some of their area. Progress was influenced by machinery type, with self-propelled harvesters faring the

best. It is the trailers rather than harvesters that are causing the challenges getting on and off the field. Many potatoes are being loaded wet. Growers with larger areas tend to be further ahead due to starting lifting when ground conditions were 'too dry'. Those smaller growers who were waiting for rain received more than they expected and are now facing the challenges of lifting all their crops out of overly wet ground.

Quality remains good, with fry colours still meeting market specification. Where potatoes were sat in water prior to harvest, rots have begun to develop and many are concerned these could cause issues when storing.

Farm yields in the East Midlands range from 15-75t/ha, these poorer yields include crops where there were partial crop losses earlier in the season due to waterlogging. Higher yields came from well-drained fields. Overall farm yields are close to average.

### **West Midlands**

Just under 60% of the West Midlands potato area (excluding seed) had been lifted by WE22 October. Clearance rates across the region are variable and generally lower than expected for this time of year. As with other regions, there are occasional reports of small areas where crops have been abandoned. Soils that were previously saturated were negatively affected by even small amounts of rain during the month. Many are concerned that there could be further delays to lifting in areas where ground conditions are restricting machinery movement.

Yields are consistent with or slightly above average for the region. Those that were affected by heavy rainfall in June/July are showing lower yields. Farm yield estimates are between 40-60t/ha, with most yields close to the farm average.

### **East**

Just over 90% of the regional potato area (excluding seed) was lifted by WE22 October. High rainfall during early October made progress challenging. Growers worked when the weather and ground conditions allowed to maintain harvest plans, but were only able to take small areas at a time. Despite this, they maintained steady progress throughout the lifting period, albeit in little bites.

Tuber dry matters remain slightly higher than normal, increasing the potential for bruising if not handled correctly. Current disease issues in the region are low. Skin quality is good and bright. There are concerns that this may change if potatoes are stored wet and not properly managed.

Farm yields are tending to be slightly above average, with farm yields ranging from 34-68t/ha.

### **South West**

The majority of crops in the South West are earlies and were therefore lifted before the wet weather set in. The small areas that still had to be lifted saw some quality issues, but most have met specifications. There was some wastage due to growth cracks and seed borne viruses.

Farm yields were close to or slightly above average.

### **South East**

Progress began well where crops were lifted during settled weather. This has now slowed for crops that still need to be lifted. Saturated ground conditions have made getting machinery into fields difficult and have delayed harvest of the remaining areas slightly.

## Wales

Progress has remained steady, with many areas lifted during settled weather at the beginning of October. Heavy showers brought halts to harvest progress, having the most significant impact on those with large areas to clear.

Overall yields are good. The lower yields are from crops lifted during wetter periods, where wastage was an issue. Crops lifted in late September and early October tended to yield better.

Weather is beginning to cause issues with quality. The small area of potatoes grown in the South are showing rots; even by those that have managed to get crops to storage. Black spot is beginning to develop where storage housing is humid and soil has collected on the tuber.

## Sector Overview

### Fresh Chipping

#### Yield

There are limited areas that grow fresh chipping potatoes. These are predominantly the East Midlands, West Midlands and East of England. With more of the better crops lifted during October there has been an improvement in yields, raising the GB yield estimate to 46-48t/ha.

Farm yields this week ranged from 15-60t/ha, with higher yields reported from crops on well drained soils. Lower yields have been from crops affected by seed borne viruses and increased cracking issues.

#### Quality

Despite unsettled weather across much of GB, quality remained good to WE22 October. Dry matters are within specification and fry colours remain typically within 00-1. There were occasional internal issues with spraing and brown centre where crops were lifted after a period in standing water.

**Dry Matter:** Ranges from 20% in Yorkshire, through to 23% in the East of England. To date, dry matters were unaffected by wet weather as most crops were sprayed off prior to significant rainfall. Where spraying off took place late in Scotland, dry matters rose to 24%, increasing the risk of bruising.

**Fry colour:** Still meeting specification, but beginning to deteriorate where crops were stood in water prior to lifting. Typically between 00-1, there has been no significant cold weather through to WE22 October to negatively impact on fry colour.

**Size:** Overall tuber size and number is fairly typical, although there is a fair amount of variability with some crops having small numbers of large tubers and others large numbers of small tubers. The later maturing varieties have good tuber numbers, with 10kg sacks holding between 58-63 tubers.

**Wastage:** typically 5%, occasionally rising to 15%. Main causes of wastage are due to greening, rots, increased slug damage and occasional wire worm. Reports of cracking from the East of England where crops were stressed in June.

### Processing

#### Yield

An increase in the number of better crops harvested has raised the GB national yield estimate to 48-50t/ha.



Farm yields this week ranged from 37-68t/ha. Higher yields are from crops lifted earlier in the season when ground conditions were better.

### Quality

Tuber sizes are variable, but overall around average. There are some crops of Rosetta and Taurus with lower numbers and some oversized tubers. Some cracking has been seen in Piper and Royal, but shapes are generally good.

**Internal Issues:** Low levels of internal issues are reported; some browning reported in Shepody and Dell varieties in the East of England.

**Dry Matter:** Majority of crops are meeting specification, with an average of 21% ranging from 20% in the North to 23% in the East of England.

**Fry colour:** Good throughout, still maintaining 00-1 with no cold weather to affect this.

**Size:** Size and number is variable, but overall sizes are average. Chipping 10kg bags are holding 58-63 tubers, crisping 10kg bags are holding between 58-62 tubers.

**Wastage:** Typically between 5-15%, mainly from black leg and cracking.

Storage issues are starting to be seen, with some crops showing evidence of rots developing within 3-4 days of going into storage. These stores will require close monitoring to minimise losses in store.

### Packing

#### Yield

As with the other sectors, yields have seen a slight improvement as better crops came to harvest. This is despite the challenges of extracting tubers out of wet ground. The current estimate of the GB national yield is between 47-49t/ha.

Farm yields this week ranged from 15-68t/ha. Those yielding higher were from lighter soils. Those yielding lower have been affected by seed borne disease and have been in challenging ground conditions. Some growers report driving over the worst wet patches and losing part of the crop where flooding has occurred.

### Quality

Overall quality deteriorated slightly during October. The main issues were due to wet soils, with growers on the wettest land opting for 50-55mm webs on harvesters to get rid of soil. In crops not grown specifically for the salad market, this is resulting in the smaller salad potatoes not being harvested. Loss of bloom on skin finish is reported where lifting was delayed and overall skin finishes are beginning to show low levels of scab.

**Skin finish:** Skin finish is still bright in the East of England, with some reports of scab developing further north, particularly crops on lighter land. Scotland has seen increased issues with powdery scab, but generally skins look good to date.

**Internal issues:** There remains no significant issues. Occasional localised reports have been received of brown centres where potatoes have cracked. Skin set has been slower in Scotland where conditions have been wetter.

**Size:** Baker content is variable ranging from 40% in Scotland to 65% in the East of England. In salad specific crops, the proportion of potatoes under 45mm ranges from 75-85%.

**Wastage:** Outgrades are varying from field to field, with the main reason for wastage associated with greening, rots and slug damages. The West Midlands are seeing an average of 18% wastage on farm, mainly from greens, but some associated with wire worm, whilst in the East wastage is below 5%.

## Fresh Bags

### *Yield*

As with all the other sectors, yields have improved as more of the better crops were harvested in October. The current GB estimate is 47-49t/ha, although this does not account for areas of crop that remain unharvested due to waterlogging.

Farm yields this week ranged between 35-66t/ha. The East of England is reporting the lowest yields where seed borne viruses and rots have affected some crops.

### *Quality*

Overall quality is good, despite an increase in reports of rots developing where tubers were lifted wet. Increased bruising is also occurring where excessive cleaning of soils from tubers has had to take place. Generally more bruising is taking place as crops are cleaned.

**Internal issues:** No significant issues reported. Occasional reports of spraing in the West Midlands and growth cracks associated with viruses or turgor cracking in Piper varieties.

**Size:** Size and numbers of tubers are variable, but overall about average. 25kg bag counts are now typically 140-150.

**Wastage:** Typically between 5-15% where black leg and greening has been an issue.

## 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.

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