

**SUMMARY OF AHDB POTATO BOARD  
HELD ON 12<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2020  
Teleconference**

**PRESENT:** Alison Levett (Chair), Jim Cargill, Dan Metheringham, Andrew Skea, Will Shakeshaft, Michael Welham (MWe), Mark Willcox (MWi), Chris Wilson

**APOLOGIES:** Jonathan Papworth

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Rob Clayton, Sue Cleaver (minutes), Nic Dodd, Anna Farrell, Rebecca Geraghty, Will Jackson, Jane King, Richard Meredith, Nick Skinner, Louise Woodward

**WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE, AND DECLARATIONS OF BUSINESS INTERESTS**

The Chair opened the meeting at 8:30 am and welcomed those in attendance to the teleconference. Apologies were received from Jonathan Papworth.

DM informed the Board that he would be sitting on the Potato Processors Association (PPA) board. He had discussed this with RC and it was agreed that there was no conflict as it was just in an advisory role.

**MINUTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 21<sup>st</sup> JULY 2020**

The minutes from the meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2020 and the summary notes from the calls held on 30<sup>th</sup> July, 27<sup>th</sup> August and 8<sup>th</sup> September were agreed and accepted as a true record.

**MATTERS ARISING**

RC went through the matters arising from the meeting held on the 21<sup>st</sup> July which were either completed or on the agenda.

**CHAIR'S UPDATE**

. AL highlighted key points including the work on levy recommendations and proposals. In terms of strategy, AL noted that it was good to see that the proposals that have been put forward started to reflect the greater level of focus that the Board were seeking.

AL updated the Board on conversations that she had had with levy payers. There was a strong message coming through regarding environment and how important this area would become. AL would be grateful for any more connections and recommendations for levy payers to talk to from the Board members. Her overriding message was that she wanted discussions to be about the work that AHDB does here and now, for example the excellent work on consumer insights, Brexit and DMN

MWi observed that busy levy payers would value a slimmed down news feed that is highly relevant, rather than going to a portal to extract the information which can be overwhelming. His colleagues rated highly one or two people from the Trade Associations who email a weekly summary with only two or three lines and a couple of links. They know that individual is fighting their corner, and hear first from them that e.g. mancozeb has had its approval revoked. MWi proposed that engaging some senior people with a weekly head to head type message would be very valuable.

JK encouraged the Board members to come forward with any further ideas to help engage levy payers. She discussed the plans for a more personalised web login that was in progress. The

digital activity during covid was reaching between 40-50% of new people now accessing AHDB through webinars and podcasts.

DM agreed with AL on the importance of keeping an ongoing positive drumbeat, being proactive on work that we are undertaking, and offered to assist AL by connecting her with influential growers and farmers.

AL recommended the recent consumer insight webinars to the Board members. These are available as recordings <https://ahdb.org.uk/webinars>.

## **CEO UPDATE**

JK gave an update on the transformation programme going on alongside the development of the new five year strategy.

The new strategy has a focus on evidence and data, marketing and exports, and farm potential, with evidence and data the golden thread running through the organisation. AHDB was embarking on the biggest set of reforms to date in order to deliver the strategy, changes in levy payer engagement and increased value to the levy payer.

The strategy and change document would go out to consultation from the week commencing December 7<sup>th</sup> through to February.

JK discussed the horticulture ballot which will take place mid-January, the possibility of a potato ballot and the longer term commitment that AHDB will hold ballots for industry as a whole. Would be leaving AHDB soon, and the process of finding a new Chief Executive was underway.

## **OPERATIONAL REPORT**

RC highlighted the effect of Covid on the activity plan. Much of his time had been taken up with the future of storage engagement, stakeholder engagement and ballot readiness. RC touched on the activities within the research team, farm economics team, market intelligence team, and exports team. Both marketing and KE were included in the agenda.

The current position for DMN was that RC was expecting the full support of CRD for the emergency application, however it would not be granted until later in November. The delay had created uncertainty, and RC had joined a new workstream around waste and regulation of waste disposal, which included crispers and WRAP (the Waste and Resources Action Programme) in the group. Dormfresh have announced that their full application has now been completed.

RC asked the Board whether they would like Tess Howe or Steve Dunkley to attend a future Board to give a more detailed update. AL confirmed that it would be useful to brief the board on the high level picture regarding The Institute of Agriculture and Horticulture (TIAH).

MWi questioned why the planted area report by sector and by variety came out in mid-October. The late timing caused frustration to levy payers. RC updated that an MI working group was looking to bring it forward but there were issues around competition law which increased the time taken for validation. AL sat on the MI working group and confirmed that the challenge on timing of data had been picked up by the MI team.

## **FINANCE MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS AND LEVY**

RC presented the management accounts.. RC highlighted the reasons for the forecast deficit position of -£583k, the potential changes to this forecast and the impact this would have on the market development campaign budget.

The Board expressed a frustration that a formal reforecast was not ready and the figures were from September.

MWe queried whether the savings that had been made because of covid would be carried forward in the future. RC noted there was a social and societal conversation across the whole of

AHDB about how we run things going forward, balancing both face to face and digital interactions.

## BALLOT READINESS

RC updated the Board on the Potato Ballot situation. It was written in the statute that 5% of levy payers need to write in to trigger a ballot. The petition group had written to potato levy payers and given them a pro forma that they could send back. RC was expecting the petition group to receive enough forms to trigger a ballot in potatoes.

RC shared the timeline of activities with the Board. The ground work was complete and the next phase would be to stage “town hall” meetings which would be open format sessions that levy payers can be involved in to give feedback. These could be split for crisps, fries, fresh, seed and export to allow more focussed discussions for individual groups. RC requested a Board member presence at each of the “town hall” meetings. (See action following para 175/20).

AL agreed that some really powerful messaging with postcards was a nice simple way to cut through. AL requested an action plan on how the Board could help support AHDB staff throughout the campaign and asked the Board for suggestions. This was a call to action to get out positive messages now rather than wait.

## KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE (KE) UPDATE

The Chair welcomed RM to the meeting. RM updated the Potato Board with the KE activity and levy payer engagement taking place. Every levy payer engagement was recorded, with objectives set for each Knowledge Exchange Manager. RM provided progress by size band for engagement and members noted there was still some way to go to meet all levy payers

KE activity had included 12 webinars with overall views of 1333. The webinars were reaching a new audience of people that hadn't come to AHDB events before, in what was a traditionally a quieter time for KE due to potato growers being busier over the summer. Once Lockdown was over, the team were keen to get the balance between face-to-face and digital engagement right.

RM shared the upcoming events. The team had aimed to make sure there was something for all areas and markets of industry. SPot farms remained the main tool and platform for communicating to levy payers, and RM was glad to announce a new SPot West Host – James Oliver from Gatley Estate. **Chris Wilson volunteered to join the SPot West steering group as a Board member representative.**

The Agronomists conference was taking place in the first week of December. So far 600+ people were already booked on. It is open to farmers to attend, but the primary audience still remains the agronomists.

## STRATEGY

The Chair welcomed WJ to the meeting. WJ updated the Board with the latest strategy developments and timelines. The feedback regarding sector specific vs cross sector needs had been taken on board. The new strategy would be presented as an interactive digital package where people can get straight to the information that interests them via links. As well as the sector specific details, it would also include sections on change, governance, costs and levy mechanisms.

The initial recommendations of the governance review group would be presented to the main board on the 24<sup>th</sup> November. The aim was to publish the strategy document on the 7<sup>th</sup> December. WJ confirmed that the plan was to share it with the sector boards a few days before external publication.

RC went through the Potato sector specific pages that had been included in the pack. The Board were concerned that there was not enough emphasis on environmental and sustainability issues

and wanted this reflected within the document. WJ confirmed that the environment was very much present in the over-arching strategy. **The Board agreed to approve the sector summary provided there was a strong enough link to the front end of the strategy, and that this had a strong enough piece on environment / net zero ambitions.**

## LEVY MECHANISMS

RC presented the latest iteration of the levy mechanisms proposal. The Board had discussed the various levy mechanisms proposals previously, including a mechanism for coping with flooding, and removing the mention of criminality. This proposal included what AHDB might do if there was a catastrophe and proposed that provided a problem could be identified, it could be considered on a case by case basis. Reasons for not pursuing a tonnage based system were also laid out in the paper, along with questions that would be asked to industry to sense check the proposal. AHDB would be introducing a new zero based approach to planning what products and services were delivered. This means that it would set the levy to deliver the specific support that levy payers said they need, as opposed to examining how best to spend the available levy income for the maximum benefit of levy payers.

**Potato related content for the levy mechanism proposal was agreed.**

## FUTURE STORAGE

The Chair welcomed NS and RG to the meeting. NS reminded the board of the background and original vision for future storage, which was for a dynamic and innovation-led approach that delivers for levy payers and industry and can adapt to a rapidly changing environment. NS went through the timelines and deliverables that had been achieved so far in the project. It was now close to the end of the evaluation phase which had been extended to allow clarifications that ensure a fair evaluation of bids. The aim was to complete this by the 20<sup>th</sup> November, and for the preferred bid to be presented to the Board in the week commencing 30<sup>th</sup> November. If approved, the preferred bid would be presented to the main AHDB Board on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2020.

## MARKETING SPEND

The Chair welcomed ND, LW and AF to the meeting. If covered campaign objectives, and the current consumer mindset; what they are looking for in terms of meals, and the way they work and live at the moment. The Board were presented with five options to consider shorter and longer term opportunities. The current available budget would not allow for robust evaluation (using Kantar data) so evaluation would be using social metrics that could be gathered in house.

The Board's discussion included the success of the previous campaign; what the primary role of the campaign should be (e.g. whether to shift volume, or to make an attitudinal shift); the need to capitalise on the change in people's lives (working from home more etc.) and to be reactive; the 33% increase in jacket potato consumption; the use of social media and video on demand; carbon footprint comparison of potatoes versus rice and pasta; messaging such as zero waste, time pressed families, convenience and health. RC confirmed that the available budget would be £150k.

**After much discussion the board agreed the direction for short term / tactical marketing activity that continues from the lock-down related activity from earlier in the year. The focus would be around promoting the positive attributes of bakers / jackets). This was based on:-**

- Strong indicators of the scale of opportunity from the Kantar meal occasions model (consumers working from home and wanting a hot lunch)
- Relatively poor performance of bakers at retail (whilst all formats have increased sales during lockdown, the baker format has gained less so)
- Strong health attributes associated with bakers (these always play well post-Christmas)
- Zero waste in the home

- Versatility – a good platform for some imaginative and enticing toppings

A small working group including the Chair would develop the plan and creative designs over the next weeks. This would be taken back to the Potato Board to get agreement, with an aim to launch in the first few months next year.

#### **AOB AND CLOSE**

RC checked that the Board members were receiving all the webinar details.

The Board discussed the timing around running the next Open Board meeting. It was agreed that the “town hall” meetings should have a Board member presence, and see if these work well to get levy payer feedback and interaction. This would be reviewed and if needed an Open Board meeting could be fixed in the Spring.

Chair thanked all the Board for their time and contributions and closed the meeting at 12:30.

DRAFT