

SUMMARY OF AHDB POTATO BOARD HELD ON 19th March 2020 Teleconference

PRESENT: Sophie Churchill (Chair), Jim Cargill, Alison Levett, Phil Huggon, Dan Metherringham, Andrew Skea, Will Shakeshaft, Chris Wilson

APOLOGIES: Jonathan Papworth, Michael Welham,

IN ATTENDANCE: Rob Clayton, Sue Cleaver (SCI) (minutes), Peter Kendall, Jimmy Phillips

WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE, AND DECLARATIONS OF BUSINESS INTERESTS

The Chair opened the meeting at 8:45 am and welcomed those in attendance. Apologies were received from Jonathan Papworth and Michael Welham. Due to the coronavirus pandemic the meeting was run as a teleconference and would be abridged.

It was Phil Huggon's last Board meeting. The Chair thanked Phil who had been a tower of strength and wisdom during his six years on the Board.

MINUTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 23rd JANUARY 2020

The minutes from the meeting held on 23rd January 2020 were accepted as a true record and would be signed by the Chair.

MATTERS ARISING

RC went through the matters arising from the meeting held on the 23rd January 2020.

CHAIR'S UPDATE and DISCUSSION WITH PETER KENDALL (CHAIR OF AHDB)

The Chair welcomed Peter Kendall, Chair of AHDB, to the meeting. The Board members gave an update on the current coronavirus situation.

WS noted that at the moment for UK with his own business, there were minor issues around distribution and workforces. If these could be managed, then they should still be able to supply and export. If it became a struggle to have fuel delivered on farm, this would cause a major issue to UK agriculture. WS' concerns were with seed potatoes and processing.

JC asked the Board to consider what would happen if seed potato inspections stopped, and whether there were plans in place to cover this scenario.

The demand for crisps had fallen, and the demand for fresh potatoes had risen. In the media pasta was mentioned more than potatoes.

RC updated the Board on the conversations that had taken place with the trade associations. The Chair of the Fresh Potato Suppliers Association Mark Taylor had reported that the situation was like "Christmas eve over and over again" with supply being stripped out but without the same time to prepare. There were concerns around how to approach self-isolation if, for example, a worker was sharing a caravan with 8 others. There were concerns around Red Tractor, whether the Basis and Facts qualified advisors would be available to help, and whether assurance protocols would be compromised. There was further concern around time sensitive pesticides, and whether the supply chains would be interrupted. AHDB had set up a team to cover internal changes and external needs in response to coronavirus. The activity of these teams is being shared via a new web page. <https://ahdb.org.uk/coronavirus>

PK thanked the Board for inviting him. He gave an update on the current situation and how coronavirus had seriously brought home to the government the importance of food production, with concern for the availability of food at the top of their agenda. AHDB would respond quickly, engaging with industry, finding out where blockages are occurring with fuel and licencing, working with industry bodies, collating information about available help, and highlighting where the industry needs the government to help. Scenario planning for the whole growing season was required, and thought should be given to activities that would be stopping. The knowledge and expertise of the Board would help keep AHDB informed.

PK talked about the future direction of AHDB under the new Chairman Nicholas Saphir. There were challenges ahead for agriculture e.g. regarding food security, fair trade, and net zero. PK challenged the role of the Potato Board, discussing the smaller size of the sector, with very professional growers, and the way the levy is collected.

Mark Willcox, Technical Director from Branston, had been appointed as a new Potato Board member, starting April 1st 2020. The new Board would be slightly smaller, with 10 members which gave scope for change in the future. The Chair thanked the Board members for their portfolio areas: CW – Research and KE, MW and JC – MI, AL- marketing, WS and JP – future storage research, AS – marketing and communications. DM – processing, GYOP

The Chair noted the strong AHDB response to the Farmbench data breach, and highlighted the challenges in maintaining confidence with industry.

PK thanked SC for the way she had led the Board. She packed a punch, knew how to raise issues, and was a forceful advocate for potatoes. He asked the Board to think about the big picture, and the challenges of the whole area that span agriculture. How AHDB focuses on the big issues will make the biggest difference. SC thanked PK for leading AHDB over a challenging time, working with Defra, and acting as a strong advocate.

PK left the call.

The Chair said in conclusion that there would be a long period of change, with the Request for Views, a new Chair of AHDB, coronavirus, and the demands on industry. PH commented that the role of the board would be more important than ever in the next 12 months. Potatoes had much to contribute in the diet, the sector would not be short changed.

BUDGET FOR 2020/21

RC covered the proposed budget in detail. All papers had been put together ahead of corona virus. The board could give provisional approval to the budget noting the need to be flexible. There was a massive spike in retail and takeaway demand, and less out of home and food service.

There was a broad agreement that getting to a sustainable budget position where the sector was not running down reserves or running a deficit budget was crucial. The Board were frustrated with the increasing central costs. **The Board agreed to sign off the 20/21 budget on the understanding that the full impact of coronavirus was not yet understood and that it did not accept a deficit budget in the medium term. Further efforts were to be made to balance the budget including controlling all costs, central, shared and sector-specific.**

AOB

26/20 WS gave a Sutton Bridge update. The vacancy for a Change Manager was still to be filled.

27/20 The plan for an Open Board meeting was still in the pipeline, but would take place in a different format, e.g. a webinar, and would be dependent on developments with coronavirus over the next few weeks. The May away day would not take place and would be a teleconference.

28/20 The Chair thanked all attendees for their contributions, and closed the meeting at 11:34am.

