

SUMMARY OF AHDB POTATO BOARD HELD ON 6th May 2020 Teleconference

PRESENT: Sophie Churchill (Chair), Jim Cargill, Alison Levett, Phil Huggon, Dan Metherringham, Jonathan Papworth, Andrew Skea, Will Shakeshaft, Mark Willcox (MWi), Michael Welham (MWe), Chris Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE: Rob Clayton, Sue Cleaver (SCI) (minutes), Tom Hind, Jane King, Nicholas Saphir

WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE, AND DECLARATIONS OF BUSINESS INTERESTS

The Chair opened the meeting at 8:30 am and welcomed those in attendance. Due to the coronavirus pandemic the meeting was run as a teleconference and would be abridged.

MINUTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 19th MARCH 2020

The minutes from the meeting held on 19th March 2020 were accepted as a true record and were signed by the Chair.

MATTERS ARISING

RC went through the matters arising from the meeting held on the 19th March 2020

CORONA VIRUS UPDATE AND REVIEW OF AHDB POTATO RESPONSE TO DATE

RC updated the Board with the work taking place as a response to the coronavirus crisis, including the regular input of evidence to Defra, work in MI following from the publication of the stocks figures, the provision of a trading portal, work on different recovery scenarios, and the marketing programme.

Issues had arisen around storage decontamination (CIPC) due to various factors including stores staying fuller for longer, and difficulty getting staff for store cleaning or modification. Detailed conversations were taking place with Defra on how this could be tackled.

Pest and disease, blight and aphid services were still going ahead, at a reduced level. A piece of work had been commissioned on managing harvesting under social distancing measures which was going through Defra and the Health and Safety Executive. The KE team had produced a programme of webinars and digital offerings throughout the summer to replace face-to-face meetings. Drones were being used around SPot sites to provide aerial footage of plots at different growing stages.

JP queried the use of water to clean stores. Any waste water with CIPC contamination would need to be treated as rinse water from a pesticide application. It was noted that the environment agency are now screening water courses for CIPC.

The Board discussed the responses taking place in Europe which were all slightly different, and could lead to a more unbalanced playing field.

MW highlighted that perhaps the biggest risk to businesses with lots of people will be the contact tracing app that is about to launch. At the moment food service was working almost as normal using social distancing. The contact tracing app could be used as a blunt tool that would lose a shift overnight, it needed more subtlety and nuance.

The Chair summarised that the coronavirus responses in potatoes aligned with the wider AHDB emphasis on MI analysis and evidence, and targeted marketing.

CHAIR'S UPDATE AND DISCUSSION WITH NICHOLAS SAPHIR AND JANE KING

The Chair welcomed JK and NS to the meeting. The Board members each introduced themselves. NS introduced himself to the Board, sharing his background and extensive experience in agriculture and industry. NS highlighted that British agriculture was heading for a radical change due to a variety of factors, including leaving Europe as well as volatile changes in consumer patterns, which will require the industry to be fleet of foot, embracing farming innovation to stay competitive.

NS considered the centre ground that AHDB can take between the farming world (including supply chain) and government. He explored ideas around how the future of farming may change, and the role that AHDB could play, for example to be a provider of honest evidence which tells the world and the farming and supply chain, what the reality is, in terms of the market place both at home and overseas. NS examined the difference between profitability and productivity, and the importance of encouraging integration and involvement right through the supply chain. He was still teasing out in his own mind how to improve the two way flow with communications and getting feedback from farmers and growers, and was interested in the Board members opinions on how this could be improved. NS had been impressed with the work that was taking place at AHDB, but it still was not being communicated very well.

The role of the Potato Board was discussed. The board considered how to maintain a voice for potato levy payers making sure that the feedback was granular enough to make a difference. There was a need for levy payers to understand what AHDB was doing for them, and for AHDB to be clear on the areas that will make a difference. NS encouraged the board to consider the best ways forward and to share their ideas with him.

The Board had a wide ranging conversation on the role of AHDB in the future and how it can contribute the most. The next step for NS and the leadership team would be finalising the strategy and business plan.. There were lessons to learn from the coronavirus response – the crisis had galvanised some excellent work and also highlighted for example, that board and panel members travelling all over the place is not required.

The Chair thanked NS for sharing his thoughts on a wide number of topics. He had encouraged the board to think strategically about the whole of industry, grasping the need for analysis, as well as understanding and working out what the big picture is in potatoes, and how to balance profitability and productivity. There was a real interest in how AHDB does its business, building on the process of change.

Reflections and preparation for June board discussion on strategic / structural challenges for potato sector

RC gave the Board a recap of where strategy discussions had reached so far. With the Defra Request for Views now published, and the new Chairman in place, this could now move forward and a full discussion would take place in June.

The Board discussed the implications of the Levy Payer Satisfaction Survey results, and the feedback from the Defra Request for Views.

The Chair summarised that the Board wanted a more fundamental look at where the value of AHDB potatoes lies and enough time to be radical with any future strategy.

AOB

The Chair thanked the Board members for their charitable donations. JP had inspired the group when he sent potatoes to Fareshare. WS was also donating 31 tonnes of beetroot, and McCains were donating 25 tonnes every week until the end of June. AS had supplied half a tonne of seed potatoes for a schools project but as schools were closed, they had made up 200 packs of seed potatoes for children to grow at home.

The Chair thanked all attendees for their contributions, and closed the meeting at 11:35am.

