

Tuber TALK

YOUR AHDB POTATOES UPDATE

AHDB



Winter 2019/20

All change

Growers prepare for life after
CIPC & Diquat – pages 4 & 5



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New 'Arable Focus' magazine to launch this year

This is the last issue of TuberTALK, our potatoes-focused printed newsletter. Later in the year, we will launch Arable Focus, a forty-page magazine for potatoes, cereals and oilseeds growers.

The magazine will bring you all the latest thinking from levy-funded activities. This includes our latest research findings, tools, resources and events. There will be regional pages to highlight the events and meetings taking place near you.

Running a single magazine for the arable sector reflects the fact that a number of our levy-funded activities benefit both cereals and potatoes enterprises – such as our GREATsoils research or GrowSave project on energy efficiency.

The Monitor Farm programme originated in the cereals and oilseeds sector, but more often than not the host farm will choose to investigate issues that are relevant to any farming business.

Herefordshire Monitor farmers Russell Price and Martin Williams were invited to speak at BP2019 in Harrogate because of the excellent work they have led on motivation and resilience in farming. This is a topic that is more relevant than ever after two very difficult years for growers.

Russell and Martin have thought very carefully about why they farm and what motivates them. They make a conscious effort to think beyond the day-to-day frustrations brought by weather, regulations and politics.

They have resolved to: look at opportunities differently, embrace new ideas and technology, work together with other growers, and attempt to inspire and drive the industry. At BP2019, they were joined on stage by speakers who presented practical tools and advice for dealing with issues such as succession and people management.

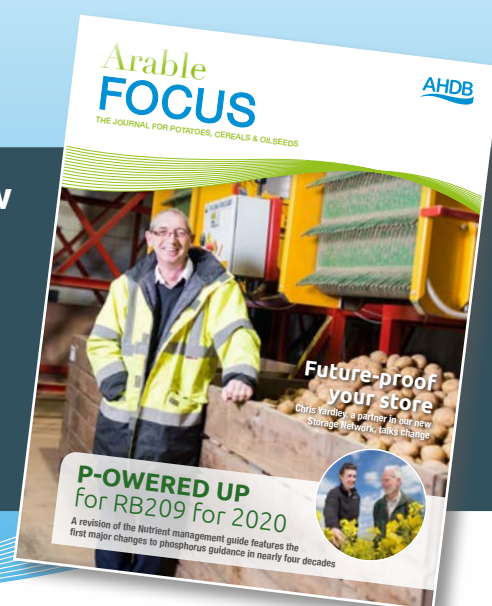
By bringing you a longer magazine, we will be able to present these ideas in more detail via features with farmers from across our Farm Excellence network. We will also delve deeper into research results.



Jimmy Phillips
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Finding content in the new Arable Focus Magazine

As well as a range of content that is relevant to all readers, the magazine will run both potatoes- and cereals-specific features. Potato features will be marked with the following icon:



Greater focus in our technical newsletters

Our specialist technical newsletters are designed to give you a deeper insight into the results from our research and on-farm programmes and how they can be used at your farm or business. We are rebranding our existing titles and linking content between them and the new Arable Focus magazine.

If you already subscribe to Grower Gateway or Storage Bulletin, you don't need to take any action – you will still receive them under their new titles.

If you would like to sign up for these newsletters, please visit ahdb.org.uk/keeping-in-touch

Technical newsletter new titles

Grower Gateway will become
Potato Agronomy Focus

Storage Bulletin will become
Potato Storage Focus

All AHDB content on one website

Growing potatoes does not happen in isolation, which is why all AHDB content is now part of a single website.

We have now closed down our old potatoes-focused site and moved all the key content to **ahdb.org.uk**. This will allow you to link seamlessly between AHDB content. You can check the latest market prices for cereals, cattle, milk, etc. before delving deeper into the latest research on alternative sprout suppressants.

Hosting only one website stops us from duplicating content that benefits all farms, such as GREATsoils or online benchmarking tool Farmbench, across multiple websites. It means we can link more easily between related content that originates from different sectors.

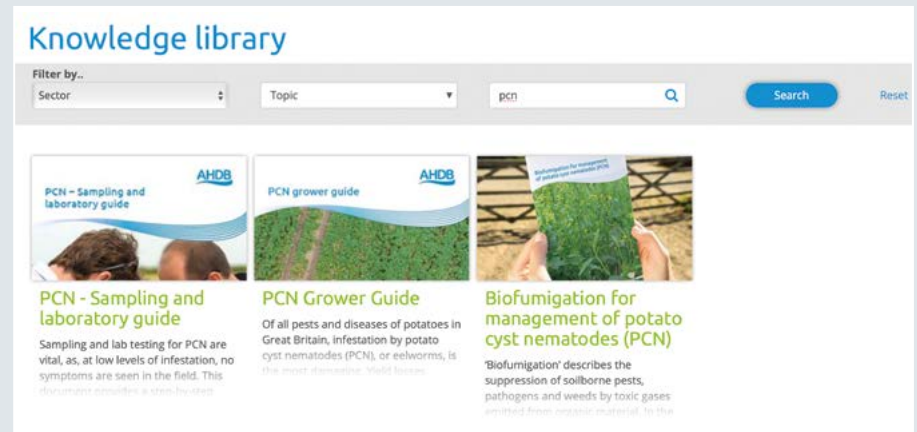
To help you find the most popular potatoes content on the new site, here are some links:

- Potatoes homepage: **ahdb.org.uk/potatoes**
- Weekly average price and market info: **ahdb.org.uk/potato-market-insight**
- Storage research and best practice: **ahdb.org.uk/storage-hub**
- Research results and agronomy information: **ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library**
- Events: **ahdb.org.uk/events**
- Tools: **ahdb.org.uk/tools**

How it works: Knowledge library

The knowledge library (**ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library**) is the home for all of AHDB's technical content. It is fully searchable, so the easiest way to find what you're looking for is to type it into the search box.

If, for example, you wanted to find content on potato cyst nematodes (PCN), you can simply type PCN into the search box, click search and it returns the below results:

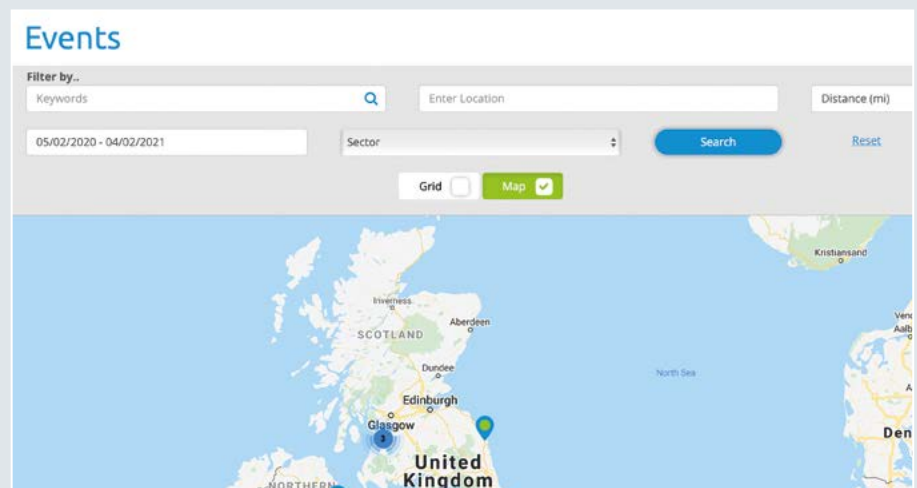


If your search results are too broad, you can narrow your search by using the filter drop-down menu. You can, for example, tick 'potato' from the sector menu, meaning the search will only display results that are applicable to potatoes.

How it works: Events portal

All AHDB events are now in one place: **ahdb.org.uk/events**. That means if you farm in multiple sectors, all meetings relevant to you are displayed on one screen.

You can filter by sector, or by distance from your location. Results can be displayed in a list or on a map.



Going Dutch: store managers will need to split the sprout suppression load next year



Adrian Cunningham
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Store managers may need to consider beyond the direct costs of the remaining approved sprout suppressants and towards adjusting store management strategies to keep the number of applications to a minimum and therefore helping to keep costs down.

As we discussed in the last issue of TuberTALK, effective use of maleic hydrazide (MH) in combination with alternatives such as spearmint oil or ethylene will hold the key for most growers. What this means in practice is a realisation that we are not dealing with a like-for-like replacement but a shift to a whole new storage management system.

This means upgrading store sealing and ventilation, along with using a combination of treatments. This will allow you to manage the number of applications of alternative products needed – the only way to keep cost rises under control.

Last year, we went on a study tour of Northern Europe to meet store managers who have been running CIPC-free stores.

Jeroen van Kappel of Netherlands-based Mooij Agro, who has been trialling both spearmint and DMN across multiple sites, says he has achieved robust sprout control, but application costs can be up to seven times higher.

Jeroen says: “When spearmint oil is applied, stores have to be closed for 48 hours or more, ideally with no natural ventilation.

“During fogging, the supplier recommends running fans on forced internal ventilation. Because of the closure, it is not possible to avoid the crop temperature rising as it is important not to run refrigeration units during the period of store closure.

“The problem with closing stores is that levels of carbon dioxide (CO₂) can rise significantly. If this is for a short time, it seems like the fry colour remains acceptable, but if closure is for too long, it could become an issue.”

A full interview with Jeroen, and all of the latest results from AHDB projects into CIPC alternatives, can be found at ahdb.org.uk/storage-hub

Sprout suppressants timeline

CIPC withdrawal date: 8 January

CIPC use-up date: 8 October

(do not use CIPC this storage season)

CIPC Alternatives:

- Maleic hydrazide:
- Ethylene
- Spearmint oil
- Dimethyl naphthalene (DMN) (awaiting approval, expected 2021)

Pre-planting planning for desiccation without diquat



Dr Anne Stone,
Knowledge Transfer Manager
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From next year, the withdrawal of diquat will mean big changes for growers. While the loss of this chemical will be significant, with some forward planning it is still possible to have an effective desiccation strategy.

The fundamental point is to begin preparation earlier in the year: by February at the latest.

Compared with previous seasons, attention should be paid to your tillage and the machinery you intend to use: particularly your ridge configuration. Using a narrower tyre for a topper can reduce the chance of damage to tubers on the side of ridges (although avoid this in wet conditions). In-field tracks will also need widening to make space for the tractor and flail.

When it comes to spray applications, consider using up to 10% less nitrogen than in previous years. This will trigger natural senescence, making desiccation easier and reducing regrowth. Meanwhile, applications of chemical sprays must be planned earlier in the year, working backwards from the harvest date. Planting date may also have to be brought forward.

In terms of varieties, if you have the opportunity, grow late-maturing, indeterminate varieties on lightest, easiest land, with early maturers on the wettest and heaviest fields. If aiming for large-size tubers, using a reduced seed rate can reduce difficulties for haulm destruction later in the season.

AHDB is committed to supporting growers in the absence of diquat and has been overseeing a number of desiccation trials across our Strategic Potato (SPot) Farm network. The work includes looking at potential replacement methods and their effectiveness. You can find the results online at: ahdb.org.uk/farm-excellence



Awards recognise contributions to agronomy



Rob Clayton,
Sector Strategy Director
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Dr David Firman has been awarded the British Potato Industry Award 2019 in recognition of his valuable contribution to the sector over 30 years.

Throughout his career with Cambridge University Farms (CUF), where he also completed his PhD, David became known for his attention to detail. He initially worked on crop pathology and later focused on key aspects of agronomy.

David was appointed Head of Research within CUF and fulfilled that role to retirement, helping secure the success of CUF's acquisition by the National Institute of Agricultural Botany (NIAB)

Presenting the award, Sophie Churchill said: "From identifying significant events in the potato life cycle through to studying concepts like how the chronological age of seed affects the growing potato, David has contributed significantly to the critical mass of peer-reviewed literature over 30 years and has been a leading force in the industry."

Also at the event, Graham Tomalin was awarded AHDB's 'Above and Beyond' Award, which is presented every year to someone who has made a significant impact through the support given to their clients and networks.

After working for Greenvale and James Foskett Farms, Graham joined VCS Agronomy as a potato specialist and has become a familiar face at our Strategic Farm programme, with a particular focus on some of the key crop protection challenges faced by the sector.

Sophie Churchill said: "When it comes to helping us find the herbicide and desiccant solutions we are going to rely on for years to come, Graham has had the foresight to consider the newer up-and-coming varieties alongside popular varieties such as Maris Piper and King Edward."

Now in their 23rd year, the annual Potato Industry Awards are presented in November to two individuals, rather than businesses. Winners are chosen by an independent judging panel from candidates nominated by their peers.



Graham Tomalin has an ability to address current needs while keeping an eye on the future



David Firman engaged with growers through out his career to push agronomy forward.



Zoe Avison,
Retail Insight Analyst
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Can our environmental story win over 'the millennials'?

Cedric Porter, editor of World Potato Markets, and Stu Baker, Senior Marketing Manager at AHDB, recently joined me at BP2019 for a session on misinformation, millennials and myth-busting.

Cedric set the scene, outlining growing global demand for potatoes and potato products, particularly in developing markets. He also showed us the evidence for why we should be calling potatoes the 'ultimate superfood', with great health and environmental credentials.

Barilla Center for Food and Nutrition recently released a report that shows that potatoes emit half the CO₂ used in producing pasta and a third of rice. On water use, it is an even better story, with potatoes using just a fifth of the water that goes into producing rice and a third of what is used for pasta.

I then introduced a very important group of consumers – the millennials. Though often maligned, they are now very influential as many are starting families and reaching the peak of their spending

power. I explored their attitudes and behaviours, showing how, when it comes to food, they have access to a wealth of information but are often cynical and confused by what they see. The environment is more important to them than it is to other groups.

To round off the session, Stu introduced the work that AHDB is carrying out with the new Food Advisory Board (FAB) – a panel of experts in health, nutrition and the environment. When sensationalised media reports demonise certain foods, FAB will reintroduce clear, evidence-backed balance to the debate, which we can all agree is much needed!

FAB will also produce proactive pieces – their first was a press release on 'the perfect chip', which underlined Brits' love affair with fried potatoes but was also successful in landing messages on fibre and vitamin content. The pick-up of the piece was phenomenal: it achieved 44 pieces of coverage, including 13 national papers, with a total combined readership of 1.7bn!

Introducing AHBD's new Head of Potato Exports:

I'm excited to join AHDB at a crucial time for British agriculture. Our impending departure from the European Union means trade is now top of the agenda, making this a critical time to work in exporting.

My time spent as Head of Scottish Seafood means I'm experienced in developing opportunities overseas for the British food industry. My work involved introducing export development partners to new and existing customers and supply bases, as well as helping them explore potential new markets.

In my new role, I'll work closely with exporters to sustain our excellent reputation abroad, as well as developing new opportunities. I'm keen to meet seed growers and exporters around the UK, so please do get in touch by emailing Patrick.Hughes@ahdb.org.uk



How will the wet autumn affect the market in the coming year?

At the time of writing, we are moving into the Christmas period and, after a difficult lifting window, what is left in the ground looks likely to stay there until the spring. By 12 November, 11% of the crop remained unharvested. What has come out of the ground since has been moved as quickly as possible to prevent breakdown and deterioration in store. So far, supplies lifted early appear to be keeping well and drawdown rates will give us an initial indication of any storage problems as the season progresses.

Prices crept upwards in the lead-up to the holidays, but the situation seems manageable for the packing sector so far. Packhouses have carefully managed contracted supply and limited free-buy purchasing, with a rise in contracted area (to c.70%) reducing free-buy requirements. Equally, while parts of Lincolnshire and the Fens were hard hit by the weather, Scottish crops came out of the ground in good order and appear to be storing well. With a large proportion

of the Scottish packing area (77%) grown to contract this year, a significant volume of Scottish free-buy supplies could head into England and weigh on packing prices in the New Year.

For processors, the volume of crop still in the ground in Yorkshire and the North of England is causing concern, with fry colours degraded by the wet and cold weather. What has been lifted since October has been moved quickly, where possible, to prevent breakdown and further reduction in quality. However, despite tight supplies, we still have yet to see the price spike which would be associated with processors snapping up large blocks of frying material.

Prices in the fresh chipping market have been firm, with best-quality supplies demanding an increasing premium to incentivise movement. However, limited chip shop demand has meant that actual movement of supplies is slow. Demand for average-quality supplies also seems to be muted, with processors yet to heavily dip into the free-buy. The question remains if they will.



Aidan Wright,
Market Intelligence Analyst
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In October, we saw 8.4 Kt of fresh potatoes imported from Belgium, up 434% from average. The majority of these are likely to be frying varieties brought in to help top up processing supplies. Moving into the New Year, the availability and pricing of processing supplies on the continent will be key to determining domestic frying prices. It is important to note that these will be mainly for French fries, with free crisping material in short supply both domestically and Europe-wide. We will be keeping an eye on trade statistics and the European situation, so check Potato Weekly regularly for any updates.

Follow our analysis at
ahdb.org.uk/potato-market-insight



Farewell* from outgoing Chair Sophie Churchill



It is a poignant pleasure to pen this farewell piece, after three years as Chair of the AHDB Potato Sector Board. In that time, fellow board members, colleagues and I have strengthened the knowledge exchange team, opened up the way the board operates and provided intensive support to the industry in the face of challenges on storage. AHDB Potatoes will continue to focus, I am sure, on how it provides value for money and well-delivered services to levy payers. There will be no shortage of chunky issues: how we work with fewer actives, how we keep up consumer demand and how we contribute to net zero, to name but a few.

A good Chair gets stuck in and close to the realities of the world they are lucky enough to be involved in. I can't express how much I have valued the fun, interest and learning of my visits to Wales, England and Scotland. Thank you. I was always a big supporter of UK farmers and our food industry, but I now have any number of examples of the brilliant attention to detail and good practice which characterise our whole supply chain and I will keep talking up our industry at every opportunity. Surrounded by experts at CUPGRA in December, I found I did have contributions to offer, despite still feeling something of a newbie, and I shall wear my 'Spudgeek' badge with pride, into the future.

A really excellent Chair also brings a wider perspective and I hope I've done this. I reflect often both on what makes the potato industry unique (especially its level of risk and its technical demands) and what is pretty much the same across industries, such as dealing with change, bringing out the best in our people, and understanding the market. These are universal and we serve ourselves best by solidarity with all those in a tight space – however bad a particular lifting season.

*Sophie Churchill will stand down as Chair of the AHDB Potatoes Board at the end of her term (31 March). She may act as interim Chair beyond that date if a new Chair has not been appointed.

One of the many strengths of AHDB is that it gives us a perspective across all of agriculture: every industry has versions of the wider challenges I've noted.

In that spirit, as a Chair who has feet in various worlds, I'd like to close by sharing a source of inspiration which I'm really enjoying at the moment.

Richard Jefferies' Hodge and his Masters – vivid accounts of the characters and politics of English farming around 1870. I was amazed at how much it echoed 2020: finding good employees, facing cheap imports, the need for diversification, potato disease, the challenge of making the right business decisions. All is here, a real page-turner.

So, onwards. I have no doubt that our industry will face up to current challenges and thrive beyond them. With thanks to my fellow board members, Rob Clayton and everyone at AHDB, I wish all levy payers the very best for 2020 and beyond.

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