

Between the dreels.

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Summer
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Future Proofing

Returning to normal is a topic with resonance far beyond potato production. But here too we are crying out for some stability.

Whether it be the change in demand patterns due to the pandemic, post-Brexit trade policy or the wrangling following the levy ballot. All of it means that we as an industry can't simply repeat what has worked in the past.

Agrico is working hard to understand what the future of the potato industry in the UK looks like. We are taking steps to future proof our business and those of our customers.

In this edition of 'Between the Dreels' you can read about investment in new varieties. The global approach of Agrico is to produce varieties that can be grown sustainably. Using inputs smartly to produce better crops with a lower environmental impact. Resistance to blight is one example of this with 'Next Generation' varieties which marry consumer appeal with good agronomic performance.

You can also read about some of the steps we are taking to address the post-Brexit restrictions on seed potato imports.

As well as, an update from recent events in England and Scotland and a preview of forthcoming events.

Agrico recently issued our seed prices for the season. Adam Young and Alex Moore have already been busy dealing with early enquiries and sales. But there is still plenty of time to secure seed for next season.

Contact the Agrico team for any seed enquiry and we will do our best to help you.

Archie Gibson
Executive
Director



Website Refresh

Look out for an updated site at agrico.co.uk. We are currently revamping the site to improve the availability of variety info, agronomic guidance, news stories and research findings from the UK and international Agrico projects.

New Chip On The Block

Babylon looks set to become the successor to Agria for the frying market. Seed and ware growers are already step-by-step increasing production."

The seed grower

"It's in a field of its own this year, so we'll get a better idea of what it is, and what it isn't going to do. So far, the variety is looking promising. It has bred reasonably well; numbers were good and it got up to size really quickly. There weren't any issues with disease, we didn't see any blackleg for example, and it was relatively easy to kill off which, from a seed growers' perspective, is a big benefit."

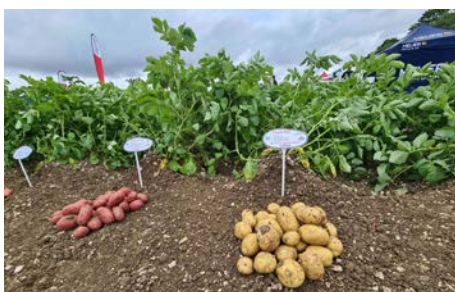
Peter Shields

The ware grower

Babylon yields slightly better than Agria and the plants look healthier. That's partly because it's a newer variety and hasn't been multiplied up so many times. It's got loads of vigour too."

"We put new varieties out to our more discerning chip shop fryers and ask them for constructive feedback. We need to know how well they fry across our portfolio of end-users which all treat our potatoes slightly differently."

Christopher Lee



12 varieties showcased at Wholecrop trials day

On 28th July, Agrico welcomed growers and processors to its stand at Wholecrop Marketing's annual trials day at Ellerker, Brough in East Yorkshire.

"We've supported this event since its inception," says Agrico Sales Manager Alex Moore. "And it's great to be here again; to be able to meet new and existing customers and demonstrate some of the varieties in our portfolio."

Now in its 11th year, the event started when the founders of Wholecrop Marketing wanted to help their growers' businesses succeed by offering them greater technical insights.

Agrico showcased 12 varieties at the event – a selection that are well-suited to the north of England and the borders both in terms of growing conditions and the market. "We like to show growers a mix of well-established and new varieties," said Alex. "Spectra, for example, has been a particular talking point today. As a high-yielding table white variety with its regular shape, smooth skin and tendency to produce a high percentage of bakers, it's a good fit for many of the visitors here, and is proving popular with M&S customers."



Jacky also attracted much attention. Despite the stony land at the site, the variety demonstrated its potential for good marketable yields. Both varieties are grown by Manor Fresh and Donna Benton, the company's potato agronomy manager, checked-in to talk to the team.

"For our customers, taste is just as important as quality. Even if a potato looks nice, it must meet the taste profile our customers are renowned for."



"We grow a reasonable quantity of Spectra; it is a nice round white variety that fits well in our packs.

"We're always looking for new varieties. It's one of the reasons I'm here today. Bringing new varieties through to market requires teamwork from all parties during the whole development process. With Jacky, for example, a variety to support Maris Peer, the team at Agrico regularly visit our trial plots at key crop stages and review the varieties with our Innovation Manager."

"The team at Agrico are extremely knowledgeable and it's always well-worth catching up with them at events like these."

Rebecca Blumfield (right), Variety Development Manager at Branston also headed to the event for a snapshot of the potato pipeline.

"We already have many of the varieties you can see here today in our trials," she explains. "And I'm here to see what the new varieties look like, to gather information that will inform our decision around what to trial next year."

"We're looking for varieties that offer consistent quality, taste good and store well. We supply large retailers and they always want to be the first to market with new varieties. Events like Wholecrop Marketing's annual trials day gives us those insights."

It hasn't been an easy season for many of the growers at the event. "On the whole crops are looking good now," says Rebecca. "But many growers were hit hard at planting. Cold conditions in April resulted in some crops taking up to six weeks to emerge with some growers holding back waiting for soils to warm getting nothing planted until June. From organic growers, we know it's been a high-pressure year for blight too."



Plenty of reasons to be positive despite short-term concerns

It's easy to dwell on all the challenges in the potato sector. But we think it's vital to show the positive steps we are taking to put potato production on a surer footing.

We are now starting to see the outcome of Agrico's **Next Generation** programme which is breeding blight resistant varieties with the look, flavour and other characteristics that consumers and processors want.

At the Wholecrop event **Alouette**, **Beyonce**, **Jacky**, **Twister** and **Twiner** were all on display which offer excellent foliar and tuber blight resistance.

They allow growers more flexibility when with fungicide programmes across their potato acreage and, in light of the growing sentiment for sustainable farming practices, the opportunity to reduce inputs. Many of these varieties have been in blight trials this season, look out for the results we'll publish later this year.

"Speaking to packers over the summer, sustainability is growing in importance for supermarkets"

At present, it is only a major factor for premium brands, but it's likely to become more commonplace over the next few years.

With their strong PCN Pallida tolerance and resistance, **Arsenal**, **Performer** and **Lugano**, can reduce populations in soils, helping growers improve land and/or reduce nematicide use.

Other varieties to keep an eye on include table red **Manitou**, which can outyield Desiree and continues to grow in popularity, all-rounder **Spectra** which is beginning to get interest and support from the supply chain while **Babylon** is shaping up to be a successor to Agria for the frying market.

The only cloud on the horizon is a



slight delay in variety development caused by Brexit. Previously we could bring in seed from the continent to sell direct to ware growers or multiply up with our seed growers. Now we have to do all the multiplication ourselves from the early stages of variety development. As a result, some of the promising varieties are a little behind timetable to reach commercial volumes. Longer-term it won't be such an issue as Agrico is increasing its capacity to develop and multiply varieties in the UK."

Alex Moore, UK Sales Manager

Appetite for face-to-face events undiminished

Potatoes in Practice went well. There was some understandable uncertainty about what the attendance would be but judging by the numbers it was on a par with previous years. There was a steady flow of people on the stand from 8:30 discussing the main developments in the potato industry.

Seed growers are generally quite buoyant as prices, yield and quality all look reasonable this season. For ware growers, 'variability' is the watchword.

There was a cold start to the season which has left some crops in fairly poor condition but others unscathed. Quality and tuber counts vary greatly within and between fields. All of this points towards fairly routine harvest without remarkable yields or prices.

Overall, Brexit, the pandemic and the levy vote continue to weigh heavily on the potato industry. Logistics for example is a problem for many sectors inside and outside agriculture. But I think we can be positive that after an unusual couple of seasons things should settle down in 2022.

Adam Young, Sales Manager

Speak to the Agrico team at...

Potato Variety Open Days 2021

Wednesday 8th September
10am – 4pm

Thursday 9th September
10am – 3pm

Hundreds Farm, Crowland,
PE6 0LG

What3Words:
thudding.archives.giggle

British Potato 2021

November 24th and 25th
Harrogate

www.bp2021.co.uk



Fighting blight: what does it take to bring a resistant variety to market?



Can we reduce the number of blight sprays?

In the Netherlands, Agrico is exploring how to exploit blight resistance. There have been three growing seasons of experimental work with these varieties in conventional conditions.

"We're proving conventional farmers, supported by decision-making tools, can save 3 – 7 blight sprays per crop. Where conditions are hotter and drier, then most sprays can be saved.

"With potentially resistance-breaking isolates tending to emerge later in the season, continuing with late-season fungicide applications help to protect and preserve the biology."

In the UK, Agrico is also working with organic farmers to test variety performance and blight resistance without any supporting crop protection programme.

"Our **Next Generation** varieties contain different 'new' R genes. It takes longer than the usual 11 years to bring to market because we first have to dilute the wild gene, before integrating it with the breeding programme."

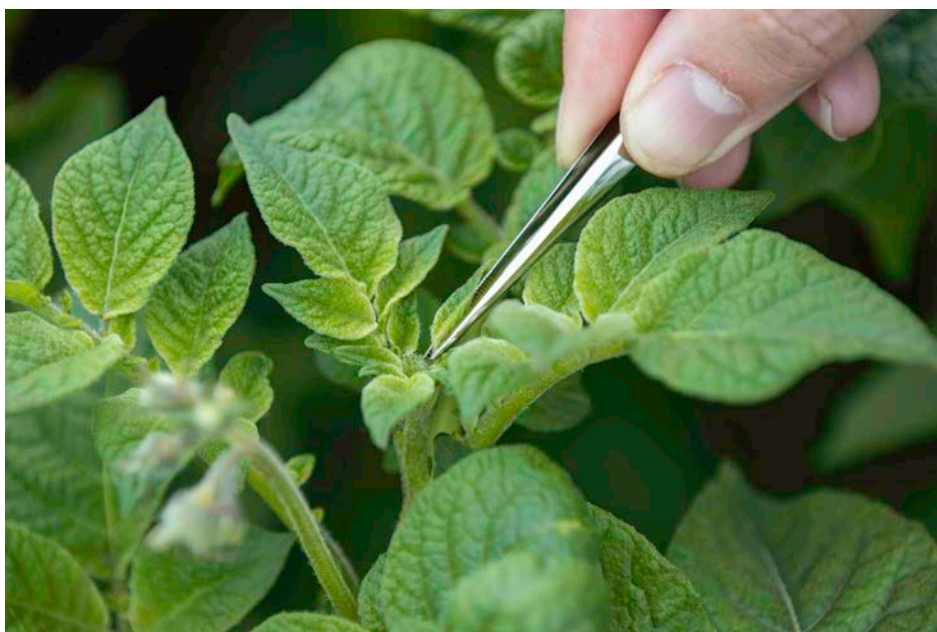
At the glasshouse stage, the Agrico Group has over **220,000** offspring clones in the next season. "These are all unique individuals that have inherited characteristics from their parents.

It takes a further nine consecutive years of field trials to find those that meet the demands of any market segments.

"On average, only **3–4 new varieties** will make it to market each year." Mr Allefs estimates that it costs about **€1 million** to get a variety to market.

"There is, of course, no guarantee that if you spend this money you will have a marketable variety at the end of the decade," he notes.

The work doesn't stop here. New varieties need to be multiplied for sale and heavily supported during the early years in the marketplace.



Bringing new potato varieties to the marketplace is a team effort. Seed breeders work closely with growers to develop desirable agronomic and quality traits. In parallel, researchers across the globe, including at Scotland's James Hutton Institute inform the breeders about the moving target that is blight and genetic markers of resistance.

Varietal resistance doesn't play as big a part in crop protection programmes as it really should. It's a form of protection that lasts; from the seed tubers right through to harvest and beyond.
Dr David Cooke, JHI

To improve varietal protection, Sjefke Allefs, global director of Agrico Research are delving into the genetics of potatoes.

"All the cultivated potatoes originate from Peru," explains Mr Allefs. "As the potato spread across the Andes, it met with the pathogen we now know as late blight, which originates from Mexico.

"This is where we predominantly find wild varieties with high levels of genetic resistance. It is the main source of genes for our breeding programmes though we also draw from primitive and old varieties."

Mr Allefs and his team use DNA markers to identify genes and the biological characteristics they invoke.


"My view is that, over time, we will be able to introduce varieties that, in principle, can still be attacked by the late blight fungus but the economic damage is considerably lower."

Today Agrico offers a portfolio of nine '**Next Generation**' varieties. All offer outstanding blight resistance.

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