

Teagasc Potato Newsletter

January 2021

SEED

With Brexit now complete, farmers should make themselves aware of the implications for Irish growers. Accompanying this newsletter is the DAFM Trader Notice issued on December 23rd which outlines the current situation with regards to potatoes both ware and seed but also machinery. In short ware is allowed to be imported but with strict phytosanitary conditions. We have already heard of cases where trucks have been stopped at ports because they haven't the necessary documentation. This will also be the case with potatoes

Seed on the other hand is not allowed to be imported under any circumstance from the UK at the moment. It remains to be seen if there is and deal done in the coming months to change this position.

One other detail that farmers should be aware of is that used farm machinery brought in the UK must also have a phytosanitary certificate before it is allowed into the country.

For the seed that has been delivered check each batch for defects or disorders. If there are any issues get back to your supplier immediately, be it native or imported seed, as there will be limited scope to replace this with home grown seed. Make sure to file the seed labels away carefully in case there are issues during the season.

Where you plan to apply a fungicide treatment for rhizoctonia (Black Scurf) do this as early as possible, the labels for Gavel, Rhino and Maxim advise to apply before dormancy break (see table 1 below).

Table 1; Liquid Seed dressings

Name	Gavel	Maxim	Rhino
A.I.	Imazalil	Fludioxonil	
Rate/t	0.1-0.15L	0.25L	0.2L
Timing	Before chitting		
B. Scurf		***	***
S. Scurf	***	**	

When handling seed, coming out of the cold store, make sure to warm up the seed before putting them across a platform to apply seed dressings or before transferring into sprouting trays. Remember cold tubers are more susceptible to damage including bruising and splitting.

SOIL TESTING

Fertiliser costs will be similar in 2021 to those in 2020, approximately €560/ha, and so they will be the second largest single input cost after seed. However the costs may vary significantly depending on the soil fertility.

Many growers now opt for speciality blends to give more balanced nutrition for their crops depending on the soil nutrient status, these tend to be field specific and can be quite expensive, so it is important to get the balance right.

It is also important to remember that no single compound will be optimum for each field. Choose your base fertiliser based on what is most suitable for each individual field. Table 2 below shows the P & K requirements for maincrop.

Table 2: P & K requirements

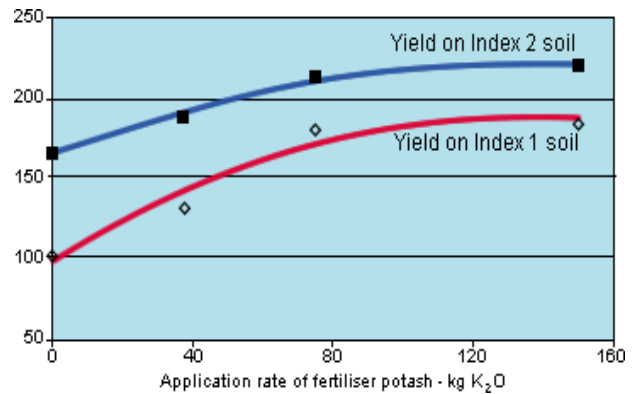
Soil index	Rate kg/ha (units/ac)	
	P	K
1	125 (100)	305 (244)
2	100 (80)	245 (196)
3	75 (60)	185 (148)
4	50 (40)	120 (96)

If we look at the difference in the cost of fertiliser requirements between growing the crop in an index 3 soil for P&K versus index 1 we see that the amount of compound (e.g. 10-8-20) needed increases from 937kgs/ha (7.5 Bags per acre) to 1560Kgs per ha (12.5 bags per acre). That equals an increase of 66% in compound requirements. If we take the price of the compound at approx. €410 per tonne this extra compound would cost an additional €255/ha (€102/ac) on the index 1 soil.

While P & K fertilisation rates are important research from the UK also suggests that crops grown in index 1 soil generally don't yield as well as those grown on higher soil indices, regardless of the amount of fertiliser applied. See figure 1.

For this reason growers should try to concentrate potato production on higher fertility soils. Where results show that fertility levels are low, try to increase the P&K levels in the years before planting potatoes. Organic manures, cover crops and incorporating straw all can be very useful in this situation.

Figure 1: Yield response to K



Source: PDA UK

PEST MONITORING

While testing the nutrient status of the soil growers should also look at the history of the fields if possible. There were quite a few reports of slug problems in potato crops in 2020, while there also seemed to be a lot of damage in winter cereal crops sown last autumn, so it appears that the numbers present in soil are high at the moment. Given that slug pellets will not guarantee total control of slugs, fields with known problems should be avoided.

In the case of grassland, again a background check should be carried out. Poorly managed grassland can often be infected with wireworm which can damage tubers and make crops unsaleable.

Since Mocap is no longer available, pesticides will struggle to control high populations of wireworms and therefore these fields may well be more suited to cereals for a couple of years before planting with potatoes.

Shay Phelan

Potato specialist

087-7985195

shay.phelan@teagasc.ie