



SEED

Good quality seed is the basis for good crops especially in potatoes. If you haven't started to source seed already start immediately. However firstly you have to ask the question what markets do I have? It is pointless growing crop, as we see at the moment, if the market is over supplied. Is it possible to get new markets that might reduce the risk for the farm? This should form the basis of the amount and variety of seed you get.

On receiving your seed carefully inspect each lot to make sure that they are free from rots. There have been a few reports towards the end of 2015 about problems with seed crops in the UK. Late blackleg infection was blamed for some of the problem given the late season. Also make sure that they are dry and uniform in size. Unfortunately all too often cases occur where seed is not of the necessary quality and problems arise later in the season. Make sure to keep all labels from each batch in a safe place in the office. If there is a problem later at least the seed can be traced.

Home saved seed should be kept completely separate from the certified crop and the quantities of the home saved seed must be recorded for royalty purposes.

If you intend to sprout the seed, check if the shed/tunnel is suitable with enough light and frost free so as to ensure even sprouting. Dark areas will only lead to uneven and weak sprouts (see fig. 1).

Fig 1.



Where you see trays that are not getting full light on all sides you should consider moving them outside to get full light (Fig.2) or install inflorescent tubes between rows to harden up the sprouts. As a general rule of thumb you will need 1 fluorescent tube per tonne of seed or 8 stacks of trays.

Fig 2.



Check the seed also for greenfly or any other aphids as they may be present on warm days in polytunnels. Temperatures are so mild that it is likely there will be aphids about.



You should also remove any rots if you see them and make note of the trays, if you intend refilling these trays after the first planting is done, then they should be thoroughly cleaned before new seed is filled, otherwise you may well be transferring infection from one batch of seed onto the next.

TESTING

If you intend to plant home saved seed it is important that you get them tested for viruses X and Y etc. NIAB in Cambridge provide a full service for testing seed and the contact details are as follows;

[Helen Appleyard](#)
[NIAB Trading Limited](#),
[Huntingdon Road](#),
[Cambridge CB3 0LE, UK](#)
[Tel: +44 \(0\)1223 342200](#)
[Fax: +44 \(0\)1223 277602](#)
[www.niab.com](#)

It will take at least 28 days for the samples to come back so get them away as soon as possible.

If the land is in lea then you should also get a PCN test done for the presence of eelworm. This test is provided by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute in Belfast, the contact details are;

[Nematology Section](#),
[APSBD, Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute](#),
[Newforge Lane](#),
[Belfast, BT9 5PX](#).
[Tel: +44 \(0\)28 90 255636](#).

FERTILISER

While fertilisers are falling in price they will still make up 25% of your input costs (approx. €550/ha) so accurate applications are essential. Get soil analysis carried out on all land intended for potatoes. Try to avoid land that is index 1 or low index 2 for P and K as this will add significantly to the cost. It will also probably have a lower yield potential.

DATE FOR THE DIARY

The National Potato Conference 2016 takes place again this year. [Tuesday Feb 23rd](#) is the date for the event which takes place in the [Red Cow Hotel, Naas Road, Dublin](#).

Among the presentations on the day, will be an update on the new potato promotional campaign.

The trade show will also be ongoing throughout the afternoon as usual. Registration starts at 9am.

Hope to see you there!

[Shay Phelan](#)
Potato Adviser
087-7985195
shay.phelan@teagasc.ie