



Euro-Potato

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British Potato Council report

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On the continent, grower confidence is firming for the trading season ahead. Current opinions are that the EU 15 potato harvest for 2005 will be considerably lower than in 2004 when production totalled almost 48 million tonnes. According to futures commentators in Holland, a crop nearer to the size of the drought affected year in 2003 appears likely, at around 41 mt. Some feel the figure could be even lower than that if concerns over the quality of the crop this season are considered. On the Amsterdam Futures market itself (*still recovering from shock news of it's closure and move to Hannover next year*) April '06 contracts are also continuing to firm with the closing price on 31st August at £119.51/t compared with just £45.26 on the same date last year for April '05 contracts.

This report looks at the factors influencing these attitudes in the main northern producing countries.

HOLLAND

As reported last week in Potato Weekly yield estimates for the major maincrop variety Bintje at mid August are already 25% lower than in 2004. Tuber size above 50 mm is also 20% lower than last year. Other varieties in Holland show a similar situation. Planted area of Ware potatoes is also estimated to be around 3-5% lower than in 2004. The combination of these two factors could indicate a Dutch crop of around 6.8 mt compared with 7.4 mt in 2004.

FRANCE

The 2005 potato harvest in France is also expected to be lower than the 7.2 mt in 2004. However, it should be remembered that the large crop last year was 12% higher than the previous 5 year average of 6.4 mt. Considering a possible 2% reduction in French planted area, and only moderate increases in bulking recently, a total crop of around 6.4 mt is predicted. This would represent over 10% less potatoes available for this season. In northern regions, where large processing areas are grown, yields in some crops are estimated to be 20% lower than in 2004. Nevertheless reports suggest that many crops have potential to catch up on last years levels as rain has now fallen and plants still look fresh.

BELGIUM

In parts of Belgium, particularly the South and West, potato crops have already received two periods of very heavy rain. The first was in June when more than 100 mm fell in the Flanders region, the second was early in August. Delayed growth and quality problems have resulted, particularly in Binje. However, latest yield estimates indicate the crop has made good progress during late August with a 5 t/ha increase in average yield from the last estimate made on 16th August. Bintje is now averaging 39 t/ha after 117 days growth compared with 40 t/ha last year after 115 days. The percentage of large tubers over 50 mm (on 35mm gauge) however remains low at 49% this season compared with 59% last season. There are large variations in crops with Bintje ranging from 17 t/ha up to 52 t/ha. As well as these expected yield reductions planted area for Ware potatoes is estimated to be 3% lower than in 2004. Quality issues are also predicted for the season ahead.

GERMANY

The 2005 German potato harvest is predicted at 11 mt compared with the large crop of 13 mt last year. Planted area for 2005 has also been published at 6.4% down on 2004 (fresh potatoes down 8.4% and processing down by 5.4%). Production could also be hit as a result of losses caused by the torrential rain and floods reported in mid August in the South.