Fight against Blight

ISSUE 5: BLIGHT ON THE BPC WEBSITE

Maps All the available maps are displayed so you are one click away from your area’s blight status.

Register for updates You can register postcode areas for which you would like notification of new incidents. Whenever a blight outbreak is confirmed in your nominated areas you will receive a text message on your mobile or an email (or both) prompting you to look on www.potato.org.uk/blight for details.

Expert comment Ruairidh Bain of SAC and Nick Bradshaw of ADAS are again providing weekly expert comment. Register for weekly bulletins by email.

Best practice The complete series of Fight against Blight Growers’ Advice sheets are accessible here.

More blight information Latest technical information highlighted as it becomes available, for example:
- UK Blight Forum report 2006
- Application technology report

Detailed information Every sample sent to the laboratory by BPC Blight Scouts is featured in a sortable table beneath each map, both regional and country-wide. All columns can be sorted, including Outbreak Size, Variety, Date reported, Source, Postcode Area, and Lab Result. Blight Scouts (and their clients) can check their own samples using the secure identification number in the first column. Scouts will also get a text message saying ‘negative’ or ‘positive’ for each of their samples as the information becomes available.

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May 2006
How does the system work?

BPC has recruited volunteer Blight Scouts who report any incidence of blight they find during their normal activities. They log the incident by sending a text message with just the first part of the postcode where the infection was found (e.g. PE12), and the system replies with a unique ID number. This postal district determines the position of a dot on the website maps, so it may not be close to where the outbreak occurred. The scout then posts a sample with its ID number to the laboratory for confirmation (using a BPC supplied kit) and includes the following background information:

- Size of infection - from single plant through to very severe infection,
- Variety of sample,
- Date sample was found,
- Source of infection – was it from a conventional/organic, outgrade pile, volunteers etc.,
- The scout also has the opportunity to add any other relevant comments.

This information is used in the data tables beneath each website map.

Who can be a blight scout?

Anybody can be a blight scout. Farmer, agronomist, adviser - anybody that regularly monitors potato crops during their daily work can register for a scout pack that provides the information and sampling kit to send suspected outbreaks for confirmation. The system is designed to be very straightforward and non-time consuming for scouts. For more information please contact Mark Prentice, details below.

Why use Blight Maps?

Combining a forecasting method with the blight maps will give a more comprehensive picture of risk in the local area. This will allow better product choice, better timing and better targeting of the blight sprays in the field.

- Current forecasting methods for blight use local weather information to give an assessment of the risk that blight will spread. They do not provide any information on whether the disease is present or absent.
- The only other way to find out about blight locally is through word of mouth, which often provides an incomplete picture.
- BPC blight maps are independent and free from commercialisation.
- Blight is becoming harder and more costly to control. More tools are needed to improve decision making.
- There is increasing pressure to reduce and justify pesticide inputs.
- Loss of tin removes the “fire engine” approach, resulting in a greater emphasis on prevention through better targeting of protectant fungicides.

How to use the maps

Maps and data tables are updated twice a day. The information provided by Blight Scouts during each interval appears as an orange dot. It then changes according to the legend below when the laboratory keys in the background information accompanying the sample and test result.

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European experiences

Many of our European countries use variations of blight maps as a decision support tool, including Ireland, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands as well as many Scandinavian and Eastern European countries (there are links to some of these on the website). The BPC have studied these to help formulate the system that is running in Great Britain. European experiences suggest that such a mapping service can help improve blight control by:

- Better targeting of the first fungicide through a better understanding of the local blight pressure,
- Possibly reduce fungicide use in low-pressure years,
- Giving more confidence in the decisions being made on spray programmes,
- Building a better understanding of the original outbreaks and movement of blight, so advice can be tailored,
- Providing samples that can be used for research to develop a better understanding of the biology of blight.

If you require more information on how to become a blight scout or how the service works, please contact:

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