

Report to the

POTATO COMMITTEE

**To the 89th Annual General Meeting of the
CANADIAN HORTICULTURAL COUNCIL
Westin Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario
March 11, 2011**

To the President and Members of the Canadian Horticultural Council

As is always the case, the past year has again been active for the Potato Committee. It was especially busy as we did not have a staff member dedicated to our sector for most of the year. I assure you no one was more pleased than I when we hired Mark Drouin as Vice President Potatoes. Mark was with AAFC prior to accepting the position with our industry, over the past year Mark worked closely with the Potato Committee Executive, this allowed him to step into the position with good knowledge of the issues facing our industry. Mark also works as General Manager of United Potato Growers of Canada. Agreement was reached to form a joint executive committee (PCE and United) which consists of 6 members, this joint executive is tasked with ensuring good communication between the two groups, the group also reviews the work plan as presented by Mark to ensure that the priorities are set and achieved. I have a high degree of confidence in Mark.

Is it time to change our name?

For as long as I have been involved with the committee we have been know as the Potato Committee or the Potato Committee Executive. The Potato Committee meets once a year at the CHC annual meeting and reports the work that has been done during the past year by the Potato Committee Executive. There are times where people with whom we deal either in government or with industry fail to understand that we are the voice of the Canadian Potato Industry. I feel that we should consider changing the name to reflect that responsibility of the committee and executive. A few suggestions are National Potato Committee or Canadian Potato Committee. The PCE will discuss this when they meet prior to the CHC annual meeting, I hope to bring a recommendation from the PCE to the Potato Committee on this issue.

IPM/Potato Sustainability

The IPM/Potato Sustainability survey is complete, we are currently waiting for the final version to be available as a web based format which will allow growers to fill out the survey online. It was good to be part of the group which developed the survey. This group consisted of representation from McDonald's, McCain Foods, Simplot, Lamb Weston, National Potato Council and the Potato Committee Executive. While I realize that growers are not looking for more paper work we must also realize that change is inevitable, we are better to be involved in the change than to have the change dictated to us.

Bio Security

Earlier this year, CFIA approached industry to gain agreement to establish a joint working group to develop a Bio Security Standard for potatoes. The official name of the group is the Potato Sector Biosecurity Advisory Group, (PSBAG). The committee is jointly chaired by Alain Boucher and I; Jarvis Mawhinney a former CFIA employee has been hired as a consultant/advisory (he is the one who gets to do the work) to assist the group in the development of the Standard. The group has developed a survey which will provide insight into present practices of industry. Translation is complete and we hope to complete the survey across the country within the next few months. A random cross section of the industry will be selected based on the total number of potato farms in the province. We have been assisted by a statistician to determine the number of farms in each province. Funding will be provided to allow contracts to be awarded in each province to ensure the survey is carried out. The PSBAG hopes to have the Bio Security Standard near completion by March 2012.

Plant Health Strategy

The PCN Task Force has shifted their focus and will start working on a Plant Health Strategy. AAFC and CFIA have indicated a willingness to use potatoes as the benchmark for establishing a Plant Health Strategy for all field crops. This will be a large undertaking; we are hoping that government will have funds to allow the working group to hire a project leader to assist the group. An application for funding through the AgriFlexibility program is currently under review. Work that has been done on Food Safety, IPM/Sustainability, Bio Security and Environmental Farm Plans will be advantageous and reduce the work load in establishing the Plant Health Strategy.

PCN Alberta farms

Fall of 2007 CFIA announced that two farms in Alberta were suspected of being positive for PCN. Today over 3 years later we continue to wait to see these farms declared free of PCN. CFIA has done massive amounts of testing in effort to comply with the PCN agreement between Canada and US. Testing from the 2010 crop is now complete and we can again report that no positives or suspect samples were found.

We also wait for government to come to the table to settle the loss of business that these two farms have suffered. While we pride ourselves in a government that can react to issues such as PCN quickly and we realize that this provides protection to our industry, we need to push to get government to react equally as quickly to resolve issues when actions cannot be substantiated. Being declared suspect for PCN has ruined the business which these farms established, I fail to understand why our government will accept their responsibility to cover the cost of reestablishing financial viability to the level that they were prior to being declared suspect.

Working Groups of the PCE Quality Assurance

The QA manual has been finalized and is currently available; this means that the main work of this working group is complete. I feel it is important for the group to continue as the manual should be reviewed after a year of use to identify whether there are areas that should be changed. This working group has been chaired by Gary Linkletter.

Research

The research working group is chaired by Tracy Shinnars-Carnelley. The group worked hard to get the research priorities which were included with the rest of the Agri-Science Cluster for Horticulture application. The group had included members from AAFC research in an effort to ensure that our priorities were in harmony. Sadly when the application was reviewed by

government they decided to award only 10 funding for projects to be conducted by non-AAFC researchers. The result is that we cannot involve AAFC researchers in any of the work that we were looking to do. We have tried to convince government to review their position but have not been successful to date.

Export Development

The Export Development working group is chaired by Mary Kay Sonier. At this point the group consists of members from Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick as these provinces have been willing to provide funds to match the federal government funding through the AgriMarketing program. The group has reestablished Potatoes Canada and is continuing to find new off shore market opportunities.

BRR

Tracy Shinnars-Carnelley continues to chair the BRR working group. The next step for this group is to put together a manual of best management practices for BRR. In order to achieve this, the group will need some financial assistance. We have been looking for a partner for this project.

Late Blight

This working group which was established in 2010 is chaired by Khalil Mughrabi. The committee has been very active but will need some funds in order to continue with the work of identifying strains of late blight. As we know that late blight can mutate the group feels that it is extremely important that we continue to identify the strain as we find late blight in order to know when new mutations are established. Any new mutations would need to be checked to see if they had resistance to the pesticides currently used.

Stuart Cairns Committee

The Stuart Cairns Committee continues to fund research with the goal of providing high quality Canadian produced potatoes to the Canadian Potato Chip plants 12 months of the year. This committee is meeting in late February to review reports from last year and to look at awarding funding for the current year. This committee consists of equal representation from the Potato Committee and the Snack Food Association.

Respectfully submitted,



Keith G. Kuhl
Chair, Potato Committee
March 11, 2011