

Less hectares and late start for 2021 crop.



Lower total potato area in EU-04

As plantings of the 2021 crop are finishing, it seems very probable that total potato area within the NEPG zone (EU-04) will be reduced by 3 to 5 %. This is an absolutely historical event (last time area went down was 2014), because area has usually gone up year after year for the last 2 decades...! And during that time, processors are still planning to expand current factories or building new ones...

The repeated advices made by NEPG since last summer to lower planted area, and the difficult situation on the free buy market since the 2020 harvest, have produced some effect.

Cold and dry weather since mid-April

Even if winter 2020-2021 was usually wetter than the last 3 or 4 winters, the weather has been colder and dryer since mid-April. Earlies were planted between end of February and April. Some plantings of maincrop happened end of March beginning of April in some regions, but real work started 3rd week of April. Main crop plantings have gone very swiftly and in good but cold conditions.

Frost protection by irrigation was largely used in the early producing regions of Western Germany, whereas in Belgium and Germany earlies kept quite under snowfall around April 6! Earlies have currently around 2 weeks delay due to the cold weather. And the mostly dry weather could also have an impact if it stays so another couple of weeks.

End of 1st week of May, maincrop planting were estimated above 95%. The cold weather with some frosts at night since the 3rd week of April has slowed down any kind of quick emergence.

Good undertone for the old crop market

The free market is in a bullish mood, as processors expect some kind of boom or at least an increase in demand in the coming weeks and months. On the NEPG market, but also for shipment to other European countries and for export outside the Union. Growers are confident as the early crops will be later, while the main crops in the ground will come out later and the cold weather since the beginning of April has helped keep most stocks in good shape (not as much sprouting as feared at the end of the winter). Free buy volumes in stock are also lower than in recent years.

Future perspectives

Growers are aware that their potato business is fragile and uncertain. On the one hand, production costs have gone up during the last 2 seasons, yields have somewhat stagnated for the last 4 years, storing potatoes is more expensive and difficult. On the other hand, potato producers and the potato sector as a whole have often been singled out when water pollution, erosion and mud runoffs, and a lot of spraying are observed. Growers have to be aware of this, show that they are making a lot of efforts and communicate better. They also expect research to quickly provide them with varieties and techniques that are better adapted to environmental constraints (blight, climate change) and societal expectations.

The following organizations are active members of the NEPG (by alphabetical order): ABS (B), FIWAP (B), FWA (B), PCA (B), REKA (D), UNPT (F) and VTA (NL). NEPG (North Western European Potato Growers Group) – 10 May 2021