Growing potatoes is never a smooth ride!

February 05, 2024

In season 2023, potato growers were confronted with difficult weather conditions, a high disease pressure and rising costs. NEPG estimates that there are around 11.000 ha of potatoes which are written off and a minimum of 650.000 t lost (in fields or after harvesting). Due to a lower supply of seed potatoes, the start of the new growing season 2024 already has its challenges.

Average production in 2023, with differences between countries

The global harvest was 22,7 million tonnes, 5,1 % up vs 2022 and nearly equal to the 5 years average. These figures include the estimated in field losses in the NEPG countries. Potatoes were produced on a total area of 519.583 ha, 2,0 % up from 2022. Average stored yields in the NEPG zone were of 43,7 t/ha, 1,4 % higher than 2022.

Unlike in the rest of the NEPG zone, yields, hectarage and thus global production in the Netherlands were lower in 2023 compared to 2022. In Belgium, in spite of the dramatic losses endured by many farmers, global production is up by 18 % thanks to a 7,9 % area increase and overall better yields per ha.

POTATOES (Excl. Seed and Starch)									
26 January 2024									
year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	actual vs l.y.	5y-avge	2023 vs 5y-avge %
Countries NEPG									
Production (x 000 t) 5y avge	21.490	21.654	21.493	22.094	22.679	22.122			
Annual Variation	(17,7%)	12,8%	4,0%	(2,6%)	(5,8%)	5,1%			
Total crop	**20.043**	**22.603**	**23.501**	**22.901**	**21.562**	**22.663**	5,1%	22.122	2,4%
BE - Belgium	3.475	4.406	4.335	4.429	3.842	4.542	18,2%	4.097	10,9%
DE - Germany	7.319	7.998	8.555	8.329	7.995	8.162	2,1%	8.039	1,5%
FR - France	5.956	6.491	6.915	6.895	6.045	6.826	12,9%	6.460	5,7%
NL - Netherlands	3.294	3.708	3.696	3.248	3.680	3.133	(14,9%)	3.525	(11,1%)
Hectareage 5y avge	447.357	461.253	475.755	494.068	502.886	508.117			
Annual Variation	2,5%	4,1%	1,3%	(4,6%)	2,3%	2,0%			
Total	**495.338**	**515.541**	**522.275**	**498.010**	**509.423**	**519.583**	2,0%	508.117	2,3%
BE - Belgium	94.428	97.921	96.985	89.649	89.550	96.639	7,9%	93.707	3,1%
DE - Germany	178.500	186.000	189.700	183.060	189.000	189.810	0,4%	185.252	2,5%
FR - France	145.260	152.720	158.590	153.913	154.202	157.650	2,2%	152.937	3,1%
NL - Netherlands	77.150	78.900	77.000	71.388	76.671	75.484	(1,5%)	76.222	(1,0%)
Yield (t/ha) 5y avge	48,0	47,1	45,3	44,7	45,1	43,7			
Annual Variation	(19,7%)	8,4%	2,6%	2,2%	(6,3%)	1,4%			
Total	**40,5**	**43,8**	**45,0**	**46,0**	**43,1**	**43,7**	1,4%	**43,7**	0,0%
BE - Belgium	36,8	45,0	44,7	49,4	42,9	47,0	9,6%	43,8	7,4%
DE - Germany	41,0	43,0	45,1	45,5	42,3	43,0	1,7%	43,4	(0,9%)
FR - France	41,0	42,5	43,6	44,8	39,2	43,3	10,5%	42,2	2,6%
NL - Netherlands	42,7	47,0	48,0	45,5	48,0	41,5	(13,5%)	46,2	(10,3%)

Higher production costs, ever higher risks

Many growers are realising that growing potatoes is not only a costly business but also a risky one. With this in mind the question rises, how much area should be planted under these market conditions? Better contract conditions do not compensate higher production costs and bigger risks. On top of that, many fields have been damaged and compacted due to an extreme wet autumn.

Not enough certified seed and less free buy potatoes

The availability of seed potatoes is also worrisome, it is uncertain what volume will be available for the most popular varieties. It is clear that they will be expensive despite concerns about seed quality (when chitted). It is likely that seed traders will choose their customers carefully. Meaning that the availability of seed will be linked to contracts. There will be much more chitted seed, particularly in medium sizes (45-55 mm) which is uncommon.

The consequences of more chitted seed on emergence, number of stems per ha and overall production could be a problem for potential yield. Less seed and seed linked to a contract, also means there will be less free buy potatoes.

On the other hand, the processing industry still has a big appetite for an increasing production. It will be challenging to contract sufficient acreage to sustain the need for potatoes. It is clear for growers that more risk premium will be needed than before.