

Never had potato growers such a difficult planting season behind their back. Never has a future harvest seen so many uncertainties!



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Very late and difficult planting conditions and emergence problems on a large scale are cause of concerns in some of the main production regions. The context for the coming season will continue to be guided by the increase in processing capacity in Europe, and by a supply/demand ratio favorable to producers. But given the conditions of the current campaign, the growing risks affecting production, and market trends (competitiveness and consumption), this in no way guarantees a sustainable future for the sector. Many questions remain...

Planting season and upcoming problems

Throughout the NEPG zone, potato hectareage will increase in 2024. Few official figures are available yet but the increase could be up by 4 to 6 %. Planting calendar lasted between 8 to 10 weeks this spring, with the very last plantings still underway last week! Current fields vary between full flowering and end of tuberization (with tubers as big as geese egg's) to just planted!

Emergence problems are very common with between a few percent to more than 80 % not sprouting due mainly to rotting tubers, especially in Belgium and The Netherlands. The use of cut seed, delays in plantings, multiple desprouting, difficult planting conditions and lots of rainfall has rendered the whole planting and emergence season very complicated. Written off fields due to heavy rainfall and flooding are common, mostly in the Benelux and parts of Germany (Bavaria...).

There are more questions than answers concerning the future quantity and quality of the harvest. Will late planted varieties, some of which are no real processing ones, have big enough sizes and high enough under water weights?

Seed problems are not yet solved! Even though seed production is on the increase in France, seed production area in the Netherlands is stable. In addition, hundreds of ha of seed have been heavily damaged due to flooding and even written off in different parts of Holland. There is no clear indication yet on how tuberization and tuber count is and will be.

Processing demand and sales of processed products

Processing demand throughout the NEPG zone and higher processing capacity – mainly in France, secondarily in the other countries - is still on the increase. But sales of frozen chips and other processed products have been stabilizing or going down lately. There is more competition in the market, not only with the North Americans, but increasingly with countries as China, India, Turkey or Argentina. Growers must be aware of these developments whilst planning future expansion or investments.

Current and future risks and uncertainties

Risks potato farmers are taking have never been so high. The combination of expanding problems linked to climate change, this season's high blight pressure combined with resistance of some new Phytophthora strains, less fungicide availability and the current use of chipping and crisping varieties which are susceptible to blight and need a lot of spraying, is rendering potato cultivation evermore risky. Growers have to produce what they reasonably and sustainably can, taking into account increasing disruptive weather patterns and water availability.