

Spud storage must be fit for purpose

* Congratulations to everyone involved in the 50th birthday celebrations of the Sutton Bridge Crop Storage Research – a great event.

Trade, agronomists and end users were present in abundance; sadly the same cannot be said of growers.

While the future of CIPC was uppermost in everyone's minds, the problems being experienced with it highlight another daunting issue: far too much of the UK's potato storage capacity is in dire need of refurbishment or replacement.

The Potato Council's CIPC Stewardship Group has spent six years grafting hard to ensure its retention, but all its efforts could be wasted if producers do not

respond.

At the birthday event, Potato Council director Dr Rob Clayton borrowed the phrase "islands of excellence in a sea of mediocrity" to describe Britain's potato stores.

And the sad fact for growers who have installed "islands of excellence" is that the fate of CIPC will be decided by those whose potatoes are stored in the "sea of mediocrity".

I have heard far too many of these latter producers say they will improve stores only when they are forced to do it. But if your store's air distribution does not distribute CIPC efficiently then it is not working for anything else either.

Making improvements will help cut energy bills, reduce in-store problems such as condensation and shrinkage and make your crop more marketable. Oh yes – it will also cut your CIPC usage.

If we continue to have residue breaches above the UK's maximum level, we could lose the use of CIPC while continental producers retain it.

Alternatives to CIPC are rare and more expensive, so that could create a price differential that sucks in imports.

Yet these producers resist making improvements such as renewing fans, installing new suction walls or fitting inverters to fans, which cost little compared with the £100,000s spent on new tractors, graders, destoners, harvesters and sprayers.

Processors, packers and supermarkets could help by rewarding growers supplying potatoes from efficient stores, and stop buying potatoes supplied from stores that are not fully fit for purpose. But the onus is on growers themselves.

Ray Andrews

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