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Sprouted tubers

Draft position paper

This document was submitted by the delegation of the United Kingdom for discussion by the Specialized Section.

1. Seed potato tubers which have sprouted present a potential problem for the certifying authority. Sprouts can be damaged during transport, handling and planting, with the potential for uneven emergence. Excessive sprouting can result in the tubers being commercially unacceptable.
2. De-sprouting tubers (running the potatoes over a grading line to knock sprouts off the tubers) can also be detrimental to tuber quality, as this process can lead to the spread of pathogens symptomlessly.
3. Pre-sprouting (or chitting) seed potatoes can be used to promote dormancy breaking and to manage early emergence in crops. Where pre-sprouting is well managed, sprouts will be short with well-formed robust growth points capable of withstanding the handling process involved in mechanical planting.
4. Seed pre-sprouting carries a certain risk, which should ideally be borne by the seed user rather than the seed producer (i.e. post certification). In practice, pre-sprouting may be conducted by the seed producer who may have the facilities and expertise to achieve the desired tuber growth stage on behalf of the customer, which is likely to take place before certification (tuber inspection).
5. Under certain circumstances, sprouted tubers may be acceptable to the Designated Authority at tuber inspection. Regulation of this aspect of tuber quality with a single prescriptive tolerance under the Standard would be inappropriate given the dynamic nature of sprouting during the storage season and in the immediate period prior to planting.

6. It is recommended that the Designated Authority regulate the marketing of sprouted tubers at the point of inspection to reasonably ensure that sprouts be sufficiently robust to withstand mechanical planting. This should be done taking into account the time of inspection relative to the time of planting and the likely period and conditions of shipping and storage prior to planting.

7. Ultimately the seller bears the risk of excessive sprouting which may take place after official inspection of tubers.
