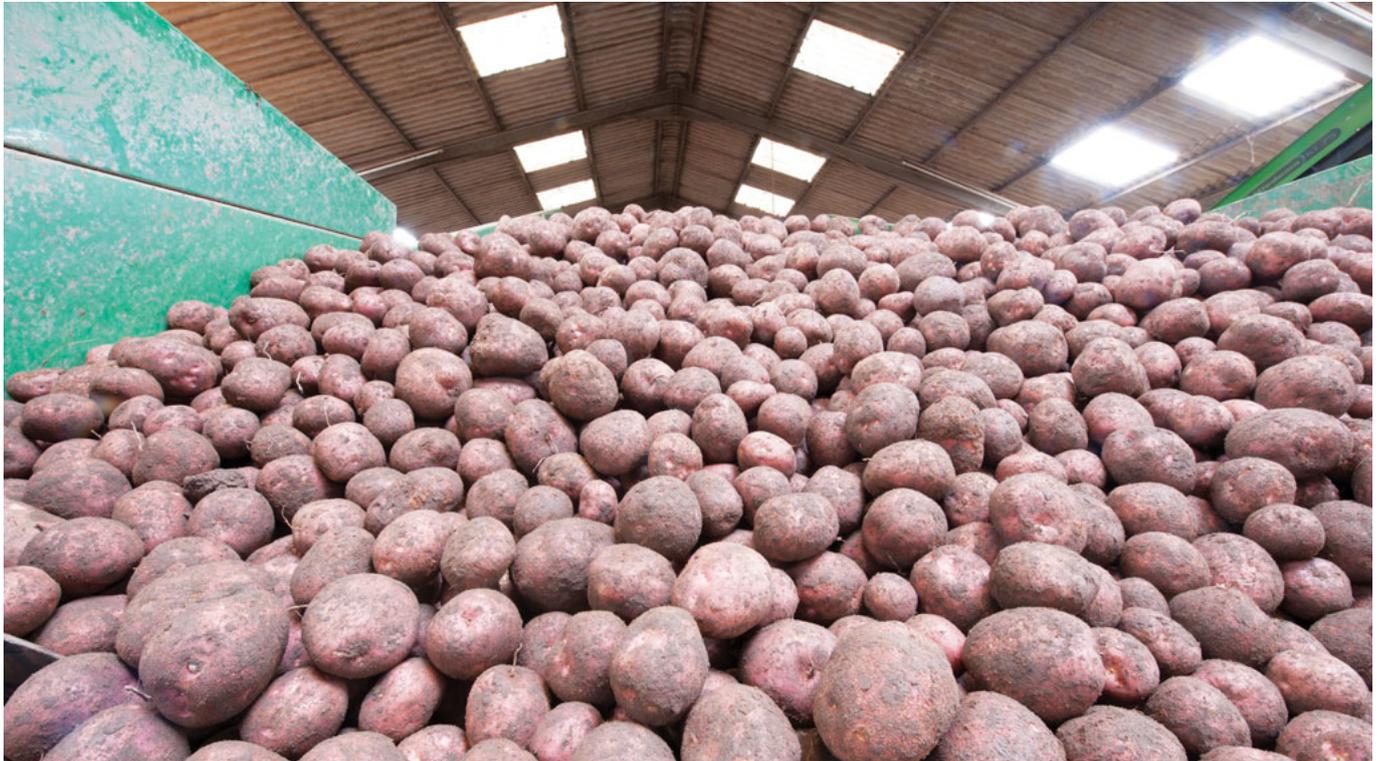


## When does the management of a potato crop actually begin?

Potatoes

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### "Ask the Industry"

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I often field calls about situations where poor seed handling by a commercial grower has led to diseased or poor quality seed being planted and the outcome being poor yields. So, in this month's column I am going to discuss when management of a potato crop actually begins.

### It starts with an important discussion

Management of a grower's potato crop begins with the contracting and purchasing of good quality seed – that is both cosmetically sound and of the physiological age. The purchase of good quality seed is a critical factor in producing a quality potato crop and is one of the most significant investments a grower makes each year in the production of this crop.

It is important that commercial growers and seed growers have good, open discussions with each other throughout the season around the progress of the seed crop and that each party understands "what they want the seed to do" in the commercial phase.

The communication should be clear and understood by both parties. As a commercial grower you should clearly specify your requirements as early as possible to ensure that you give your seed growers every opportunity to produce a seed crop that meets these requirements. These may include:

- The size range of seed potatoes you require, this will depend on whether or not you intend to plant whole or cut seed;
- The level of disease/virus that may be present in/on the seed, as this will impact on what management strategies you will adopt in the commercial growing phase of the crop; and
- Any other factors that may influence your management plans when growing the commercial crop.

Also ensure that specific requirements are understood and accepted prior to committing to a purchase.

## **First steps first**

In my experience, quite a few commercial growers do not actively start managing their crops until they receive their potato seed and begin planting it, yet it is the steps prior to planting that can have the greatest impact on the final yield results achieved. Once quality seed has been purchased and delivered, growers then need to focus their attention to the next step, storage and handling.

## **Handling & storage**

Proper seed handling and storage by growers prior to planting is extremely important.

To ensure a desirable yield out of the potato crop growers need to ensure they have correct seed storage and handling practices in place. All too often I witness potato seed stored in poorly-maintained, dusty or poorly ventilated sheds with fluctuating temperatures. Storing potato seed in these conditions can cause the seed to be infected with diseases such as silver scurf, or lead to the physiological aging of seed. Other factors, such as grading the seed using poorly-maintained and dirty equipment can also lead to infecting potato seed.

## **Hygiene**

As I've pointed out above, good shed hygiene practices as well as the use of well-maintained and clean handling equipment is absolutely critical when storing and handling potato seed.

So ultimately, this is a timely reminder to ensure growers pay attention to detail when handling and storing seed to maximise the returns from a good quality and high yielding potato crop.