

Extra Care Necessary In Handling Aucklander Short Top Potatoes

WITH the grading of certified seed potatoes now in full swing, the time is opportune to bring to the notice of growers the danger likely to arise from rough handling of tubers. It is well known that the Aucklander Short Top potato, with its delicate skin and soft flesh, is very susceptible to damage. It may not, however, be so widely known that any slight damage sustained by this tuber very quickly turns to dry rot.

The fact that this disease can occur only through injury is quite definite.

The disease is caused by wound parasites, and a point of entry to a tuber must be effected by an outside agency before infection can take place. Infection proceeds from spores present in the soil, and these may adhere to the tubers, human hands or any gear used in handling the potatoes. In many cases the disease spreads inwards at a greater rate than it does to the outside tissues, and the smallest abrasion, scarcely discernible, may overlie a large decayed inner cavity.



The after-harvest period is most important from the dry rot point of view, and damage causing the disease can occur in various ways. Three of the most likely are:

- (1) During digging, either by piercing with the fork or slicing with the shoe of the digger.
- (2) When passing through certain types of grading machines.
- (3) By rough handling of the sacks.

In the case of certified seed the first two causes can be controlled. In the third instance, however, control can be obtained only up to the time of tagging, and it is with this cause we are chiefly concerned.

At planting time in 1939 many complaints regarding damaged seed were received by the Department. In view of the high standard demanded at tuber inspection (a maximum of 4 per cent. damaged tubers) it was realised from a purely "certification" point of view that these complaints could not be substantiated, as much of the damage must have occurred after the seed had been tagged.

During a routine inspection last season a man was noticed dumping sacks of potatoes to the ground from a tier one sack in height. One of these sacks was opened at the end which contacted the ground, and the tubers were found to be damaged, as is shown in the accompanying photograph. It will be observed that the damage to the tubers, all in the nature of cracking, is in some instances almost unnoticeable, and it is in this that the danger of this damage being overlooked at planting time lies. Although it may be considered that the almost invisible cracks are of no consequence, they are wide enough to permit entry of dry rot spores, which will lessen the viability of the seed.

It is realised that there are occasions when damage to tubers cannot be avoided, but in view of the trouble which may arise, however slight the damage may be, it will be seen that the utmost care must be exercised in handling this variety of potato.

—A. GRANT, *Fields Instructor, Timaru.*

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