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11 February 2021

George Eustice

Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Defra

Area 3A

Noble House

17 Smith Square

London SWIP 4DF

Dear Secretary of State

**Export of UK Seed Potatoes to EU Member States**

I am writing, on behalf of the Pre Basic Growers Association, an Association of more than 40 high grade seed potato producers, to express our disappointment and concern at the recent decision to prohibit the export of seed potatoes from the United Kingdom to EU member states. In recent years annual seed potato exports to the EU from the UK have been up to 30,000 tonnes, with a value up to £13 million. These sales represent a very significant proportion of annual income for many seed growers and for some they represent by far the greater proportion of their business.

 Such losses cannot be borne without serious consequences for their businesses. The sustainability of some businesses will be threatened if the EU seed market is lost. Seed exports do not simply represent one season’s production. Producing seed for any export market requires a production programme to be developed over several years and the sudden loss of the EU market will mean several years’ lost production for some businesses.

Export markets in the EU have been built up over many years. Markets lost now will be very difficult to retrieve and may be lost for all time. And it is a misconception to think that seed intended for the EU can be easily diverted to other markets. Seed potatoes are produced for specific markets which have particular requirements in respect of variety and quality. A major market lost represents a very serious loss of income for many growers.

For this reason our Association asks Defra to engage with the EU to establish reciprocal trade in seed potatoes or, if that cannot be achieved, to prohibit, from 1 July, the import of seed potatoes from the EU until a reciprocal trading agreement can be achieved. The Association believes that any shortfall in seed that results from a prohibition on EU imports can be offset by UK seed production. Time is of the essence and with planting dates just 6 weeks away growers need to know now what the future market requirements will be.

Yours sincerely,

W J Rennie, Secretary, Pre Basic Growers Association