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By Fred Searle

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Potato shortage 'forcing UK grocers to evolve'



Impact of reduced plantings will be balanced against falling demand and relaxed specifications at several retailers, says data analyst

The anticipated potato shortage may not be as harmful as expected since it coincides with falling demand and a more flexible approach from retailers, a leading data analyst has said.

According to GlobalData, the move by several retailers to relax their specifications will help suppliers cope with a fall in production, although potato availability at supermarkets is still set to decline in late October 2018 as the main crop is picked mid-September.

The AHDB anticipates that the total area dedicated to potato planting in the UK will fall by around three per cent on 2017 – the third lowest area on record – following nightmare growing conditions this year.

In anticipation, McCain Foods, which makes a range of potato products, has announced plans to **increase prices by 20 per cent** in September. Other suppliers are expected to follow suit and introduce price rises of their own.

With consumers increasingly aware of the levels of farm-grown vegetables being discarded based on appearance – estimated at around 30 per cent – most of the UK's major retailers have agreed to address the supply challenge by relaxing their presentation standards.

Tesco is now less strict about 'dry scab' in potatoes, Morrisons is promoting its 'Wonky' range of fruit and vegetables, and Aldi has stated it will be flexible on crop-damage specifications.

Thomas Brereton, retail analyst at GlobalData, said: "The move towards selling less-than-perfect vegetables will gain traction with shoppers concerned about food waste and the environment, so retailers won't be too upset with relaxing regulations."

The demand side of the potato market is also evolving with potato sales in the UK reported to have fallen in recent years. According to The Grocer magazine potato sales have fallen by 5.4 per cent in

the last four years, while sales of rice and noodles have risen by 30 per cent.

"While potato production is falling, so is the British appetite for them," Brereton said. "In the eyes of many, potatoes are overly starchy and take time to work into a meal, which limits their appeal to younger shoppers. This has coincided with the rising popularity of interchangeable products such as brown rice.

"Wetter weather in late August and early September could help to steady the ship for potato producers. But with the UK food market facing the uncertainty of Brexit, doubt cast on the supply of such a home-grown staple may lead to further adjustments from retailers."

<http://www.fruitnet.com/americafruit/article/1474/parts-of-san-diego-quarantined-as-psyllid-count-mounts>

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