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By Michael Barker

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Covid drives down potato plantings

Area of potatoes planted in Britain falls to third lowest on record due to reduced demand in foodservice and catering markets



Britain has recorded its third-lowest potato plantings on record at 117,470ha, according to revised AHDB estimates.

The driving force behind the reduction has been a scaling-back of potatoes planted for the processing market, which after four consecutive years of growth has now dropped below the planted area of 2016.

An estimated 34,800ha was planted with the intention of reaching processing markets, representing a drop of 7.1 per cent year on year, or 3.6 per cent versus the five-year average. Processors have been hit badly by the coronavirus outbreak, as lockdown saw mass closures of restaurants, fast food outlets, schools and other venues.

The largest area was made

up of potatoes planted to be pre-packed for supermarkets, at an estimated 44,320ha. This is a rise of 1.6 per cent compared to 2019. It comes amid strong retail performance for fresh potatoes in supermarkets at the time of planting, with the volume of potatoes sold at supermarkets in the 12 months to 9 August up 8.4 per cent against last year [Kantar].

Alice Bailey, senior analyst for potatoes at AHDB, said: "This estimate is based on receiving 90 per cent of growers' planting returns. Our earlier estimates showed a smaller decline in planted area and it was thought that the timing of the pandemic, arriving as planting was kicking off in earnest in March, had not allowed growers enough time to adjust their plans.

"Since the estimate based on 80 per cent of growers, some larger growers have submitted their planted areas showing they have dropped their area more significantly than many of the earlier submissions. This has caused a larger drop than usual and highlights that, with 10 per cent of submissions still outstanding, we could see some further changes to these estimates."

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