

Potato Day

March 2011 Event

Shortcomings:

1. Publicity needs to start by Christmas otherwise people may already have ordered their seed.
2. Insufficient preparation, information, organisation.
3. No facilities for people to advance order for subsequent collection if they were unable to attend.
4. Insufficient first earlies and some other popular varieties.
5. Its date, 6th March, was probably about 2 or 3 weeks later than ideal for planting in greenhouses but fine for planting outdoors.

These were near inevitable given the absurd timescale - I didn't decide to run it until late January so only had 6 weeks to make it happen - and my failure to organise things so that other people could join in and help.

Positives:

1. Good attendance, 200+ people.
2. Good publicity, especially thanks to the Ross-shire Journal.
3. Positive feedback and comments from many who attended.
4. Sold about 75% on the day, subsequently sold or donated about a further 15%, so quantities were close to optimal.
5. Made a profit of about 10% on total costs of about £450.
6. The duration of 3 hours was just about right for the number of people who attended.

The general consensus is that it was good to do it, largely successful, and that we should run another in early spring 2012. It will be very easy to improve on the 2011 event provided we start serious planning before Xmas and have a small team of people responsible for aspects of the event. I think that given good and timely publicity an attendance of 500+ is very probable, it may be wise to plan for about 600 attendees - which will bring its own set of logistical challenges.

2012 Event Suggestions

Product: Deciding what varieties - how many, organic / not, how much of each, seeking requests via website etc. Where to source, when to order, where to store (both prior to event and surplus after event for subsequent sale eg at community markets). Involvement of local seed potato growers. Pricing, costing, ensuring a profit.

Event Planning: Date (probably mid to late February), venue, duration, refreshments, parking. Somewhere with more parking capacity than Findon Hall would be wise; a 5 or 6 hour duration

may be appropriate if we expect 500+ attendees (may need to have two 'releases' of seed potatoes so those arriving later have a decent choice); we might try to have some lunchtime entertainments, talk, film or whatever. In 2011 the catering was done by Antje Kremer to provide sponsorship, if TBI did the refreshments we might add several £ hundred to the revenue.

Publicity: Initial notification of event for Christmas press etc. Firm event information for mid-late January, final splurge 1 to 2 weeks prior with reminders a few days prior. Perhaps we could have a semi regular spot in the press saying how the event planning is progressing. Posters at all Black Isle noticeboards by Christmas, details on website from September, Entries in all online potato day listings, Transition websites, relevant local what's on guides.

Event mechanics: Display of product; information leaflets; bags, pens; taking money; managing people and vehicles; catering.

Information: All I provided in 2011 was a limited number (about 50) of a 4 page summary briefly describing each variety. It would be good to have a 1 page laminated sheet for each variety as part of its display / labelling, plus a descriptive list like 2011 and a suggestions list for various attributes (eelworm resistance, blight resistance, best for roasting, salad etc) as a handout. These could be made available on the website in advance so people could read and print them. We should start a discussion at the TBI forum for people to contribute their own recommendations, observations and suggestions.

TBI website & forum: These will be an important means of informing people, soliciting their comments and involvement. We should start soon by asking for comments on varieties that people have grown and eaten this year, and by beginning to discuss what varieties we should have at the 2012 potato day. Hopefully it will encourage greater use of the site and forum.

Approximate 2011 financials and initial suggested estimates for 2012

Item	2011	2012
Venue hire	50	50
Seed potatoes	350	700
Printed material	10	100
Casual labour	30	0
Publicity	0	100
Bags, pens	15	50
Total costs	455	1000
Sales at potato day	430	1000
Sales outwith potato day	75	150
Entrance fee (see below)	0	? 200
Refreshments	0	?
Total revenue	505	1350

Some comments re financials:

Due to lateness of 2011 event and lack of publicity until 2 weeks prior many people had already

bought their seed potatoes so either did not attend or only bought relatively small amounts. I estimate the average number bought per person was around 20 tubers, more advance publicity should raise the average quantity significantly. A process for people who can't attend to order and subsequently collect their desired potatoes could be worthwhile, and we should add a handling charge for this (perhaps £1 per 50 potatoes or part thereof).

I've used a conservative estimate of 400 adult attendees at the event each buying 25 potatoes at 10p in the 2012 estimates (£1000). I guess a more probable minimum is 500 each buying 25 (£1250), and it could easily exceed that.

Being unsure of likely demand I only bought a limited number of varieties in bulk (25kg) and bought smaller amounts of other varieties (2 to 6kg) from retail seed merchants to increase the selection. 25kg bags cost around £15, the smaller quantities cost up to £2 per kg - well over double the bulk cost. Consequently we adopted a dual pricing: 10p for bulk potatoes, 20p for the more expensive ones. It would be great if we can manage to sell all at 10p.

Delivery / postage costs were very significant, close to £100 in total. Bulk orders cost around £30 per consignment up to a total weight of 1 tonne. The retail orders typically cost about £7 for relatively small quantities and escalated rapidly with weight. Doubling or quadrupling our total quantity will probably not increase our total delivery cost. Often there is little difference in cost between ordering 5 to 6 kg from retail suppliers and 25kg in bulk. It may be possible to negotiate deals with some of the retailers.

We could offer to order 25kg sacks for people who want to order a few varieties in bulk and charge them £5 per sack for delivery as a way of reducing our and their delivery cost.

Weather could be a delivery issue, particularly if we hold the event in February, need to confirm all orders by 3 weeks before the event.

We also received donations of seed from a couple of local seed growers and amateurs gardeners, amounting to over 20 varieties in quantities of approx 5kg each. These made the difference between the 2011 day making a profit or a loss, and greatly increased the varieties available. Hopefully we'll be able to expand this source of our supply, I was sent details of several other potential local suppliers too late for me to contact them. However, it's illegal to sell uncertified seed - we asked for donations (10p per tuber suggested) at the 2011 event. With more advance planning / discussion / research we may be able to improve this situation.

It may be a good idea to charge an entrance fee of say 50p per adult to cover venue / publicity / leaflets etc. This would give us a count of attendees, enable us to be more ambitious in providing information and help keep the cost to 10p per tuber. Alternatively a more nominal entrance fee (10 or 20p) could be charged but that may mean some potatoes costing more than 10p.

[I need to dig out my detailed notes re: costs, quantities etc and provide info].