



Press release

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Disappointing potato harvest

The Dutch potato harvest of 2003 will be the second lowest in twenty years. The preliminary harvest estimate made by Statistics Netherlands stands at 4.3 billion kilograms. This is almost 20 percent less than in 2002. The main cause for the low yield is the continuous drought during summer. The record low was in 1998, when much of the harvest was lost due to extreme wet weather conditions. The yield then was 3.4 billion kilograms.

Lower yield per hectare and smaller growing area

The potato harvest in 2003 is mainly very small due to the low yield per hectare. One hectare of potatoes on sandy soil yielded only about 38 thousand kilo on average this year. This is a fifth less than in 2002. The yield on clay soil averaged about 45 thousand kilo per hectare last year, versus 40 thousand kilo in 2003.

The area used to grow potatoes for consumption and for seeding is also down in 2003. The cultivated area was reduced by 7 percent to a total of about 110 thousand hectare. The cultivated area on sandy soil and peat fell substantially (-20 percent), whereas the area on clay soil was reduced only slightly (-2 percent).

Sandy soil less productive due to drought

The volume of harvested potatoes from sandy soil in 2003 was reduced by a third. The yield per hectare is the lowest since 1984. On sandy soil and peat the production per hectare is lower than on clay soil this year, whereas in recent years sandy soil used to be more productive. Yields on sandy soil increased in recent decades due to advanced water management, such as managing ground water levels, and sprinkling systems.

However, during the dry summer of 2003 there was a limit to the amount of sprinkling allowed in certain regions. This created substantial differences in yields per hectare.

Fewer onions despite record cultivated area

In 2003 the yield per hectare of sowing onions will be considerably lower than last year. The yield per hectare will be about 15 percent less than in 2002, with 47 thousand kilo per hectare. This is compensated somewhat by the expansion of the area on which onions are grown.

The area used for growing sowing onions in 2003 is over 16 thousand hectares. This is the all-time record since observations began in 1900. The total harvest of sowing onions will be 8 percent lower and is estimated at 755 million kilo. Onions suffered a great deal from the recent drought. This in contrast with cereals.