

Early aphid migration service for potato growers

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The British Potato Council's web-based aphid-monitoring service has now gone live for the 2007 season to help potato seed growers maintain the high health status of the British crop.

New features have been added to the service, which is updated daily by the Central Science Laboratory (CSL) and gives growers an early, localised indication of aphid migrations.

The maps now show a traffic light system for each trap, highlighting increases in vector pressure index, says CSL's Phil Northing, who runs the service. This allows users to see which traps in a region have increased most.

Growers can also sign up to new SMS alerts. These send a message to a mobile phone when the first peach-potato aphid – the species that can transmit viruses such as potato virus Y most effectively – is found in their area.

"We've also introduced a weekly index value SMS alert that sends you a message if the index exceeds a level you choose. These new features are big benefits for time-poor growers and agronomists," said Mr Northing.

The first flights have already been picked up by the service. "It looks like we could see some early flights this year, so seed growers should be on their guard and use the service when deciding aphicide programmes with their agronomist."

Growers are encouraged to log on to the service at www.potato.org.uk/aphids and sign up to the SMS and standard email service that gives weekly results detailing regional averages.

Maps on the website allow users to quickly drill down to find local trap count data. This shows the type of aphid found, while a score, weighted according to virus vector, indicates overall threat.

This is displayed on graphs, which offer growers a quick check on local migrations.

The aphid-monitoring service, available only to levy-payers, is a development of BPC-funded research that has taken place over the last 10 years.

Data on aphid flights is based on catches in 100 BPC-funded traps placed around the main seed-growing regions in Britain.

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Phil Northing of CSL

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