

Potatoes at the Hirsell

Potatoes are an important crop at the Hirsell being grown by Greenseed International Ltd who rent around 100 Ha (250 acres) each year. They grow well in the deep, fertile soils along the River Tweed and are a valuable break crop in an arable rotation. However, they are unable to be grown in the same field within 7 years because of the risk of soil borne diseases.

In the spring the soil must be at least 5 degrees before it is suitable for planting. Much work is needed to prepare a fine tilth for the seed bed, cultivating to the depth the potatoes will grow in. Satellite technology on the tractors help the ridges to be absolutely straight and de-stoning the beds means that the potato plants will grow without the tubers coming into contact with stones or being lifted along with the potatoes at harvest time.

Over the growing season the potatoes need constant attention being regularly sprayed for blight and other pests. They are irrigated during dry spells of weather to ensure the tubers swell. The potato plants grow small pink and white flowers, Later, as they begin to die back, the skins on the potatoes will set. From late August onwards the crop is harvested. Before harvesting any green shaws are mulched. While lifting it is important that the potatoes are handled carefully to avoid damage and bruising if possible. They are loaded into potato boxes and taken to the cold store at Homebank (one of the Hirsell farms) where they are stored in a dark temperature-controlled environment of around 2 degrees until required by the potato pre-packers during the year. If stored too warm they will sprout, too cold they will spoil. They are packed by Branston at Perth, R S Cockerill, York, Morrisons or Produce World, Lincolnshire.

What to do:

Retell the story of growing potatoes by cutting up the worksheet sections to be put back together in the right order/matching picture/matching text to picture.