

BURLEIGH DODDS SERIES IN AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE

Achieving sustainable cultivation of potatoes

Volume 2: Production, storage and crop protection

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Contents

Series list	ix
Preface	xiv
Introduction	xvi

Part 1 Potato production and storage

1	Modelling potato growth	3
	<i>Ilkka Leinonen, Scotland's Rural College (SRUC), UK; and Hongyan Chen and James A. Taylor, Newcastle University, UK</i>	
	1 Introduction	3
	2 General principles of crop modelling	4
	3 Applications of crop models: an overview	7
	4 Mechanistic modelling of different processes of potato growth	8
	5 Use of models for potato production: recent examples	12
	6 Future perspectives: application of the models in precision farming	14
	7 Summary	16
	8 Future trends	16
	9 Where to look for further information	17
	10 Acknowledgements	17
	11 References	17
2	Improving potato cultivation practices: an overview	23
	<i>Vijay Kumar Dua, Sanjay Rawal, Sukhwinder Singh and Jagdev Sharma, ICAR-Central Potato Research Institute, India</i>	
	1 Introduction	23
	2 Potato cultivation in India	24
	3 Soil management	26
	4 Seed bed preparation and planting	29
	5 Cultivation	30
	6 Nutrient management: green manures and cover crops	33
	7 Irrigation	34
	8 Mechanisation	35
	9 Conservation agriculture	37
	10 Conclusion	38
	11 Where to look for further information	38
	12 References	38
3	Improving nutrient management in potato cultivation	45
	<i>Philip J. White, The James Hutton Institute, UK</i>	
	1 Introduction	45
	2 Demand of the potato crop for mineral nutrients	47
	3 General fertiliser practice for potato mineral nutrition	48
	4 Addressing requirements for specific nutrients	53
	5 Precision management	57

6	Breeding for better acquisition and utilisation of nutrients	59
7	Future trends and conclusion	60
8	Where to look for further information	61
9	Acknowledgements	61
10	References	61
4	Advances in irrigation management and technology in potato cultivation: experiences from a humid climate	69
	<i>Jerry Knox and Tim Hess, Cranfield University, UK</i>	
1	Introduction	69
2	Precision irrigation (PI) for potatoes	74
3	Scheduling challenges in managing PI	76
4	Assessing potential 'water savings' from PI on potatoes	78
5	Engineering PI for potatoes	80
6	Other factors	82
7	Drip irrigation on potatoes in the United Kingdom: past usage and future uptake	84
8	Conclusion	85
9	Where to look for further information	85
10	Acknowledgements	86
11	References	86
5	Organic potato cultivation	89
	<i>Thomas F. Döring, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and University of Bonn, Germany; and Derek H. Lynch, Dalhousie University, Canada</i>	
1	Introduction	89
2	Rotation and diversification	91
3	Breeding, seed potatoes and planting	94
4	Tillage and weed control	96
5	Nutrient management and soil fertility	98
6	Irrigation	101
7	Regulation of diseases and pests	101
8	Conclusion	110
9	Where to look for further information	110
10	References	111
6	Post-harvest storage of potatoes	119
	<i>Adrian Briddon, Adrian Cunnington and Glyn Harper, Sutton Bridge Crop Storage Research, UK</i>	
1	Introduction	119
2	Quality of crop entering store	120
3	Management of disease	121
4	Management of sprouting	123
5	Management of non-pathological disorders	126
6	Store management	127
7	Conclusion	131
8	Future trends	131
9	Where to look for further information	132
10	References	133

7	Acrylamide formation in fried potato products and its mitigation <i>Bruno De Meulenaer, Raquel Medeiros Vinci and Frédéric Mestdagh, Ghent University, Belgium</i>	137
1	Introduction	137
2	Overview of acrylamide formation and dietary exposure	138
3	Health risks and risk assessment	143
4	Factors affecting acrylamide formation and mitigation strategies: before harvesting	145
5	Factors affecting acrylamide formation and mitigation strategies: from storage to frying	148
6	Factors affecting acrylamide formation and mitigation strategies: use of additives or processing aids	152
7	Additives or processing aids: from lab tests to the industrial scale	160
8	Evolution of risk management	162
9	Future trends	164
10	Where to look for further information	166
11	References	166

Part 2 Diseases and pests

8	Fungal diseases affecting potato storage <i>A. Lees, The James Hutton Institute, UK</i>	179
1	Introduction	179
2	Identifying and quantifying the pathogen	180
3	Understanding the epidemiology of potato storage diseases	181
4	Integration of knowledge to inform management decisions	182
5	Case study: Fusarium dry rot	183
6	Where to look for further information	185
7	References	185
9	Bacterial diseases affecting potatoes <i>M. Jennifer Sjölund, Rachel Kelly, Gerry S. Saddler and David M. Kenyon, Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA), UK</i>	189
1	Introduction	189
2	Symptoms and impact of bacterial diseases affecting potatoes	191
3	Pathogen diversity	193
4	Control strategies	195
5	Case studies	196
6	Future trends in research	200
7	Where to look for further information	201
8	References	202
10	Viruses affecting potatoes <i>Colin Jeffries and Christophe Lacomme, Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA), UK</i>	209
1	Introduction	209
2	Challenges posed by viruses in potato production	210
3	Challenges for management and control of potato-infecting viruses	224

4	Case study: transmission and distribution of aphid-transmitted viruses in field conditions	227
5	Conclusion and future trends	230
6	Where to look for further information	231
7	References	232
11	Non-infectious disorders affecting potatoes	243
	<i>Andrew P. Robinson, North Dakota State University and University of Minnesota, USA</i>	
1	Introduction	243
2	External disorders	244
3	Superficial disorders	246
4	Internal disorders	252
5	Case study	254
6	Conclusion and future trends	256
7	Where to look for further information	257
8	References	257
12	Nematode pests of potatoes	263
	<i>Kim Davie and Jon Pickup, Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA), UK</i>	
1	Introduction	263
2	Quarantine regulations	265
3	Nematode management	269
4	Major nematode pests of potatoes	271
5	Conclusion	279
6	Future trends	279
7	Where to look for further information	280
8	References	281
13	Potato pest management with specific reference to the Pacific Northwest (USA)	285
	<i>Stuart Reitz, Oregon State University, USA</i>	
1	Introduction	285
2	Economics of potato pest management	286
3	Seasonality of arthropod pests in the PNW	287
4	Arthropod pests of the PNW	287
5	Horizontal and vertical integration of pest management practices	294
6	Outreach efforts	296
7	Future trends and conclusion	297
8	Where to look for further information	297
9	References	298
	Index	307

Preface

Research into the production, storage and utilisation of the potato crop is increasing steadily. This is, perhaps, unsurprising given that it is the fourth most important staple food in the world after wheat, maize and rice and that the area and quantity of potatoes being grown worldwide continues to increase. There is no aspect of the potato crop and its cultivation that is not under investigation somewhere, reflecting the fact that as a vegetatively produced crop it presents more challenges in production than grain crops.

What is changing dramatically with the potato crop are the demographics of consumption. A cursory glance at FAO statistics on the crop will see that, in general, in developed countries potato production has peaked and is often declining, whereas in developing countries it is rapidly increasing, with Asia, particularly China, and Africa leading the charge. Of course, potatoes are still important in developed countries but the choice of food options is much greater and consumers demand better quality and more diverse options. The focus in developing countries remains primarily yield, and this often relates to finding solutions to basic production issues such as appropriate cultivars, provision of healthy seed, water and nutrient to feed the crop and basic crop protection. By contrast, in developed countries where often, high yield is relatively straightforward to achieve, more focus is on quality, added value and consumer safety.

Traditionally, scientific research into potatoes has been carried out in largely publically-funded institutes around the world. Researchers in these institutes have a desire to publish refereed papers as the end point of their research. These papers are the life-blood of progress as they provide open access of validated results for agronomists and economists to turn into practice. The majority of research will continue to be carried out by institutes, but there is an increasing proportion of research being carried out by industry where the publication of research is secondary to profit from developing a patented product. An example of this is the development of GM cultivars.

In reviewing potato research publications, it becomes apparent that, to date, the majority have emanated from institutes in developed countries where long term research programmes have been established. This is not to say that excellent research does not take place elsewhere. For example, the International Potato Centre (CIP) in Peru has an enviable record in scientific research. However, as developing countries rely more heavily on the potato crop and they increase in wealth it can be anticipated that a greater proportion of potato research will be published from institutes in these countries.

The focus of research in institutes remains addressing challenges to the potato crop and developing new ideas and initiatives. Obviously, the focus for research will vary from country to country and region to region and often reflects local emerging challenges. One example of an emerging challenge is the relatively recent occurrence of Zebra chip disease in a few major areas of production. Naturally, this problem has been intensively studied where it has become established but neighbouring countries or countries trading with them have had to take the disease seriously in order to limit its spread.

In developed countries, there has been an increasing focus on quality aspects and this has resulted in a continuing requirement for under-pinning research. The move to understanding processes at the molecular level, for example using information from DNA sequencing of the potato, has expanded rapidly. These fundamental areas of study will ultimately lead to many diverse improvements in production, storage and

utilisation especially through the development of new or improved cultivars with specific traits. Naturally, expectations for rapid progress are high and greater funding has been moved into molecular and genetic research. To an extent, this has been carried out at the expense of more applied research. Sustained applied research is equally important and governments need to ensure that institutes sustain a balanced portfolio of strategic and applied research.

When presenting the complexities of the potato to a lay person, it is often the case that they cannot understand why so much research is required. They may have the image of crop production simply being the task of planting a tuber into the soil and waiting for it to grow. These two volumes of *Achieving sustainable cultivation of potatoes* bear witness to the level of complexity production, storage and utilisation has reached. That there are two volumes and such a wide range of topics covered should convince those with a simplistic view that potatoes are a technologically advanced crop.

There was a time when one person could be familiar with most aspects of potato research. One such person was W. G. Burton, who published the first edition of his *Magnum Opus 'The Potato'* in 1966. This was one of the first publications to present a comprehensive overview of potato research in a single volume and is a work of immense stature. It reflects the breadth of understanding he had for the crop. It might be suggested that no one individual today could retain such a breadth of expertise.

Yet there remains a need, every now and again, to assess the state of play in potato research. These two volumes attempt to review the progress made in the last 10 years or so. Not every aspect of potatoes is covered but these volumes follow a tradition of bringing the latest research into an accessible publication. Unlike W. G. Burton's book, more recent research review publications have been written by scientists expert in one aspect of potatoes and edited by more generalist researchers. Thus these volumes follow the legacy of Burton (1966), Harris (1978) and Vreugdenhill (2007) amongst others.

Stuart Wale

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Introduction

Potatoes are the fourth most important food crop in the world and the most important root crop. Their nutritional value, and the fact that they can be grown with relatively few inputs in a wide range of environments, makes them an important food security crop. However, yields in developing countries are held back by factors such as poor cultivation practices, the impact of pests and diseases and limited breeding to identify climatically adapted cultivars. In more intensive systems, crops need to become more 'climate smart' to minimise environmental impact and adapt to climate change. These challenges are addressed in the two volumes of *Achieving sustainable cultivation of potatoes*:

- Volume 1 Breeding improved varieties
- Volume 2 Production, storage and crop protection

Volume 2 looks at key recent research on improving cultivation techniques at each stage in the value chain for potato production, from yield modelling to post-harvest storage. The volume also offers a detailed review of the main fungal, bacterial and viral diseases affecting potatoes.

Part 1 Potato production and storage

The themes of chapters in the first part of the volume range from modelling yields to nutrient and irrigation management, as well as post-harvest storage. The subject of Chapter 1 is modelling potato growth. The development of mechanistic models for predicting growth of various crops (including potatoes) has continued for several decades, and new applications of such models are increasingly becoming available. Despite the benefits of this development, it may be difficult for the user to decide which models are suitable for a specific purpose (such as decision making in potato production). This chapter provides insights intended to help the potential user to better understand the benefits and limitations of various types of models. The chapter first presents some ideas of the general principles of mechanistic modelling and potential applications of crop models. It then briefly describes the main physiological processes of potato growth and how they have been handled in mechanistic models. Finally, the chapter provides examples of the recent applications of potato models and discusses the future use of the models for new applications, particularly in precision farming.

Chapter 2 offers an overview of ways of improving more sustainable potato cultivation. This chapter does so by exploring the adoption of conservation agriculture and other techniques by potato growers in the Indo-Gangetic plains. Focusing on the goals of optimizing soil health and achieving vigorous early crop growth, it reviews best practice in soil management, seed bed preparation and planting, and cultivation techniques, including irrigation. The chapter then moves on to consider the contribution of green manures and cover crops to potato nutrient management, as well as the impact of mechanisation.

Moving to a specific aspect of potato cultivation, Chapter 3 focuses on improving nutrient management. Potatoes require a significant number of mineral nutrients and this chapter describes management practices that maximise crop production whilst minimising

nutrient losses to the environment. It first describes the development of the crop and requirements for macronutrients (nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, sulphur, magnesium, calcium) and micronutrients (chlorine, boron, iron, zinc, manganese, copper, nickel, molybdenum), and current agronomic practices for delivering these nutrients. There follows an overview of recent developments in precision management of potato crop nutrition, underpinned by geospatially-referenced soil maps and application systems, which aim to optimise fertiliser inputs by addressing local heterogeneities in soil conditions and varying inputs across a cultivated area. Finally, the chapter describes how agronomic strategies can be complemented by breeding cultivars with more efficient acquisition of mineral nutrients. These breeding programmes focus on root characteristics, and better physiological utilisation of nutrients for tuber yields, as well as on canopy architecture and nutrient or biomass partitioning within the plant.

Complementing the previous chapter's concentration on nutrients, Chapter 4 addresses advances in irrigation technology and management in potato cultivation, drawing on examples mainly from the UK. Irrigation is an essential component of potato production for many farmers, serving to maximise yields and meet quality assurance targets for retailers and consumers. In recent years, rising financial and environmental costs have led to increasing attention given to improving on-farm irrigation efficiency and water productivity, or 'more crop per drop'. The chapter focuses on recent advances in both in-field water management (notably irrigation scheduling) and application equipment, including the challenges in implementing precision irrigation technologies, to improve productivity and reduce water demands. Whilst the chapter reports experiences from the UK, the issues raised are equally applicable to other environments where water resources for agriculture are under scrutiny and potatoes are an important commodity crop.

Chapter 5 shifts the focus to organic potato cultivation. Organic potato cultivation requires a whole-system approach, with a particular focus on rotation design. Producing organic potatoes relies strongly on indirect, preventive and long-term strategic measures both for plant nutrition and plant protection. The chapter examines all aspects of the process of cultivating organic potatoes, including breeding, seed potatoes, rotation and diversification, planting, tillage, weed control, nutrient management, soil fertility and irrigation. The chapter also describes the main diseases and pests of potatoes and organic methods of their control.

The theme of Chapter 6 is post-harvest storage of potatoes. Storage is a major component of the field-to-fork cycle and a point in the cycle where major crop loss can occur. Good storage is essential to maintain supply and quality of both ware and seed potatoes. The chapter reviews the mechanisms underlying potato spoilage and discusses key techniques for storing potatoes to maintain quality and shelf life. Pathological and physiological factors both impact on quality and can affect the proportion of a crop that is marketed. These are discussed in relation to current storage practices, highlighting control methods.

Moving from storage to processing of potatoes, Chapter 7 examines acrylamide formation in fried potato products and ways to mitigate its occurrence. Acrylamide is formed in potato products during cooking in industrial processing, retail, catering and home preparation. The chapter summarizes the research to date on acrylamide levels, mechanisms of formation in tubers, assessment of acrylamide intake and health risks, regulatory status and possible mitigation strategies from farm to fork in the growing and processing potatoes for fried potato products.

Part 2 Diseases and pests

The chapters in the second part of the volume review advances in understanding and managing fungal, bacterial and viral diseases as well as the management of pests and weeds. Chapter 8 addresses the subject of fungal diseases affecting potato storage. Fungal and oomycete pathogens responsible for causing potato storage diseases are both numerous and ubiquitous wherever potatoes are grown. Such pathogens can result in losses of up to 10% during storage, with additional losses caused in the field in subsequent growing seasons when planting affected stored seed crops. Previous research has tended to focus on individual diseases and their management in isolation but, given the variety of possible pathogens, there is a growing need to understand common issues in potato storage diseases. The chapter considers the key issues in three stages: identifying the pathogens, understanding the epidemiology of the diseases, and managing the disease at different stages of development. The chapter includes a detailed case study of *Fusarium* dry rot in order to show how greater understanding of a disease can ensure its more effective management.

Chapter 9 moves on from fungal diseases to consider bacterial diseases affecting potatoes. Bacterial pathogens continue to pose a significant threat to potato production through in-field yield losses, storage rot and reduced marketability. *Ralstonia solanacearum* alone is estimated to cause \$1 billion in losses worldwide. The chapter reviews current knowledge on the principal bacterial diseases of potato: ring rot (*Clavibacter michiganensis* subsp. *sepedonicus*), brown rot (*Ralstonia solanacearum*), blackleg (*Pectobacterium* and *Dickeya* spp.) and common scab (*Streptomyces* spp.), as well as the recently emerging pathogens, *Dickeya solani* and *Candidatus Liberibacter solanacearum*, causing blackleg and zebra chip respectively. The chapter reviews sustainable disease management strategies, and discusses how the development and increasing accessibility of molecular genetics enables new avenues of research.

Moving from bacterial to viral agents, Chapter 10 considers viruses affecting potatoes. The impact of viruses on potato production can be devastating in many areas worldwide. Breeding for agronomic and resistance traits, knowledge of virus species and their epidemiology, together with the development of accurate diagnostic methods have been essential for the development of integrated disease management strategies, and helped certification programmes worldwide to maintain high health standards. The chapter describes the current state of knowledge about viruses in potatoes and provides guidance on developing efficient control measures. It includes a detailed case study on the transmission and distribution of aphid-transmitted viruses in field conditions.

Complementing the focus of the previous three chapters on fungi, bacteria and viruses, Chapter 11 looks at non-infectious disorders affecting potatoes. A wide range of non-infectious disorders can affect potatoes, generally as a result of imbalances within the plant caused by environmental stresses. Such disorders make tubers unappealing to consumers, and therefore have significant economic consequences. However, non-infectious disorders are often poorly understood and characterized, limiting the extent to which they can be prevented and detected. The chapter describes a range of disorders of potato tubers, categorising them as external, superficial or internal disorders. In each case, a description of symptoms is given, followed by information about the causes of the disorder and ways of preventing and minimizing its symptoms.

The final two chapters of the volume move on to look at pests of potatoes, with Chapter 12 concentrating on the nature and impact of nematode pests. Potatoes are particularly susceptible to attack from nematodes, with around 70 species from 24 genera reported. Nematodes reduce the value of the harvested crop by affecting yield, tuber size and marketability or indirectly through the transmission of viruses. After reviewing what we know about the major nematode pests of potato, the chapter describes quarantine regulations affecting potatoes with regard to nematodes, before outlining techniques of nematode management.

The last chapter of the volume, Chapter 13, examines integrated potato insect pest management with a specific focus on the US Pacific Northwest. Over the past 20 years, potato pest management in the Pacific Northwest region of the USA has changed dramatically, with the emergence and resurgence of new insect pests. The chapter reviews the status of pest management in the region which aims to enable growers to maintain economically viable and sustainable potato production. The chapter describes the lifecycles and effects of the main arthropod pests in the region, including the beet leafhopper, the potato tuberworm and the most significant emerging pest, the potato psyllid, vector of zebra chip disease.

Index

- Acrylamide formation in fried potato
 - additives/processing aids, lab tests to the industrial scale 160–162
 - health risks and assessment 143–144
 - mitigation strategies, before
 - harvesting 145–148
 - climatological conditions 147–148
 - cultivar 145–147
 - maturity of tuber 147–148
 - soil properties and fertilization 147
 - mitigation strategies, storage
 - to frying 148–151
 - blanching 150–151
 - cutting 150
 - drying 151
 - frying 151
 - quality control supplied
 - to factory 149–150
 - storage 148–149
 - mitigation strategies, use of additives or processing aids 152–160
 - occurrence in food 140–143
 - overview 137–138
 - pathways 138–140
 - risk management 162–164
- Bacterial diseases
 - Candidatus Liberibacter asiaticus* 196–199
 - control strategies 195–196
 - crop husbandry 196
 - harvest and storage 196
 - seed management 195
 - variety resistance 195–196
 - overview 189–191
 - pathogen diversity 193–195
 - blackleg 193–194
 - brown rot 194
 - common scab 195
 - ring rot 194
 - zebra chip 195
 - R. solanacearum* 199–200
 - symptoms and impact 191–193
 - blackleg 191
 - brown rot 192–193
 - common scab 193
 - ring rot 191–192
 - zebra chip 193
- Conservation agriculture 37–38
- Cultivation 30–33
 - in India 24–26
- Fungal diseases affecting storage
 - epidemiology of storage diseases 181–182
 - Fusarium* dry rot 183–184
 - identify and quantify pathogen 180–181
 - knowledge integration, for management decisions 182–183
 - overview 179–180
- Growth models
 - applications 7–8
 - precision farming 14–15
 - general principles 4–6
 - mechanistic processes 8–12
 - developmental stages 10–11
 - dry matter partitioning 10
 - dry matter production 9
 - effect of nutrients 12
 - leaf area 9–10
 - light interception 9
 - other factors 12
 - soil water dynamics and effects on production 11–12
 - overview 3–4
 - use of models 12–14
- Irrigation 34–35
- Irrigation management and technology
 - advances
 - drip irrigation 84–85
 - integrated management systems 83–84
 - irrigation scheduling 82–83
 - overview 69–74
 - precision irrigation (PI) 74–76
 - engineering 80–81
 - potential water saving assessment 78–80
 - scheduling challenges 76–78
 - variable rate irrigation (VRI) 81–82
 - soil management 84
 - weather forecasting 82–83
- Mechanisation 35–37
- Nematode pests
 - false root (*Nacobbus aberrans*) 277
 - management 269–271
 - chemical control 269–270
 - cultural control 270–271
 - identify damage 269
 - overview 263–265
 - potato cyst nematodes (PCN) 271–273
 - distribution and control 273
 - management 273–274
 - potato rot and stem (*Ditylenchus destructor* and *Ditylenchus dipsaci*) 278
 - quarantine regulations 265–268
 - root lesion (*Pratylenchus* spp.) 277–278
 - root-knot (*Meloidogyne* spp.) 274–277
 - virus vector 278–279

- needle (*Longidorus* spp.) 278
- stubby root (*Trichodorus* and *Paratrichodorus* spp.) 279
- Non-infectious disorders
 - case study 254–256
 - external 244–246
 - bruising 244–245
 - coiled sprout 245–246
 - heat crinkle 246
 - skinning 245
 - internal 252–254
 - blackheart 252
 - heat necrosis 253
 - hollow heart 252–253
 - internal anthocyanin pigmentation 253–254
 - vascular discolouration 254
 - overview 243–244
 - superficial 246–252
 - cracking 246–248
 - elephant hide 248–249
 - enlarged lenticels 249–250
 - greening 248
 - pink eye 250
 - russeting 250–251
 - stem end 251
 - tuber malformations 251
- Nutrient management
 - breeding 59–60
 - calcium 56
 - demand for minerals 47–48
 - general fertiliser practice 48–53
 - green manures and cover crops 33–34
 - magnesium 56
 - micronutrients 56–57
 - nitrogen 53–54
 - overview 45–47
 - phosphorus 54–55
 - potassium 55
 - precision 57–59
 - sulphur 56
- Organic cultivation
 - bacterial diseases 104–105
 - breeding 94–95
 - fungal diseases 102–104
 - insect pests 107–109
 - nematodes 109–110
 - overview 89–91
 - rotation and diversification 90–94
 - seed production 95–96
 - soil fertility 98–101
 - tillage and weed control 96–98
 - viral diseases 105–107
- Pacific Northwest (USA), in pest management
 - arthropod pests 287–294
 - aphids and aphid-transmitted viruses 288–290
 - beet leafhopper 290–291
 - Colorado potato beetle 287–288
 - potato psyllid 292–294
 - potato tuberworm 291
 - thrips species 291–292
 - economics 286–287
 - horizontal and vertical integration 294–296
 - biological control 295
 - economic thresholds 294–295
 - host plant resistance 295–296
 - Insecticide resistance 294
 - overview 285
 - seasonality of arthropods 287
- PCN. see potato cyst nematodes (PCN)
- PI. see precision irrigation (PI)
- Post-harvest storage
 - disease management 121–123
 - environment 122
 - host 121
 - identification 122
 - pathogens 121–122
 - pre-storage treatment of tubers 122–123
 - store loading 122–123
 - non-pathological disorders 126–127
 - blackheart 126
 - freezing/low-temperature damage 127
 - greening 126
 - internal sprouting 127
 - senescent sweetening 127
 - overview 119–120
 - quality of crop 120
 - sprout management 123–126
 - application technology 125–126
 - suppressants 123–125
 - store management 127–131
 - capability to dry 128–129
 - crop cooling 128–129
 - design and construction 127–128
 - economics 130–131
 - environment outside store 130
 - environment within store 129–130
- Seed bed preparation and planting 29–30
- Soil management 26–29
- Viruses
 - aphid-transmitted 217–218
 - beetle-transmitted 221
 - challenges posed 210–216
 - contact-transmitted 223
 - fungal-transmitted 222–223
 - leafhopper transmission 219–220
 - management and control 224–227
 - nematode transmission, soil-borne 221–222
 - overview 209–210
 - seed and pollen transmission 223–224
 - thrip-transmitted 219
 - whitefly-transmitted 220–221
- VRI. see variable rate irrigation (VRI)