

Another Scottish Export Success!

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Fund's first awards go to young farmer and charity

BY JOE WATSON

A young farmer and a charity devoted to helping educate children about farming and the countryside are the first recipients of a new award from NFU Scotland's Banffshire branch.

It is available to help people develop their agricultural knowledge and makes use of a fund set up with the proceeds from the sale of the branch's old office in Keith's Mid Street.

Grants of £750 each have been awarded to Helen

Morrison, 23, of Nether Blairmaud, Cornhill, and the Royal Northern Countryside Initiative.

Initiative chairman Billy Stewart said it would use its

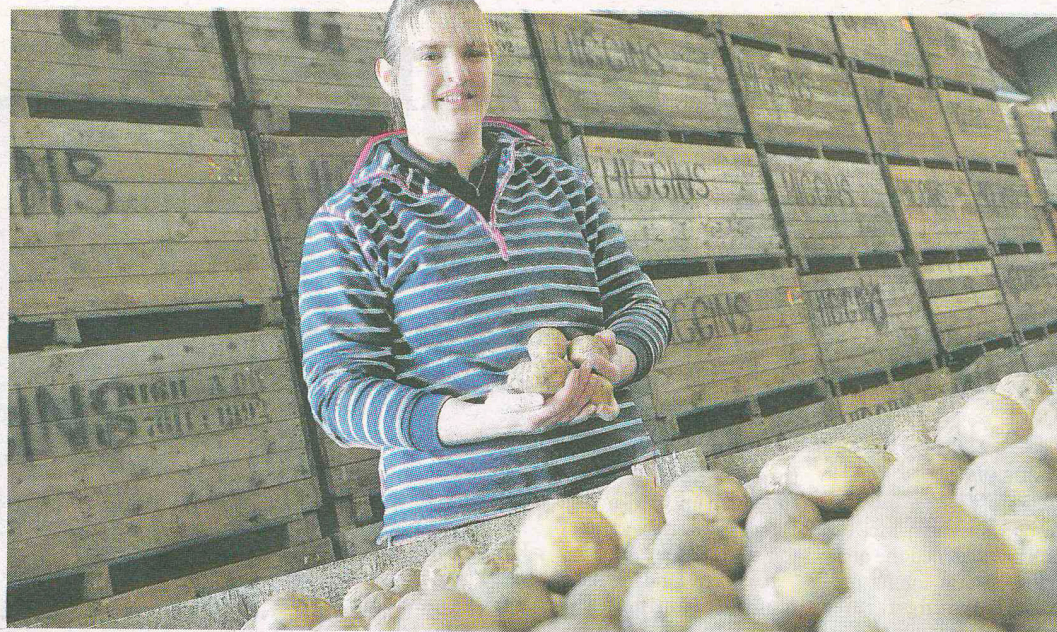
"By pure coincidence we had a visit from a group of South African farmers"

cash to fund the buses needed to take children from Banffshire out on

farm visits, to its annual estates day at Cullen's Seafield Estate and to the Royal Northern Spring Show.

Mr Stewart said transport was one of the biggest costs schools faced and the bills for buses often dissuaded them from taking part in the RNCI activities.

Helen, a member of Lower Banff JAC and who works as a fieldswoman for seed potato grower Higgins Agriculture at Alves, near Elgin, will use her grant to



FLYING FLAG: Helen Morrison with some Olympus seed potatoes. Photograph: Gordon Lennox

head to South Africa in the spring. She wants to learn about its seed potato and ware tattie sector and has already linked up with processor McCain's to organise visits.

Helen, who joined Higgins in January after being a self-employed farm labourer, said all seed potato imports into South Africa were banned many years ago, yet growers there

have considerable virus issues in its tuber stocks.

She also hopes to use her visit to fly the flag for Scotland's high-grade disease-free seed potato supplies, which are exported globally.

Her boss, David Chalmers, said the firm was delighted for Helen, adding it was great opportunity for her. "By pure coincidence we had a visit from a group

of South African farmers during the summer," he added.

"They would certainly benefit from the high-health status of Scottish seed."

Dave Scott, the international sales manager at Higgins, said: "Continuous cropping and infected ware crops make maintaining high-health status in seed crops very difficult."

Healthy minitubers could potentially be exported from Scotland to South Africa.

Helen said her visit should coincide with South Africa's tattie crop being harvested. She hopes to see storage and processing operations.

She will give a presentation on her visit to the NFU Banffshire branch after she has returned home.