



Graeme Byers Technical Director.

facilities and staff implants to manage the raw stock. By managing the reception, grading, washing, halving and peeling of potatoes they add value to the supply chain and return processing value payments to their growers. By carrying out these processes on the crispers' premises, they actually manage a part of their crisping process. Behind all this is the technical support to the growers to ensure that all customer protocols are met.

Higgins has also ventured into Russia and their first crops were harvested and delivered to the customer without any problems. They are now concentrating on a substantial increase in this activity involving seed and storage as well as growing. The European market, as well as the emerging ones in Eastern Europe and Russia, are of great importance to the Higgins Group. A major step forward was the establishment of their subsidiary office in France, at Reims, which has a staff of 8 multi-lingual French people with **Xavier Ramboux** as General Manager. This

operation rejoices in the delightful name of **Pommies Ltd** and has been a major step forward for them. Some of their international development has been driven by their British customers who want the continuity of known quality supplies to their processing plants established or taken over in mainland Europe.

The seed growing division, based at Fochabers near Elgin in Morayshire, grows some 900 acres of seed per annum and there has been considerable investment into this site over recent years. This part of Scotland is recognised as one of Europe's most disease-free regions and Higgins work hard on the systems of micro-propagation and mini-tuber production. New varieties are very important to the industry in order to have increased yields, drought tolerance, lower input costs and more stable storage. They aim to bring at least one new variety to the national listings each year! David Higgins said recently: "There's not a lot of seed surplus this year – about the same volume as last year".

Also based at Elgin in Scotland, is **Alves Diagnostics** which provides a comprehensive diagnostic service into the commercial arena. This service, developed over many years, has previously only been for Higgins own growers but now the technical skills are available to commercial growers, merchants,



Shaun Langley, Operations Manager in Norfolk.

processors, consultants and scientists. Technologies used in medicine and forensic science can now test for very low levels of disease organisms. Blackleg (*Erwinia carotovora* spp atroseptica) testing, washed brock assessment, bruise testing, hotbox testing, dry rot (*Fusarium*) species analysis, full stock assessment and fry testing are all available.

A major part of the potato growing scene in Norfolk, renting nearly 2,000 acres this season and with many leading growers on contract to them, Higgins are still looking for more growers of quality potatoes. The Norfolk office, at Stoke Ferry near King's Lynn, is run by **Shaun Langley**, Operations Manager, with a staff of 7. They deal with their own growing as well as the grower contracts in the area, especially for the Heinz contract, by providing the vital link between customer and growers to ensure that everyone knows exactly what can be provided in both directions. Shaun has been with Higgins for just over a year now and has long experience working in the same sector in East Anglia, being already well known to many growers.

Higgins have a substantial shareholding in **Avalon European Ltd** which is a specialist trans-continental bulk haulage business, based in Marlborough, Wiltshire,

with a fleet of both owned and contracted vehicles. The company which moves many bulk commodities, is not dedicated to Higgins although it handles many of their shipments— especially trans-continental.

Everyone at Higgins knows that they must keep on top of the need to improve the potato production and supply chain wherever possible. They are continually looking at improved varieties, production techniques, supply chain delivery or food processing improvements. Various innovative practices have been put into operation by Higgins. One of these is the **Big Bags** which allow vehicle utilisation to improve, pay weights to increase and keep delivery costs down.

In addition to a large party for all their staff this summer, as well as various celebratory events for suppliers and customers, Higgins will particularly be celebrating their fifty years of successful business at **British Potato 2009** at Harrogate in November. David Higgins said: "I know it gives my father immense satisfaction to continue to lead a family owned and run business which has the structure and resources to supply potatoes to the companies which manufacture the world's leading crisps, chips and meal brands."



Higgins Big Bags.



Testing samples at Alves Diagnostics.