

## **Boom for Pasta Foods -**

A leading specialist pasta and snack ingredient producer, Norfolk-based Pasta Foods, has bold plans to boost exports, members heard on the opening visit of the winter season.

A total of 23 members, including the chairman Jonathan Deane, visited the firm's site at Longwater, opposite the Norfolk showground.

Pasta Foods is also looking to take on seven new apprentice posts to join its 145-strong team at Great Yarmouth and Longwater, Norwich.

Managing director Gordon Chetwood said that the company, which was founded in 1964, was keen to recruit the new generation into an exciting and vibrant food business.

And sales at home have also been buoyant as the world's biggest pasta producing machine was running 24/7, he told a 23-strong group of Stalham Farmers' Club members.

The company, which became an independent in 2003, has invested a total of about £12.5m including at the new factory at Forest Way, Longwater, since December 2013.

It has enabled total production to be increased while the Waveney Mill at Yarmouth takes in monthly shipments of between 2,000 and 2,500 tonnes of high-grade durum wheat to make semolina flour for pasta production.

Its Yarmouth factory has also seen further growth in both pasta and also snack food ingredients – another booming sector.

Although it usually sourced all its high-grade durum wheat from France, members were told that the latest poor harvest could pose some challenges and additionally another major potential supplier, Canada, was also facing difficulties.

But, demand for home-produced pasta and snack ingredients has been transformed since Britain's surprise Brexit vote because sterling's fall in value has made imports more expensive. "We've got buyers queuing up for our range of products," said Mr Chetwood. And the export potential was especially exciting because the company's expertise in low-salt snack ingredients was also in demand overseas.

He said that the firm's turnover, currently about £25 million, was set to increase by at least 10pc over the coming months, and the total pasta production was now more than 20pc cent higher, partly because of the success of the specialist Longwater operation.

Pasta Foods was currently sourcing about 250 tonnes of durum, either grown in Norfolk or Suffolk, but this would have to be blended with imported durum. As several Stalham members, who have grown durum in the past without great success, recognised that it was very difficult to grow the top quality crops because of the cooler, maritime climate in eastern England.

Robin Baines gave the vote of thanks and the secretary, Michael Pollitt, presented silk ties to Mr Chetwood and his five-strong team.