

Emily Norton (AHDB) 14/1/2026

First meeting of 2026 - At the first meeting of 2026 on Wednesday January 14 at Wroxham Barns, 18 members and guests supported the chairman, Jonathan Pye, at supper. The guest speaker and club member Emily Norton, was joined by her father, Philip.

Chairman's welcome - More than 30 members and guests were present. Some members had not signed the attendance book!

Apologies – Jonathan Deane, Nick Deane, Graham Duncanson, Roy Houlden, Tim Papworth, Neal and Amanda Sands, Kevin Starkings.

New members –

The following were elected as members.

Peter Medler, proposed by Simon Daniels, seconded William Love.

Jo and Jamie Bennison, proposed by Christopher Deane, seconded Ian Willetts.

Gordon Paice, proposed by George Gay, seconded John Mitchell.

Joe Buxton, proposed by James Taylor, seconded Jonathan Pye.

Secretary's update – A letter of thanks, also posted on the club's website, had been received from Carole Jacques, headteacher at Earlham Nursery School, for a donation of £830. This had been "pound for pound" matched by Aviva. Members donated £165 at last month's meeting and the club gave £250.

The speaker for the annual meeting on February 11 was confirmed. Jamie Burrows, who heads the NFU's cereals board and now farms at Attleborough, would first attend a Red Tractor meeting in London.

Arrangements for the annual dinner on Wednesday, March 25 at Salhouse Lodge would be circulated soon. Hugh Pym, the BBC's health editor, will propose the toast to Agriculture and the Stalham Farmers' Club and present trophies and prizes.

Chris Borrett, of Adams & Howling, said that last-minute grain entries must be delivered to the firm's office within the next few days.

Speaker – Emily Norton, who became chair of the Agriculture & Horticultural Development Board on June 1, was almost on home ground. She was pleased to return to the club having spoken to members almost exactly eight years earlier on January 10th 2018. (Go to meeting reports for details). She had been awarded a Nuffield Scholarship in that year.

She explained since then the farm business, which includes the prize-winning Norton's Dairy, has undergone many changes.

Her father, Philip, runs the 157-acre farm while other family members concentrate on the award-winning Norton's Dairy enterprise at Frettenham, near Norwich.

Emily, who read law at Cambridge and spent two years in the City of London as a lawyer, gained her MSc in sustainable agriculture at Harper Adams by distant learning. In the past 25 years, she had held high level positions in the agricultural industry including director of the Oxford Farming Conference in 2023. She is also a trustee director of the RNAA and a member of the CLA's national policy committee.

But her biggest challenge was leading the AHDB, which has an annual budget of £50m and employs about 370 staff. She emphasised that AHDB, which covers four key sectors – pork, beef and lamb, oilseeds and cereal and dairy – was funded by farmers and industry. It was not a lobby group and was a semi-autonomous body, set up by government.

Her biggest initial challenge was to appoint a new chief executive and accounting officer, who formally took over on January 5. Helen Herniman, who is a chartered accountant and was chief finance officer at the Law Society, was also acting chief executive at the Nursing and Midwifery Council.

Emily, who spends a minimum two days a week on AHDB matters, said that the agricultural industry faces some formidable challenges – the likelihood of more regulation and ever closer scrutiny by government and agencies.

She highlighted key areas of concern as identified by the Office for Environmental Protection's latest annual report, published on Tuesday. This body holds government and other public bodies to account and in particular has identified major shortcomings in meeting key environmental targets by 2030.

But again, she argued that farmers could be part of the solution. While water quality has become more politically charged, farmers need to recognise that diffuse, agricultural pollution was a problem in some parts of the country and must be tackled by smarter farming. A "head in the sand" approach just wasn't an option was part of her message.

In terms of data and ownership, again she recognised that farmers (and processors) needed to develop ways to make the best use of it. Harnessing data to become more efficient, and crucially profitable, was key but there were no easy solutions.

While recognising that many sectors, especially oilseeds and cereals have been hard hit by low returns, this sector could not compete long-term with lower cost producers in south America, for example. Was there an opportunity to work even more closely with processors/ customers to meet the UK market of some 70m consumers with quality, home-grown raw materials? She appreciated the practical difficulties of such an

approach but pointed to other sectors, which have been more successful in forging partnerships.

There was a lively discussion involving leading potato growers, including Thomas Love and his son, William. She pointed out, to some amusement, that the potato sector had opted out of the AHDB several years ago. However, she took the point that sectors needed to work together, which was often easier to suggest than implement in practice.

One of the big challenges for the AHDB was becoming even better at giving food producers and processors more access to the high-quality research produced by a talented team.

As the AHDB was funded and driven, largely by the four farming sectors, it had to respond to these demands. But she wondered whether sometimes the team was sometimes spread too thin trying too many areas and instead could produce more immediate benefits by a slightly more concentrated approach.

After a lovely and lengthy question and answer session, she was thanked by grain merchant Chris Borrett.

The meeting was closed at 8.50pm.

