

Stalham Farmers December 2017

Big potential for Norfolk's yeast collection - December's club report.

At the final meeting of the club this year on Wednesday, December 13, the chairman, Jonathan Deane welcomed members and guests.

A total of 22 members including a guest, Ian Alston, were in attendance. A majority had joined the chairman for supper beforehand.

The president, William Donald, who was unable to be present, sent his best wishes to fellow members for Christmas and the New Year. A note would be sent to the president welcoming his support.

Apologies had been received from the following – William Donald, Jason Cantrill, Roy Houlden, Jim Holt, David Hughes, Tim Papworth, Thomas Love, William Love, William Randell, Geoffrey Beck, Nigel Wright, Jane Downing and John Grier.

Minutes – The secretary, Michael Pollitt, said that a full report of the proceedings of the November meeting were on the website for inspection.

Matters arising – There were none.

New member – Tom Corfield was proposed by William Sands, seconded by Christopher Deane.

Grain samples – The chairman reminded members that grain samples (wheat and barley) must be submitted as soon as possible because judging would be taking place within the next few days. Samples could be left at Adams & Howling or at the Brumstead depot of SAMS.

He also suggested that members could do look no further than the collection of books published by member and distinguished veterinary surgeon Graham Duncanson.

The guest speaker, Prof Keith Waldron, of the Quadram Institute BioScience on the Norwich Research Park, was introduced. He briefed members on the background and tremendous opportunities now available to add value to farm crops from “waste” products. He had moved to Norfolk in 1986 after obtaining his PhD from Glasgow University to join the Institute of Food Research, which then had some 250 staff.

A key initial stage to what has become a long-term research goal was understanding the nature of waste – of particular relevance to the production of a practical and effective replacement for peat in the horticultural sector. The outcome was a far-better growing medium than peat – which curiously smelled like “Christmas Cake.”

The challenging of dealing with food waste/ farm by products was global. And solutions could help to reduce the impact on global warming and climate change – and it was as big an issue in the emerging economies such as China and the Indian sub-continent as Europe and north America, he suggested.

He had begun research in 1996 with colleagues into a “biorefinery” initiative to identify means of adding value to what could be regarded as waste streams. One involved creating “foaming agents”

for beer derived from spent brewers' grains. Sadly, this initiative was not as lucrative as possible because it ran up against the novel foods legislation. But it did show the potential, he said.

Another, by taking waste products from commercial onion peelings produced a highly-effective natural thickener. This was rapidly adopted by a number of European food companies but sadly not in Britain, he said.

In 2004 and 2005, work started on the peat replacement project, which has achieved significant goals. The long-term research has delivered and especially with growing tiny plants in modules, where the results have been even better than with peat.

However, Prof Waldron suggested that the research initiative involving the National Yeast Collection's 4,000 strains could really help to produce natural chemicals and often high-value products. It was now possible to evaluate tiny 1ml samples, using an automated process with robots, to screen for valuable chemical products.

Given that there were an estimated 10,000 natural yeast strains worldwide, the Norwich collection was a potential valuable and exciting resource, he said.

Any farmers and growers interested in the potential of food wastes and products should look at the work of the FoodWasteNetwork. With funding of just £200,000, it had galvanised interest from across industry and now had about 500 members from all sectors. Details on the website – www.foodwastenet.org

Prof Waldron was thanked by the club's vice-chairman, Henry Alston. He was also presented with a silk tie on behalf of the club.

In closing at 9.10pm, Mr Deane wished members a Happy Christmas and New Year.

The first meeting would be on Wednesday, January 10.