

Stalham January 15, 2020

The club's chairman Henry Alston and vice-chairman Chris Borrett were joined by 32 members and guests at supper on Wednesday, January 15 at Vera's Coffee Shop. The club welcomed 14 guests from North Walsham Young Farmers' Club including the Norfolk Federation's chairman Will de Feyter. The evening's speaker, club member William Love, was supported by Tim Papworth and another guest Sophie Bambridge.

Welcome. Mr Alston, who welcomed almost 60 members and guests, was delighted that so many YFC members had accepted the club's invitation to supper.

Minutes. A summary of December's meeting had been on the club's website for the past month.

Apologies – Received from Nick Deane, Jason Cantrill, Christopher Deane, James Taylor, Nigel Cooke and Nigel Wright.

New members – Tim Kitson, proposed by Tim Papworth, and seconded by Robert Cooke, was formally welcomed.

Forthcoming activities – The secretary, Michael Pollitt, said that players were needed for the annual 10-pin and bowls evening against Holt & District Farmers' Club at Rossi's, North Walsham, on Friday, February 7, 4pm for 4.30pm. A total of 36 players were needed, 18 for bowls and 18 for 10-pin. It included a three-course meal and would cost £25. Holt had already recruited two-thirds of the total needed while Stalham had barely a handful of players. Names, please to the secretary, without delay.

The annual meeting would be held on Wednesday, February 19, 7.30pm and a former club chairman, Emma Ralph, would be outlining "Life beyond Stalham Farmers' Club." Details of the club's dinner, held on a Thursday, March 19 would be distributed soon when Sir Norman Lamb, former North Norfolk MP and a Health Minister would present the awards and trophies.

Speaker. Mr Alston introduced William Love, assisted by Tim Papworth and Sophie Bambridge, who presented a report into a study trip to Washington State, the second largest potato producer in the United States.

Members of Cambridge University Potato Growers' Research Association went to Seattle in June last year. Mr Love, who thanked CUPGRA's Mark Stalham, for providing the slides, said that the State grew some 68,000ha producing about 5.2m tonnes of potatoes. It was an industry on a vast scale although there were some smaller more niche growers. They visited some family farms, one 485ha enterprise, was fourth generation, dating from 1889, and growing potatoes on in three years. The visitors' eyebrows were raised at such a close rotation and at some other surprising treatments including spraying CIPC, a sprout suppressant, on potatoes for retail sale in supermarkets. Mr Love said that this product, which has been allowed for use in very carefully controlled conditions in store in Britain, would be lost from October.

Another 300ha holding, now run by the fifth generation of Swedish descent, was producing for the fresh market.

However, it was evident that there was a much more relaxed approach, if any, restrictions on a range of crop protection products for US growers. So, aerial spray applications by plane or helicopter were routine – banned in Britain for five decades – and fertiliser and sprays could be applied via irrigation systems.

As such this gave USA growers a massive cost advantage, apart from the scale of the largest farming businesses, one visited was farming 93,000ha, almost a quarter of the size of Norfolk.

Beyond the Cascade Mountain range, it was virtually arid with average rainfall between 150mm and 180mm, thus total dependent on irrigation. Typically, most growers were producing three types of potato – red, white and yellow – and yields were significantly higher than in Britain. This was partly because of the much higher levels of sunshine, especially in this very dry, and virtually pest-free region.

Although there was a considerable electricity cost of providing irrigation, and water was becoming more expensive in relative terms, this was not really too much of a handicap. Mr Love and party were taken to one irrigation “reservoir.” A remote canyon had been blocked to create a 27-mile long “reservoir.”

Another Big Agri enterprise of 100,000 acres on four farms was producing 300,000 tonnes of potatoes, with a target yield of 110t ha. With pivot irrigator capable of watering 100ha, the party estimated there were at least 350 pivots on the enterprise.

Nitrogen applications were as high as 450kg ha.

After lengthy discussion and questions, Mr Love was thanked by Dan Laddiman, chairman of North Walsham YFCs.

The meeting closed at 8.30pm.