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Post-Brexit era could bring major opportunities, says RNAA chair

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A major opportunity to expand the horticultural and plant-growing sector beckons in a post-Brexit world, said a leading Norfolk farmer and landowner.

Sir Nicholas Bacon, chairman of the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association, said Britain currently imported £1.1bn of trees, plants and horticultural products but only exported £50m each year.

As president of the Royal Horticultural Society, he told about 120 members of Stalham Farmers' Club at its 175th anniversary dinner at the Norfolk Mead Hotel in Coltishall, of this major market opportunity on the doorstep.

Sir Nicholas said farmers had overcome massive changes, depressions and other challenges over the past two centuries.



Sir Nicholas Bacon (left) presents the 2016 Cantley Cup to Henry Alston at the 175th Stalham Farmers Club Dinner. Picture: LEE BLANCHFLOWER

Volatility in crop prices, for example, was ever-present, he said.

In 1841 when the club was founded, wheat prices were 64/4d per quarter (£3.22) but 10 years earlier, they had been 38/6d (£1.93). And shortly after the RHS had been founded in 1804, wheat

had made 97 shillings or £4.85 per quarter.

Sir Nicholas, who also farms at Raveningham in south Norfolk, was confident that farming could rise to a post-Brexit challenge. He remained optimistic that over the longer-term the industry could prosper and thrive. And maybe in

10 years, farmers might look back and reflect on the dramatic changes in the industry.

When New Zealand scrapped farm support in 1984, farmers made radical changes. "New Zealand has the highest wheat yields in the world," said Sir Nicholas.

"We have all got to look outside the box," he added.

Sir Nicholas was invited by the chairman, Jonathan Deane, to present the club's trophies.

The Cantley Cup for best overall sugar beet production by a Stalham member, was won by a first-time entrant and club vice-chairman, Henry Alston, of Billockby Hall.

The 2016 Potato Cup was won by Nova Scotia Farms, and for the Cereals competitions, the wheat trophy went to Milligen McLeod (Invicta) and the barley trophy was awarded to Walcott Farms. The sugar beet whole crop prize was awarded to GA Tallwin & Co, and the two-acre prize went to Milligen McLeod.