

Stalham 2020 AGM report

The 178th annual meeting of Stalham Farmers' Club was held at Vera's Coffee Shop, Wayford Nursery, Stalham, on Wednesday, February 19, 2020.

A total of almost 30 members met for the formal business at 7.38pm after 14 members had supported the chairman, Henry Alston, at the supper beforehand.

Apologies – Robin Baines, Alan Beck, Becky Collen, Trevor Colman, Nigel Cooke, Sir William Cubitt, Nick Deane, Christopher Deane, Sarah Ellero, James Taylor, William Love, Alistair Ross, Jo and Ian Willetts, Nigel Wright.

Minutes – These had been on the club's website for more than a year. In presenting a summary of the minutes, the secretary explained that there was some confusion about the term of office for the president. The 2018 AGM had set a three-year term when electing Thomas Love as president, but the 2019 AGM agreed a five-year term, without seeking Mr Love's agreement. Therefore, it was decided that the reinvigorated committee would consider a succession strategy and report to the wider membership.

Chairman's report – In his retiring address to members, Mr Alston reflected on a year with increased attendance at meetings following the move to Vera's Coffee Shop. A more central location for the majority of members had been appreciated.

Although the club had not won too much silverware in competition with Holt & District Farmers' Club, there had been a superlative performance by John Lockhart in the individual 10-pin bowling at Rossi's against Holt.

Mr Alston, who was standing down after the club's forthcoming dinner, wished his successor good fortune. One of the club's highlights had been the highly successful visit to the president's farm at Walcott. The joint evening with members of East Norfolk NFU branch had been memorable.

In a reprise of the club's activities, he said that the dinner at The Boathouse had again been well-attended and the Dean of Norwich, the Very Rev Jane Hedges, had kindly presented the awards and trophies.

A visit to the East Anglian Air Ambulance, arranged by Sir William Cubitt and the chief executive Patrick Peal, had been another success. All attending had undertaken practical training in CPR.

The autumn programme with speakers, Prof Andrew Lovett and club member, Graham Duncanson, had been well-attended. The new year started well with a near-record number hearing William Love, assisted by Tim Papworth and Sophie Bambridge, talk about their tour of the potato-growing regions of the USA last June and July.

Mr Alston thanked the secretary/ treasurer Michael Pollitt and on behalf of the members presented a generous bottle.

Secretary's report – After 15 members joined in the previous year, two more were elected in 2019. A number of members were still paying £10pa – when subscriptions had been increased five years ago.

Stalham, which had set the questions at the annual quiz at Easton College, had finished runners-up in a combined team with Holt. Thanks to George Gay for his support.

A donation of £325 had been made to the East Anglian Air Ambulance following October's visit.

It was also reported that a total of 25,535 visitors to the club's website since last year – a rise of some 15,000 on the year. Clearly, the club's activities were a focus of much interest – outside the club too.

The annual programme had been posted to members, thanks again to the East Norfolk NFU for postage.

Treasurer's report – Mr Pollitt said that the club had returned a surplus of £467 – against a deficit of £223.06 in 2018. Total subscriptions were £10 down on last year at £2705.

In terms of expenditure, the biggest increase was on speakers/ meetings, which had risen from £162 to £900. The cost of hiring the room, 4 x £120 and entertaining YFC members accounted for most of the increase. The East Norfolk NFU branch also supported the club by ensuring the trophies, which was much appreciated. The annual dinner made a loss of £445 – with the cost of the photographer and hospitality the main reasons.

It was noted that the club had a healthy balance and cash reserves of £3,600 plus a stock of silk ties.

Further discussion followed with support for an increase in the secretary's honoraria, which would be discussed by the committee. Mr Pollitt noted that an increase of £100pa had been agreed at last year's AGM – incidentally, it was first increase for almost a decade.

Elections –

President – Thomas Love's three-year term expired in 2021.

Chairman – Chris Borrett, proposed Henry Alston, seconded Tim Papworth. All agreed.

Vice-chairman – Will Sands, proposed Chris Borrett, seconded Jonathan Deane. All agreed.

Treasurer/ secretary – Michael Pollitt, proposed John Grier, seconded Alastair Wright. All agreed.

Hon vice-presidents – Jonathan Deane, Ken Leggett, Hugh Crane, Michael Pollitt, Nigel Wright. Agreed.

Committee – Following the retirement of Sally Lomax, Jason Cantrill and Robert Norman, who were thanked for their services, the chairman called for further nominations to join the existing members, Alastair Ross, Christopher Deane, Guy Paterson, Sarah Ellero, John Lockhart. The following were proposed and elected – Alastair Wright, Michael Eales. In addition, the president, former chairman, chairman, vice-chairman, secretary/ treasurer/ website attend.

Any Other Business – As there was none, the meeting was closed at 8pm and the chairman reminded members of the forthcoming dinner on Thursday, March 19 at The Boathouse. The chairman then introduced former club chairman, Emma Ralph. In her brief introduction, she recalled the great support extended during her career at Anglia Farmers from many members including David Moar, Kevin Starkings, Stephen Wright. Another highlight had been winning the clay shoot against Holt – and of course, Emma won national caps for shooting. (Come back to shoot against Holt and we might win something, said one member). Another had been the visit to Lotus Engineering when John Lockhart had to be helped to get out of a car – much to

the consternation of the engineering staff. And, who could forget the two-acre beet judging when the then President Roger Beck had been wearing well-worn wellies. She had later presented him with a brilliant pink pair – much to his great amusement. On a more serious note, she spoke to members about her subsequent career.

Former club chairman Emma Ralph has been invited to address the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow.

Speaking at Stalham Farmers' Club's 178th annual meeting, she said that the crop production industry faced increased challenges from environmental pressures and from regulators.

She heads InterAgro, which is a Hertfordshire-based adjuvant specialist, and exports to 17 regions around the world. The products help to deliver more effective plant protection to crops from cereals, potatoes, tomatoes, vines, lemons and even olives. When added to crop sprays, they boost yields, control weeds, disease and pests more effectively.

Ms Ralph, who became the first woman chairman in 2007, spent a dozen years with Anglian Farmers. As agrochemicals manager, she saw sales rise from £5m to £40m a year before leaving to join BASF for five years. As InterAgro's managing director, she was leading the expansion into Europe with a new arm in the Netherlands.

Manufacturing in Coventry and also in Hungary, the firm was investing heavily on research & development. A key objective was identifying new types of adjuvants and bio-stimulants which could be used with vegan and organic crops and food.

A key area of research involved more natural products to deliver improved yields and quality and thus minimising environmental problems.

Sales of adjuvants globally were predicted to top £2.5bn by 2024 and bio-stimulant sales could top £2bn by 2023.

As a UK-based firm, which currently employed nine staff, it was a major player at home but was increasingly looking to abroad to develop sales of more than 100 products.

After a lively question session, Emma was thanked by Michael Eales. He reflected that after attending his first meeting for several years, the chairman asked him to give the vote of thanks and then he had been elected to the committee.