

# Stalham Chairman speech 2026 – Jon Pye

Key role of Club as farming faces multiple challenges:

A lack of understanding of the importance of farming, food production and country life remains a challenge to the industry, the retiring chairman told Stalham Farmers' Club's annual dinner.

Jonathan Pye told about 120 members and guests at the Salhouse Lodge that farmers must remain positive. "It seems there is little cause for optimism, but farmers are resilient. We have been through many tough times before.

"Dreadful conflict and uncertainty around the world prevail. Commodity prices stubbornly refuse to gain any meaningful positive traction while input costs have risen dramatically, especially in the last few weeks.

"Despite a welcome partial U-turn on inheritance tax, it seems the government still has a fundamental lack of understanding of farming, food production and country life.

"When I stood here last year I spoke about our concerns as farmers. The perennial battle with seemingly more extreme weather remains.

"We must stay positive and I think my concluding message from last year remains equally valid.

"Stalham Farmers' Club has been a constant in this community since 1841 and we edge closer to the club's 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary, said Mr Pye, who farms near Cawston.

"At a time when support from government seems at a low ebb and despite a level of public support, it is easy to feel very undervalued and unappreciated both as individuals and as an industry.

"We need to stand together and support each other, and this club is an invaluable network of friendships which have never been more important to have," he added.

Mr Pye welcomed members and the club's guests and speaker Hugh Pym, the BBC's health editor, and Anna Hill, of BBC Radio 4 Farming Today, Robin Hepburn, charity director of YANA (You Are Not Alone) and from Holt & District Farmers' Club, the president Peter Perry- Warnes and chairman Martin Jensen.

He then gave a brief summary of the year's activities including the club's annual farm walk. The tour of the Crown Point estate, near Norwich, hosted by Michael Balls and his team, was held jointly with the east Norfolk NFU branch. Jamie Harrison spoke about the potatoes grown on the estate.

Some 20 members visited the Diamond Jubilee fire station at Carrow in late October. Red Watch crew manager James Hawkins briefed the visitors.

Wroxham Barns was the venue for our winter meetings – and the hearty suppers were much appreciated.

At the November meeting, Carol Jaques, headteacher of Earlham Nursery school, briefed members about a new initiative, the Earlham Community Shop. Members also donated more than £800 towards the project.

Sir William Cubitt, now the club's president, described the experiences of men serving in the Royal Norfolk Regiment in the Far East. His father, Lt Tom Cubitt was fortunate to survive but 23pc of the prisoners of war didn't.

The December meeting featured not two but three speakers. Andrea Kelly, environment policy advisor with the Broads Authority, talked about rewarding conservation strategies. Henry Parkinson, of the Langley Abbey Environment Project, described the 600-acre friendly farming operation and supplying biodiversity net gain credits to developers. Finally, Evan Burdett of Norfolk FWAG outlined the environmental options for farmers and landowners.

Club member Emily Norton, recently appointed chair of the AHDB, kicked off the new year programme. With a budget of £50m and 370 employees serving the cereals and oilseeds, beef and lamb, pork and dairy sectors, she advocated the need for "smarter farming" to help solve pollution issues.

Our final speaker was chair of the NFUs combinable crops board, Norfolk and Hertfordshire farmer Jamie Burrows. The key message was the importance of engagement both with Defra and with local MPs. He urged farmers to contact their MPs to highlight their concerns especially those representing rural constituencies.

In standing down as chairman, I'd like to thank Jason Cantrill and the committee for their support over the past two years. Thanks too to retiring president George Gay for his support and enthusiasm and to our secretary Michael Pollitt for his help and keeping me pointed in the right direction.

He then introduced the guest speaker, Hugh Pym, who is the BBC's health editor.