

Stalham Farmers Visit October 21st 2026

Specialist potato grower gets 'green light' for potato stores

Going "green" is a winner solution for a leading Norfolk potato grower.

Members of Stalham Farmers' Club were told by host George Crane that fitting green lights in the family's Broadland potato store has really worked.

As the traditional white light from halogen bulbs can cause "greening" of potatoes, especially in purpose-built stores, he is switching to green LED lights.

"They're slightly more expensive but do prevent 'greening' in stores," he told the 25-strong party of members and guests at Hall Farm, Upton, near Acle, on Wednesday, October 21, 2026.

The green LED lights have a narrower wavelength which doesn't trigger the natural response to sunlight or white light. "We'll be fitting these lights to all our stores," said Mr Crane, who briefed the visitors on the farm's key potato and onion growing enterprises.

"It is perfectly safe to work in this green light but when you go outside the world then seems to be purple," he added.

Earlier George's father, Nick, who had welcomed the visitors to the 2,600-acre farm business, said that 11 different crops were grown. Potatoes and onions were key but as they also produced seed for multiplication for plant breeders, break crops were essential. They grew also foundation and pre-basic cereal seeds as well.

But staying in the potato business was a major decision requiring investment on a multi-million-pound scale. About four years ago after challenging harvests, the family did consider quitting potato production.

However, with the farm's large reservoir, holding some 330,000 cu metres (72.5 million gallons), it had the capacity to water demanding crops like potatoes and onions. With planning permission granted in 2010, it took three years to complete. Built on a 15ft and 20ft thick clay bed, it also has solar panels around the sides as well as willow trees to prevent erosion by the "wave" action. When was very windy, "white waves" could be seen breaking against the sides, hence the willows to protect the lining, explained George Crane.

He told the visitors that water was extracted from 12 boreholes, which was then fed through an eight-inch ring main to land at Upton, Stokesby and Blofield. Crucially, Mr Crane has been monitoring the impact of extraction at three sites to ensure it is used as effectively as possible. And, vitally, three years of results have not shown any impact on the under-lying nearby levels of groundwater from extraction.

The new eight-foot wide computerised "robotic" 40.2m grading line, which just fitted inside the 40.5m packhouse, has transformed the business. It has always been a

struggle to recruit the dozen staff for winter grading work but now about four people were needed to keep the lines running. And, in addition grading throughput had risen from a five-year average of 25 tonnes per hour to about 45 tonnes in only the second season. And replacing a two-row harvester with a four-row Grimme was able to keep the line running efficiently.

Finally, Mr Crane demonstrated his investment in a heavy-duty baler or compactor for on-farm waste products like cardboard, fertiliser bags and sprayer containers. This had probably cut his costs of disposal by around £3,000 per year. For example, 12 bags of containers and bags had been compacted into one square bale, weighing about 450kg.

One of the biggest costs for farmers was disposing of bulky, light items. By compacting them into 450kg or 550kg wired bales, it reduced transport costs to recycling operations which tended to be located in the north-west of England. Further, the material didn't take up as much space.

The baler was operated in a securely bunded spray building, which also had a large overhead water tank to enable speedy filling of a Horsch sprayer capable of holding 6,000 litres. With low water pressure, the header tank enabled sprayers to be filled rapidly, he said.

He was keen to work with local farmers, which could possibly take the compactor, with its 45- tonne press capacity, on a trailer.

After a light supper at the White Horse, Upton, he was thanked by the chairman Jason Cantrill.