

Final meeting of 2014 – Wednesday, December 10.

A total of 52 members and guests were welcomed by the chairman, Neil Jordan, as well as the speaker, Peter Hough, of independent sugar business, Napier Brown.

Apologies – Jason Cantrill, David Hughes, David Faulkner, Chris Borrett, John Grimmer, Alastair Ross, Sir William Cubitt, Alastair Mackenzie, Russell Corfield.

A brief summary of the November meeting was read by the secretary – and available on the club's website. Members were invited to sign a new attendance book and it was reported that the new club silk tie might have arrived on a slow boat from China, possibly by Christmas. It would cost £20.

Competition results – Best two-acre of sugar beet – 1 GA Tallowin, Hickling, 2 DL Ritchie; 3 CH Callow and partners. Thanks to Sarah Bebb, of British Sugar.

Cereals – Barley: HBS Farms, Happisburgh, Cassata; 2 and 3 Milligen McLeod Farms, of East Roston, with Maris Otter and Concerto. Wheat – 1 Milligen McLeod Farms, Invicta; 2 LJ & JL Mitchell, Repps cum Bastwick, Dickens; 3 JA Paterson, of Dilham, Leeds. Trophies to be presented at the annual meeting. The judges, Chris Borrett and Matthew Adams, of Adams & Howling, were thanked.

New members

Philip Page, proposed by Alastair Wright, seconded John Tallowin.

Ben Liddiard, proposed Jim Holt, seconded by Peter Gardiner.

Elliott Simpson, proposed Tom Hume, seconded Louis Baugh.

The chairman praised an intrepid member, Emily Page, of Scratby, now a star of Mustard TV, who had successfully undertaken at her own expense a four-day Sahara Desert trek in southern Morocco. She had raised more than £1500 for YANA (You Are Not Alone).

The guest speaker, Peter Hough, who had more than three decades of first-hand experience in the sugar industry had driven down from Napier Brown's factory at Normanton, near Leeds. He gave an upbeat presentation on prospects for sugar – and surprisingly for beet growers. Emphasising the long-term potential in a global market, which was growing at about two per cent a year and currently stood at 182.5m tonnes.

He challenged beet growers to promote the natural and healthy aspects of sugar in a sensible diet. When he asked members about the caloric content of a gram of sugar – members suggested a range from 120 to 10 calories per gram. It was actually 4g – more than half the content of butter at 8 calories per gram and fat at 9g. That took members by surprise.

His firm, Napier Brown, which had been established in 1924, had five main arms including Renshaw, provider of a range of sugars for baking. The success of the Great British Bake Off, now spreading round the world, had been a boon.

Mr Hough, who said that he had imported sugar from more than 30 countries across Europe and the world over the years, stressed that Napier Brown was also major consumer of home-grown sugar. In a comprehensive review of global prospects, he suggested that there would be opportunities for English beet growers, especially those closer to factories in the long-term. The removal of Europe's quotas from October 1, 2017 was obviously a concern but there was a major market on the doorstep. And the cost of moving a bulky product likely sugar was likely to give opportunities for beet growers especially if global consumption continued to increase. The present low-levels of prices, currently 508 euro per tonne, ex-factory (the EU average) would yet fall further, possibly to range of E450 to E500.

Mr Hough suggested that production in France, especially with some refiners planning 30pc increases, and Holland did pose a considerable challenge. However, his firm, which uses home-grown sugar in its Whitworth range, also recognised the advantage of sustainable, long-term quality ingredients. A lively series of questions followed involving most of the members.

William Sands gave the vote of thanks and presented a club tie and a copy of Alec Douet's History of Norfolk Agriculture 1914 to 1984 to the speaker.

In closing the meeting, Mr Jordan wished all members a Happy Christmas and New Year.

Next meeting – Wednesday, January 14 with Sam Steggles talking about his range of goats' cheeses.