

Opening meeting of the 175th season

Wednesday, November 11, 2015 at the Norfolk Mead

Projecting farming's image.

The chairman, Luke Paterson, welcomed guests and 29 members to the first meeting at the Norfolk Mead in the club's 175th season.

A total of 14 members and guests, Caroline Drummond, chief executive of LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) and David Jones, farm manager of the Morley Agricultural Foundation, had enjoyed a roast belly of pork supper.

The chairman initiated the use of a wooden gavel, which was presented to the club by Marion Ritchie, widow of the late president, David Ritchie. It was engraved on a turned wooden base, complete with Stalham hoe: "In memory of David Ritchie – Active member of Stalham Farmers' Club. Chairman 1972. President 2010 to 2014."

As the last meeting had been held in January, which was fully reported on the club's website, the chairman proposed that the contents be noted.

Apologies – The secretary, Michael Pollitt, had been notified as follows: Jonathan Deane, vice-chairman, Abby Deane, Christopher Deane, Jason Cantrill, Greg Smith, Ted Witton, Michael Holliday, Paul Corfield, Ray Houlden, David Hughes, Robin Baines, Alistair Ross, Harry Buxton, Alex Dinsdale, Nick Hood, Rob Hirst, Louis Baugh, Frank Read and Alistair Wright.

It was also confirmed that the meeting qualified for two CPD points for BASIS and members were invited to complete the necessary declaration.

Honorary vice-president Nigel Wright announced that one of the club's oldest continuous members, Dr Ronnie Gibbs, had died on October 17. (A memorial service was being held on Saturday, November 14 at North Cove. Post-meeting note: A number of club members attended the service). As the "Father of the Club," he had been a great supporter for many decades, attending the annual dinner into his 90s, and had followed the activities of the club with great interest, said Mr Wright, who asked fellow members to be upstanding in his memory.

In a brief report, the secretary reported results of the whole crop sugar beet competition. A total of more than 550 acres from nine entrants had been judged by Ken Matthews. Results – 1 Robert Cook, of North End Farm, Sea Palling, with a crop grown at Ingham; 2 Alison Ritchie, of DL Ritchie, of Hall Farm, Ludham; 3 John Tallowin and his son, James, of GA Tallowin, of Willow Farm, Hickling. Entries were also received from CN Beck, Richard Hirst, Milligen McLeod, LF Papworth, Robin Baines, Louis Baugh.

The Potato Cup attracted eight entries – all with different varieties. This was a first for the competition, which was started in 1969. Results: 1 HBS Farms (William Sands) with a crop of Desiree, grown at Happsburgh; 2 Robert Cook with Opal, a crisping variety, on the coast at

Hempstead; 3 LF Papworth with Royale at Coltishall. Other varieties includes Lady Claire (John Lockhart, of Nova Scotia Farms); Estima (Thomas Love), Challenger (Robin Baines) and Russet Burbank on the farm of president, William Donald, and Markies (Nick Deane). The judge was Denis Walsh.

The guest speakers, Caroline Drummond, chief executive of LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) and David Jones, farm manager of the Morley Agricultural Foundation, were welcomed.

In her opening address, she said that the charity, launched at the Royal Show in 1991, now had a total annual income of about £1m and 14 staff, including many part-timers. The core aims and objectives had not really changed over the years but the launch of Open Farm Sunday in 2006 had really raised the charity's profile.

“Our vision is very much that the world is farming, eating and living sustainably. Our mission is to inspire and enable people to do that through prosperous agriculture, through good environment and community engagement. Those are the core values of sustainability,” she said. And it was exciting too that Defra has named 2016 as British Food and Farming Year – also coinciding with LEAF's silver jubilee.

It had also developed its “Marque” of quality assurance over the past 15 years. “About 25pc of UK fruit and vegetables is now LEAF Marque accredited,” she added.

Another example included Unilever, which offered a £15 tonne premium for oilseed rape used in the baking, cooking and spreads' arm of the business. “Unilever wants 100pc of their supply chain to be sustainable produced by 2020 – five years from now. They're utilised LEAF Marque in the UK as part of that process. That is incredibly important.”

While consumers want cheap food and high animal welfare, they also want their food sustainability produced – said 82pc of Asda's customers.

As consumers were buying more food out of the home, it was a further opportunity for producers, she said. “50pc of our calories are now consumed out of the home – and that has grown by 15pc over the past two years. That is the sheer growth of the likes of Prêt-A-Manager, Starbucks, and Subway. Food and how we eat food is changing incredibly rapidly.”

In the 10th Open Farm Sunday event, it attracted 291,000 visitors to 389 farms, involving 10,000 helpers. Amazingly, 25pc of visitors had never been on a farm before. And in terms of attendance, 18pc of OFS events had less than 100 visitors, 19pc over 1,000 and 21pc over 3,000 visitors.

“We've now extended OFS to include Open Farm Schools Day. The whole of June is now Open Farm Schools' Day,” she said.

Farmers have a great story to tell. “We've got modern technology, we use it wisely, we use it safely, and we're highly professional as an industry,” said added.

David Jones, of Morley, also delivered an upbeat message and also used his one-metre square grid to tell his home-grown food story. A single square of malting barley will produce the malt for at least 10 bottles of beer, he said, while a square of wheat would make the flour for a loaf or two of bread. And he asked members how much beer could be brewed from a single hectare of malting barley – enough to fill a line of pint glasses stretching 8.5km!

After some considerable discussion, Andrew Spinks, was asked to propose a vote of thanks and the meeting closed at 8.50pm. Then Caroline was presented with a pair of wellies and David was given a silk club tie.

The chairman reminded members that the next meeting would be held on Wednesday, December 9 (7.30pm) when Rob Ferguson would be talking about his specialist tourism business. Members were also invited to join the chairman at the supper beforehand at 6pm.



