

## Walcott Visit 10.7.19

Going organic - Champion Norfolk potato grower Thomas Love is dipping a toe into organic production.

On a tour of the family's 600 hectare farm, Mr Love said 12ha of fertile silty loam will be converted over the next two years to grow baby leaf salads for Martham-based East Coast Growers.

It is expected that the first organic crop would be harvested in 2021 after the field had been in ryegrass for 18 months.

The farm also grows about 80pc of the country's home-grown autumn celery for G's, which will be harvested between mid-October and November.

Mr Love, president of Stalham Farmers' Club, welcomed about 100 members to Walcott Farms as well as a large number from the East Norfolk branch of the National Farmers' Union.

Three tractors and trailers provided by members including Richard Hirst and Simon Daniels took the party around the farm as Mr Love said that the potato enterprise, extending to some 320ha, was central to the business.

In 2011, a total of about £1m had been invested in machinery for the potato enterprise by switching to 2.7m rows instead of the more conventional 1.8m. In summary, it achieved a 50pc increase in planting/ harvesting output and cut wheelings by 30pc – resulting in a seven per cent rise in total output.

Growing some 14,000 tonnes of processing varieties a year, mainly for McCain's, Birds Eye and Bartlett, he said the availability of water for irrigation was crucial.

The former NFU county chairman took visitors along the sea front, where an £18m project to pump and dump sand dredged from the North Sea will start on Sunday, July 14. The aim will be to raise the height of the beach at Walcott by about 10ft.



He could recall as a young boy that the height of the sand had been almost as high as the concrete sea wall.

Mr Love said that a total of 120 acres of farmland at Walcott had been flooded in 2013 and the threat from the sea remained a constant threat. When the water receded, returning to the sea via Great Yarmouth, it had left quantities of rubbish including plastic waste and salt had damaged the land. He wondered whether these salt incursions could have added to the headaches in and around Catfield fen.

The extent of the rapid erosion of cliffs at Happisburgh was also quite shocking. In the past 20 or so years, it had receded at least 123 metres. The farm lost two acres to the sea in 2007 and another two acres in 2013.



While rocks had been moved closer to protect the cliffs, he had lost 40 metres to the sea so far this year where there was no hard protection.

Henry Alston, chairman, thanked Mr Love, his wife Helen, and son William, for hosting a fascinating visit. Members enjoyed a gammon supper to end a very enjoyable evening.