

HOLT & DISTRICT FARMERS' CLUB

FOUNDED 1948

President: Peter Perry-Warnes

Chairman: Martin Jensen

Vice-Chairman: Andrew Ross

www.holtfarmers.club

POLLITT'S PIECE on CLABON'S CHALLENGE to ROSS as BOSS

Triple whammy of challenges for growers Malting barley growers face a triple whammy of challenges after one of the toughest harvests for decades, according to a leading Norfolk maltster.

A combination of declining beer consumption, falling whisky sales and a global glut of 148.7m tonnes of barley have caused major headaches for maltsters around the world.

Speaking at Holt & District Farmers' Club's 75th annual meeting at the Feathers, Holt, Rebecca Gee, grain procurement director of the Great Ryburgh-based Crisp Malting Group, said that there was light at the end of the tunnel.

She said that the group, one of the world's top 10 maltsters, would stick by and support its growers with its long-term sourcing contracts. Earlier, the club's president, Peter Perry-Warnes, warned that farmers could not afford to grow malting barley at around £150 tonne.

Given the scale of barley production with quality crops around the world including Canada, Australia, Argentina and in Europe, maltsters were facing acute challenges. And closer to home, barley from France and especially Denmark was piling on price pressure. As a result, the group's Great Ryburgh maltings were not operating at peak because of slacker demand, she added.

In addition, the switch to alcohol-free and low alcohol beers was another factor. Sales of Scotch whisky had been hit by a further combination of increased distilling capacity and a fall in sales to vital export markets like the USA caused by tariff uncertainties. But promotional efforts by brewers had shown encouraging signs. However, in the longer term, Scotch whisky sales are expected to recover with industry forecasts indicating a 6.5pc growth in demand by 2035. In addition, potentially lower import duties on spirits such as whisky could boost demand in India and possibly China and the UK was leading these efforts.

Further, malt was a key ingredient in so many foodstuffs and the rapidly-expanding demanded for plant foods was another opportunity. Recognising that growers of malting barley had faced challenges from a very difficult harvest, there were indications that over time the market could be moving closer into balance.

Chris Borrett, of grain merchants Adams & Howling, which runs the annual competition, had already seen significant production cuts of between 25 and 40pc in the barley acreage for the 2026 harvest.



A Champion grower retains supreme title North Norfolk champion barley grower Andrew Ross retained his title in most of the most challenging harvests for years.

A late May rain saved his crop of Buccaneer malting barley in Holt & District Farmers' Club's annual competition.

Mr Ross, of Cannister Hall Farm, Houghton St Giles, who was only the third double winner of the malting barley championship in almost 70 years in 2024, again produced a winner.

The variety, Buccaneer, was judged the best of the 55 samples by Rebecca Gee, grain procurement director of the Crisp Malting Group.

Mr Ross said that his winning crop was drilled in early October on some slightly stronger land. It was probably saved by a late May rain and again in June whereas another crop of Buccaneer on lighter, sandier land at Little Snoring struggled.



The reserve championship sample of Diablo, grown by F J Clabon, of North Walsham, was twice irrigated. It beat the other 22 spring-sown samples of Laureate.

Chris Borrett, of grain merchants Adams & Howling, thanked volunteers Bill van Poortvliet, Stuart Ross and John Cragg for collecting samples - slightly down on last year's total of 66.

A special award was made to Mr Cragg, now in his 88th year, who had decided to stand down from the sampling team as well as long service on the club's committee.

Members elected Peter Perry-Warnes, who becomes only the sixth president since the club was founded in 1948. He succeeds Richard Brooks, who stood down after three years. While Mr Brooks was unable to attend, the chairman, Martin Jensen and secretary Tim Nicholson, would make a presentation on behalf of members.

He said that he had been encouraged to join the club almost 40 years ago at the age of 28. He urged fellow members to play their part in encouraging younger members of the wider agricultural community to join the club.

The chairman, Martin Jensen, welcomed about 40 members to the 75th annual meeting on Tuesday, October 14, 2025.



Dr Darren Heavens, of the Earlham Institute, outlined research to help farmers and growers predict potentially costly crop diseases. An early warning system, which could reduce or minimise pesticide use was on the cards and could be in farmers' field within five years, he suggested. He was thanked by Jim Alston. Results - Supreme championship: Andrew Ross, of Houghton St Giles, with Buccaneer. The Charles Mott-Radclyffe Cup (winter varieties) – 1 Mr A Ross; 2 Peter Perry-Warnes (Craft); 3 Jack Hammond, Aldborough Farms (Buccaneer). The Hammond Trophy (spring) – 1 F J Clabon (Diablo); 2 Stratton Streles Farms (Laureate); 3 Richard Seaman, of T M Seaman (Laureate).

Michael

michaelbpollitt (michaelbpollitt@btinternet.com)

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Hon. Secretary: T. P. S. Nicholson 6 Great Yard The Street, Saxthorpe Norwich NR117AH 07464 991741
tim_nicholson@ymail.com

Hon. Treasurer: L. A. J. P. Hill Summerhill House 1 Sculthorpe Road Fakenham NR21 9HA 07811 034215
laurie.hill@larking-gowen.co.uk