

HOLT & DISTRICT FARMERS' CLUB

FOUNDED 1948

President: Peter Perry-Warnes

Chairman: Martin Jensen

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www.holtfarmers.club

2026 AGM Review

A ray of sunshine might bring some cheer to hard-pressed malting barley growers

Tentative signs of a revival in demand for Scotch whisky cheered members of a leading Norfolk farmers' club.

A combination of a gradual decline in beer sales – at home and abroad – and the troubled whisky distilling sector had depressed demand for prime quality malt, said Jake Lambert, operations director of the Crisp Malting Group.

Speaking at the Feathers, Holt, to about 30 members and guests of the club after the 76th annual meeting of Holt & District Farmers' Club on Tuesday, October 13, he said that for the first time for some years some distillers in Scotland had bought admittedly small tonnages of cut-price malt from Europe.

It was a measure of the relentless drive to cut costs in an over-supplied industry, he said.

Some whisky distilleries had closed or been shut for longer periods over the summer months, which had contributed to the lack of demand for malt. But, while the distilling sector was being hit by this “blip,” the longer-term demand for premium, quality Scotch whisky was more encouraging.

Closer to home, he said that the Crisp Malting Group – incidentally one of the world's top ten maltsters - had been forced to curb production to about 80pc of capacity as demand had fallen.

But, in recent weeks there had been signs of improvement in demand. “In fact, we've had to respond by producing something like six months' production in the final quarter of the year,” he added.

Mr Lambert, who had 17 years' experience on the malting floor with Crisp, initially at Mistley in Essex, praised growers across the region for continuing to produce high-quality malting barley. It has been a testing year with much higher nitrogen levels than usual.



Growers, especially in Norfolk, through a long-term supply partnership with two merchants and Crisp Malt, sent large tonnages north of the border to the distilling industry.

And while some users of malt were tempted to switch to supplies of unknown quality, and even import, Crisp was malting locally-produced barley. “We can trace the source of malt in every bag to the very field where it was grown in just two hours – showing the provenance,” he said.

A reduction in tariffs to zero from July following the visit of King Charles to the USA may have given the industry some confidence. And India had reduced Scotch whisky tariffs from 150pc to 75pc.

Confidence in distilling was knocked when in April 2026 President Trump had imposed a 10pc tariff on Scotch. But his change of heart in July was obviously welcome.

There were also hints that demand for real cask ale was starting to improve, noted Chris Borrett, of grain merchants Adams & Howling. He noted that in Holt’s latest competition of 55 entries, there was only one sample of Maris Otter which was particularly favoured by specialist brewers.



1st Spring barley champion and Hammond Trophy winner Kees Jones with (left) Chris Borrett, and Jake Lambert (right), of Crisp Malt.



2nd Supreme malting barley champion Jack Hammond with left, Chris Borrett, of Adams & Howling, and Jake Lambert (centre), operations director of Crisp Malt.



3rd Former club president and chairman Bill van Poortvliet retires after 45 years' service, with retiring chairman, Martin Jensen, right.

Micheal Pollitt

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