

West Sussex Growers' Association (WSGA)

AGM & Executive Meeting – 11th April 2016

Annual Report to Members – John Hall (Consultant)

I am pleased to report on the main activities of the Association with which we have been involved during the past year.

1. Plan to Grow Conference – 18th November 2015

More than 120 people attended our first conference at Farbridge, West Dean on Wednesday 18th November 2015.

The key sponsors for the day were: HSBC, NFU, Chichester District Council, Langmead Group, NFU Mutual and WSGA. In addition, a number of business exhibitors also made a valuable contribution.

The Chairman for the day was Steve Oates (Economic Development Manager at CDC) and the opening speech was given by Tony Dignum (Leader of Chichester District Council).

- Session One: Economics & Planning Development; was chaired by William White (Regional Director at NFU) and included the following speakers: Martin Redfearn (Regional Agricultural Director at HSBC), Andrew Frost (Head of Planning at CDC), Gary Taylor (Chairman of AHDB-Horticulture) and Robert Searle (Finance Director at Tangmere Airfield Nurseries).
- Session Two: Water; was chaired by John Hall (WSGA & Horticultural Consultant) and included the following speakers: James Humphrys (Environment Agency Area Manager of Solent & South Downs), Jerry Knox (Associate Professor at Cranfield University) and Paul Dracott (East Malling Research).
- Session Three: Smart Technology – The Future; was chaired by Chris Moncrieff (Production Director at Vitacress) and included the following speakers: Helen Ferrier (NFU Chief Science & Regulatory Affairs Advisor), Robert Heikens (Energy 4 Growth) and Matthew Howard (Lecturer in Robotics Research at Cranfield University).

Feedback since the conference has been extremely positive and the Executive is looking into the possibility of future conferences.

2. National Living Wage

The following is an extract of an email concerning the National Living Wage that was sent to our local MPs on 27th October 2015:-

West Sussex Growers' Association (WSGA) would like to draw your attention to the fact that Kent MP, Gordon Henderson, has secured a Westminster Hall debate on the effect of the

living wage on our Industry at 16.00, Wednesday 28 October 2015. Please find attached a copy of the National Farmers' Union (NFU) briefing paper that addresses the concerns of the Agricultural & Horticultural Industries.

As you are already aware, WSGA members produce over £1billion of fresh produce and employ more than 7,000 people (FTE) in the Arun & Chichester Districts. Although WSGA supports the principle of the National Living Wage, we have a number of very serious concerns:-

- The planned sudden increase in the NLW will put many jobs and businesses at risk.*
- This dramatic wage increase will not just affect those few workers on the lowest hourly rate in our Industry, but will have a differential knock on effect right up through the pay scales.*
- Most of our members supply fresh produce direct to retailers throughout the UK. In an already very competitive market, retailers are currently putting more and more pressure on suppliers' margins. The likelihood of farmers & growers being able to pass wage rises on to retailers and customers is therefore zero.*

3. Improvements to the A27

a) Options

WSGA is fully engaged in the debate and consultations to consider improvement options to the A27. A small working group has been set up and so far we have had meetings with Mott MacDonald (Consultants to Highways England) and West Sussex County Council (WSSC).

b) Transport Assessment

In order to add some useful research to the A27 debate; WSGA is in the process of carrying out a Transport Assessment of members businesses. The survey will be completed towards the end of April 2016 and the aggregated results will be shared with Mott MacDonald, Highways England, WSSC, CDC and Chichester Chamber of Commerce.

4. Chichester District Council (CDC) – 9th September 2015

22 CDC Councillors and 10 CDC Officers took part in a visit to a number of fresh produce businesses in the CDC area including: Tangmere Airfield Nurseries (Peppers), Tinwood Estate (Vineyard), Chalder Farm (Dairy Cows), Carolines Dairy (Icecream) and Madestein UK (Cut Herbs).

This was a hugely successful day, giving CDC Councillors and Officers an opportunity to see for themselves what fantastic fresh produce businesses operate in their District.

5. Arun District Council (ADC)

WSGA has been very encouraged by the positive support received from ADC for the development of the Horticultural Industry in the area.

ADC has recently carried out a feasibility study into the provision of Food Enterprise Zones – specifically for horticulture. Reading Agricultural Consultants have completed the feasibility study for ADC and the Council is currently considering the report.

6. Coast to Capital and Coastal West Sussex Partnership

Coast to Capital (C2C) is the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) for our region, made up of five areas, including Coastal West Sussex. WSGA has a permanent seat on the Coastal West Sussex Partnership Board and Graham Bryant and I represented the Association at the C2C Forum on 3rd November 2015. Many regional issues were discussed; such as transport, a second runway for Gatwick Airport and continuing problems with broadband in rural areas.

The lack of progress with improvements to the A27 was highlighted by Graham, with many of the delegates agreeing that this issue should be a C2C priority.

A *Rural Statement* will be circulated by C2C shortly, illustrating some of the socio-economic issues and opportunities for rural businesses in the C2C area.

7. Water

Meetings have continued to be held with NFU, the Environment Agency, Portsmouth Water and Southern Water and other stakeholders to address issues around the planned reforms to water abstraction and water trading.

A visit to WSGA nurseries and a round table discussion with growers and stakeholders is planned for 17th May 2016. Our guests will include Sarah Hendry (Defra Director) and Henry Leveson-Gower (Defra Leader - Abstraction Reform).

8. University of Chichester

The University of Chichester has won a grant of £8m from the Growth Fund through Coast to Capital (C2C) to fund a new Engineering & Technology Centre at the Bognor Regis Campus. Some of the post graduate courses being developed will be attractive to managers currently working in the Agricultural, Horticultural and Associated Industries.

9. Broadband and Telecommunications

During the last year, WSCC has committed a further £6m towards the “*better connected*” initiative to bring most areas up to *superfast* levels of +24Mb. There is major concern that broadband and telecommunications connectivity and speed are still very poor in so many areas. WSGA representatives raise this subject at every available opportunity.

10. Biomass, Combined Heat & Power (CHP) & Alternative Energy

7 x 1MW and a number of smaller biomass boilers have been installed on members’ nurseries during the last 12 months. Other installations are in progress and new projects are being considered. The Forestry Commission has received a grant of £600k from C2C towards the cost of improving the supply chain for wood fuel in the SE of England. During the past 12 months, many members have replaced and upgraded CHP engines that generate electricity for the National Grid, and others are in the process. There are also a number of solar farms operating on members land, and many photo voltaic (PV) installations on packhouse and other roofs, also generating for the National Grid,

11. Website

During the year, the WSGA website has been redeveloped to provide an improved resource for members and stakeholders. www.wsga.co.uk

12. Autumn Dinner – 18th November 2015

Following on from the Plan to Grow Conference, 75 people attended the 89th WSGA Autumn Dinner at Farbridge, West Dean.

All the ingredients for the Dinner were sourced locally, including: Selsey crab & mackerel, Chichester rye bread, pork from Adsdean Farm, Funtington, with seasonal vegetables, autumn berries from Hall Hunter, Chichester and ice cream from Carolines Dairy at Sidlesham. Lychgate White and Pinot Noir wines were from the Bolney Estate at Bolney and the Crafted Coffee Company of Lavant provided freshly brewed coffee.

The wine from Bolney Estates was sponsored by Fargro, the table poinsettias were donated by Hill Brothers and Roger Lapin, the table magician, was sponsored by John Hall Consulting.

The venue and dinner were enjoyed by a good cross section of friends and colleagues from within West Sussex Growers' Association and the wider community. WSGA Chairman, Graham Bryant, wound up the evening with an entertaining speech.

The sweepstake raised £380 towards our newly established "WSGA Young Growers' Fund".

13. Visitors and other meetings during the Year

Senior members of the HTA (Carol Paris, Raoul Curtis-Machin & Martin Simmons) visited WSGA nurseries on 23rd April 2015.

A very successful LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) Demonstration Farm day was held at Eric Wall's Pollards Nursery and Tangmere Airfield Nurseries on 13th May 2015.

Gary Taylor (Chairman of HDC), Kathleen Kelliher (Defra Team Leader – Horticulture & Potatoes) and Barbara Silberstein (Defra), visited WSGA nurseries on 21st May 2015.

A meeting was held on 4th June 2015 at Ardingly with Lord Gardiner (Defra) at the South of England Show. The main topics raised were those effecting barriers to growth; including: planning issues with Local Authorities and poor infrastructure, including broadband and telecoms.

I attended a conference at Defra on 4th August 2015 to discuss strategies for the Future of Farming over the next 25 years. Most of the discussions centred on barriers to growth that cause poor productivity.

On the 11th September 2015 we hosted a visit from Professor Salah Sukkarieh (University of Sydney – robotics & automation specialist), Bill Parker and Dr Jon knight (AHDB) and Dr Matthew Howard (Kings College, London – lecturer in robotics).

WSGA members took part in a water workshop with East Malling Research at Avisford Park Hotel on 23rd September 2016.

Jane King (CEO-AHDB) spent a very useful day visiting members nurseries on 5th October 2016.

On 10th November 2016, AHDB & IPPS held a nursery tour of WSGA businesses, followed by a well-attended seminar and dinner at the Chichester Park Hotel.

14. Upcoming Events & Meetings – 2016

11th April – WSGA – AGM + Executive meeting – Aldingbourne

12th April – C2C – Rural Strategy Group meeting – Billingshurst

12th April – NFU – EU Debate – Ardingly

9th May – Portsmouth Water – Customer Group meeting – Havant

17th May – Sarah Hendry (Defra Director) – Water meeting – Chichester

26th May – Ali Capper (NFU Horti Board Chair) – Growers visit

5th June – Open Farm Sunday

6th June – WSGA – Executive meeting – Aldingbourne

12th July – Coastal Wes Sussex Partnership meeting – Littlehampton

12th Sept – WSGA – Executive meeting – Aldingbourne

15. Thank You

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Graham Bryant (Chairman), Paul Bennett (Vice Chairman), Colin Frampton (President), David Fox (Secretary) and the Executive Committee for their support; and in particular I would like to thank all those members who gave up their valuable time in hosting and helping with the numerous events that have taken place over the last 12 months.

John Hall – 11th April 2016

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