

COBREY Farms at Coughton near Ross-on-Wye is one of the biggest producers of asparagus in the UK and members of Kyrle Probus, their wives and guests were recently given an enthralling insight into how this once traditional stock farm has been transformed into a high tech enterprise, serving all the major supermarkets in the country.

Cobrey Farms is a family partnership of John Chinn, his wife Gay and their sons Henry and Chris, who are the fourth generation of Chinns to farm at Cobrey.

Nearly 1,500 acres is devoted to growing asparagus and the business employs 32 full-time and some 1,000 temporary seasonal staff. The asparagus production aims to provide a long season, high quality product for supply to all the major UK supermarkets, wholesale markets and directly to caterers and restaurants.

John presented a fascinating overview of the business and then took the Probus group, having now donned protective hairnets and coats, on a tour of the packhouse.

They saw how the asparagus is washed and cooled immediately after harvesting to maintain its freshness and how the computer-controlled grading and packaging lines produce a consistent quality and packaged end product. In all, 125,000 packs of asparagus come off the production line each day in the peak season. Some seven million packs are produced under the 'Wye Valley Asparagus' label each year.

The Chinns have successfully extended the growing season from February to November, by using different varieties and also polythene crop covers. They introduced purple asparagus to the UK in 2009 and last year launched Wye Valley white asparagus.

The business also produces blueberries and rhubarb for the supermarket trade, while potatoes are grown for Tyrrell, the Herefordshire crisp makers and salad potatoes also for supermarkets. Cobrey Farms also has its own vineyard, producing a high quality sparkling wine employing the 'methode traditioal' used in Champagne production.

After its tour of the packhouse, the Probus group enjoyed a glass of the Chinn-Chinn sparkling wine and club president Brian Wozencroft thanked John for one of the most interesting visits Kyrle Probus had experienced in many a year. As everyone raised their glasses, it really was a case of Chinn, Chinn!

Following the visit, the Probus group enjoyed a convivial lunch at the Cross Keys, Goodrich, which included asparagus, supplied of course by Cobrey Farms.



John Chinn talks to the Probus visitors about the Cobrey Farms enterprise.