

Visit to Condimentum and Colman's of Norwich - October 2023

Mustard grower Will Sands and fellow members of Stalham Farmers' Club saw his first crop through the Condiment mill at Easton.

It takes just 45 minutes for the state-of-the-art double superfine mill – one of only three in the world - to process each batch of the finest ingredients for Colman's Mustard range.

Dave Martin, chief executive, welcomed about 20 club members to the mill, which processed the first locally-grown crops of mint for Colman's in May 2020. And just six months earlier, shortly before Christmas, the first mustard flour was milled at Colman's Close.

It had cost Condimentum, which is two-thirds owned by farmer growers, about £11m to build Europe's only superfine mustard mill. There were only two other similar mills in the world, one in Wisconsin, United States, and the other in Ontario, Canada, he said.

Mr Martin said that the mill was highly efficient and capable of achieving an 82pc flour extraction – almost 50pc more efficient than the north American mills. Crucially, the milling operation had been designed and engineered to replicate the same flour quality as formerly milled at Carrow Road. "It is the same traditional gravity mill," he added. But, the very latest electronic control systems ensure that consistently, high grades of mustard flour are produced and there are even more cleaners and about 200 sieving operations than before.

In almost three years, the business has expanded rapidly and Condimentum has ambitious plans to grow the business further with investment of about £8m over the next five years to 2028. The mill could handle three times the current annual volume of about 4,200 tonnes.

Mr Martin explained that entire operation involved partners including Unilever and crucially, English Mustard Growers, which had been working closely with a leading specialist seed breeder, Elsoms, to develop new purer, varieties of white and brown mustard.

As production was being stepped up, more growers would be needed. As Mr Sands, club chairman, explained, after growing the crop for the first time on the family's farm at Brunstead, he was planning to sow 15ha (37 acres) of mustard in 2024. Ideally, he would have liked to grow a winter-own white mustard crop for an earlier harvest but given the autumn rainfall, he would have to plant in the spring.

Mr Martin and Stalham member, David Bond, who is also the growers' representative, on the tour of the site, which currently employs a total of 28 staff. They were thanked by Mr Sands, who presented them with silk ties.