

Case study

One-to-one mentor for a new entrant to farming

Support provided by FAS: Identifying a suitable mentor and providing funding support



Name & business: **Deborah Richardson-Webb, Organic Smallholder**

Deborah runs the Lint Mill a mixed smallholding located in Scotland's Southern Uplands, adopting a holistic and regenerative approach to land and animal management while promoting rare breeds. The land consists primarily of permanent, unimproved pasture, with specific areas managed for wildlife. Additionally, a no-dig kitchen garden produces nutrient-rich fruit and vegetables.

Certified organic by the Soil Association since 2016, the Lint Mill champions organic practices and highlights the importance of biodiversity in both land stewardship and livestock management.

How did you become a mentor?

I became a mentor after accessing some of the excellent support provided by FAS. While seeking specialist advice for our own enterprise, it was suggested that my experience could be valuable to others, particularly those interested in regenerative and organic farming on a small scale.

I am passionate about fostering farm diversity, which I believe is vital for building resilience in the face of the climate crisis. My interests include improving soil health and the role of ruminants in grassland management. Restoring an old hay meadow over the past three years has been both rewarding and educational. I am inspired by debates in the regenerative farming movement and actively pursue training to expand my knowledge, which I enjoy sharing with my mentees.

What sort of tasks have you helped your mentees with?

Mentoring someone at the start of their farming journey often involves guiding them in identifying and prioritising key areas for developing their business. This can range from selecting the most suitable sheep breed for their land to addressing work/life balance to prevent burnout. Supporting mentees with business planning and holistic decision-making has also been a significant part of the process.

Did you need any special qualifications to receive 'mentor' status from FAS?

I think recognising your own experience is an important first step. Being a confident communicator is equally essential, along with a genuine interest in others, the ability to listen to their needs, and building strong relationships – these are at the heart of effective mentoring.



What does mentoring involve?

We initially meet at the mentee's farm and agree on how we would like to work together. Mentoring is usually a series of ongoing conversations driven by the mentee's needs. They can be face-to-face, virtual meetings, or email support. In practice, my mentoring usually involves all three.

"The FAS package generously offers up to four days of support over a period of 12 months."

Do you think mentoring is beneficial to new farmers?

I think mentoring is invaluable. We run a program of courses called 'Learn at The Lint Mill' and offer many courses, including 'A Beginner's Guide to Organic Smallholding', to inspire others who are thinking of starting on this journey. This was borne out of wishing there had been more support when we started out.

How do you generally structure your time with your mentees?

Mentoring is a very individual process negotiated between the mentor and mentee. It's important to be flexible and be willing to adjust the plan as the relationship develops.

I like to get a feel for the mentee's context, so visiting their farm is an essential first step. Email support is also useful, and where possible, I like to share resources that I think will benefit my mentee. I'm happy to do virtual meetings but happier in my wellies on the land, discussing my mentee's ideas in situ.

Do you feel you got anything out of the experience, professionally or personally?

"Mentoring someone who is at a different point in their journey is a very revealing and rewarding experience."

It is certainly not a one-way process. Sometimes the mentee's questions require an honest and open scrutiny of my own practice, and this can be invaluable for my development.

What advice would you give to someone interested in applying to become a mentor?

Speak to one of the team at FAS. They are very helpful and have a good understanding of what the sector needs. Take some time to articulate your own experience and areas of expertise.

View from mentee of Deborah Richardson-Webb

Deborah has been a flexible and attentive mentor, keen to listen to ideas and guide decisions using her wealth of knowledge and experience. She has supported us through the early days of establishing our smallholding and has been an excellent sounding board for various enterprises that we have discussed. Deborah has been invaluable in making the initial process of establishing our business less daunting!

For further information about the support available, please visit www.fas.scot

Or contact us
T: 0300 323 0161
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