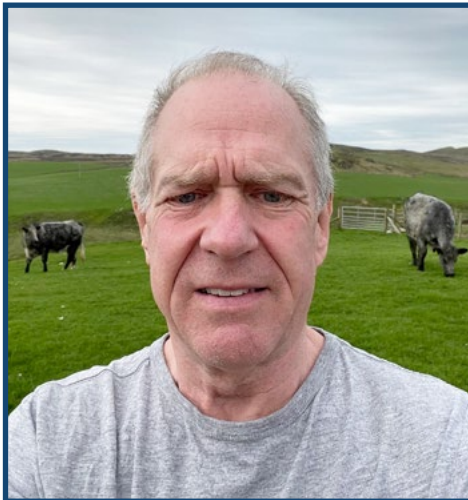


## Case study

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

Support provided by FAS: Providing funding support to enable mentor support from a neighbour



### Name & business: **Roderick MacFarlane, Tormisdale Farm**

Roderick transitioned from running his own telecommunications company to buying a farm with his wife. Both familiar with farm life, they seized an opportunity on the West Coast of Islay. Despite their desire to raise cattle, they lacked experience and needed external support.

Here, Roderick shares how they sought help from their neighbour, Peter McDermid, a third-generation beef farmer.

### How did you get started in farming/crofting?

I ran my own telecommunications company for many years before retiring in 2015. As a telecommunications consultant, I now have the flexibility to work from anywhere. My wife, Jessie, is from Islay, where we vacation frequently. She grew up on Dunlossit Estate, where her father worked at Keills Farm.

My father ran a dairy farm in Ayrshire until he passed away when I was in my 20s. Jessie and I often talked about retiring to a small holding, but we hadn't made any serious plans. That changed when we saw a two-line advert in the 'Ileach,' Islay's fortnightly paper: a 250-acre farm on the West Coast of Islay with one mile of Atlantic coastline, a farmhouse, and a byre. Three months later, we bought the farm. Jessie closed her lingerie business, packed a bag, and moved. It was a huge leap of faith!

### Why did you apply for mentoring support?

We wanted to raise cattle but had no experience with beef cattle, so we sought help from our neighbour, Peter McDermid, a third-generation beef farmer. Peter assisted us in setting up a handling area and provided guidance on general cattle handling and calving. His support gave us greater confidence. He also helped us build a new shed for overwintering our calves. Now, we have established policies for feeding, replacing breeding stock, and selecting a bull. Peter's gentle approach with cattle, which earned their trust, aligned perfectly with our own ethos.

“...we learned a lot and gained the confidence to make major decisions with our cattle.”



## **How did you find the process of applying for mentoring?**

The application process was straight forward to apply and administer.

## **How did you find your mentor?**

Jessie knew Peter and his family from their school days on Islay. I met him shortly after our move and quickly learned of his esteemed reputation in the beef cattle community. His gentle nature with livestock matched mine, making him the perfect fit when this opportunity arose.

“Without his guidance, it would have taken us much longer and involved more mistakes to reach this point.”

## **What did your mentor help you with?**

Peter initially helped us set up our cattle handling system and crush, followed by the installation of a calving gate. As calving approached, he regularly walked through the cattle with us, explaining what to look for and when to intervene. When our third cow had difficulties with an upside-down, likely dead calf, we called Peter and the vet. Peter helped us quickly and safely secure the cow, assisting the vet and myself during the calving process. Although the calf was dead and it was a difficult delivery, we managed without harm to the cow. Peter’s advice on the calving gate and its placement made the process safe and controlled.

## **How did you and your mentor structure your mentoring sessions?**

The sessions on cattle handling, equipment setup, and processes like dosing were pre-arranged to suit both our schedules. Other mentoring, such as during calving and discussions on feed, were more impromptu and conducted over the phone.

## **Would you recommend mentoring to other farmers?**

Yes, we learned a lot and gained the confidence to make major decisions with our cattle. We’ve increased our herd to 11 breeding cows, adjusted the dates for introducing our bull, and improved feed production and cattle management.

## **What benefits do you anticipate for your business as a result of mentoring?**

Improved end product, animal welfare and safety of operations.

## **Would you recommend FAS support services to other farmers?**

Yes, this is a great service. As newcomers to farming, we needed all the help we could get, but I believe any farmer can benefit from finding the right mentor.

“As newcomers to farming, we needed all the help we could get, but I believe any farmer can benefit from finding the right mentor.”

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**For further information about the support available, please visit [www.fas.scot](http://www.fas.scot)**

**Or contact us**  
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