



BRITISH GRASSLAND SOCIETY  
**BGS GRAZING  
PARTNERS**



There are some great consultants and advisers in the UK, but we feel there are not enough grazing experts to make the impact that could be achieved by using farmer-mentors to share their knowledge with other local farmers and support them in making decisions.

On her Nuffield Farming Scholarship travels, Sara Gregson saw how successful Canada's Grazing Mentors scheme, which had started in 2003, had been. By 2008 it had grown to 60 mentors, each helping five or more farmers/year. "These mentors were providing a spark and the farmers they visited were keen to speak of the benefits of having a farmer to talk through their own farm situation and to find ways to improve their grazing management," says Sara.

With BGS past president Sarah Byford, president elect Tony Evans and society director Jessica Buss, the idea has been developed into the BGS Grazing Partners initiative. The scheme will offer those asking us for help with their grazing the personal interest from an independent, objective, knowledgeable outsider who can also point them to other resources, and which is completely relevant to his/her farm.

We believe this will give them the confidence to do things differently and to seek further support, which is available to them in discussion groups, as well as through the BGS network.

The farmers who become mentors will be trained in mentoring/facilitation skills that, as well as allowing them to mentor farmers through this scheme, will help them manage staff and take a more active part in or to run discussion group meetings. The scheme will also give mentors an additional income stream, plus the satisfaction of helping others.

For a start the farmers asking for a mentor will sign up for two on-farm visits. This level 1 package of 7-8 hours of their mentor's time will be funded by those supporting this scheme, with the farmer making a small commitment of £50 as a joining fee. But the scheme has further support packages they can buy from their mentor if they feel they want more help.

The initial supporting partners for the scheme are DairyCo and EBLEX - both funding three mentors and up to nine farmers asking for help, the National Trust - funding one mentor and up to three farmers this year – and BGS, hopefully with assistance from the Duchy College Rural Business School VTS funding through the Rural

Development Programme for England in the south west - funding two mentors and up to six farms.