

## Case study

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

Support provided by FAS: subsidised funding for one-to-one consultancy time with a personal mentor



### Name & business: **Iain Withers, Narrowboat Farm**

In April 2017, Iain Withers, a new entrant to farming, started his own business – Narrowboat Farm, a small-scale market garden in Linlithgow. To help get the business off to a good start, Iain contacted the Farm Advisory Service (FAS) to access funding support for a personal mentor who could provide advice and guidance on starting up a farming enterprise.

Here, Iain explains how he got started and gives his thoughts on mentoring and the support provided by FAS.

### How did you get into farming?

I was working in the cycling business beforehand but had always been interested in the environment and eco-living. It was that [interest] that inspired me to make the change to farming.

My business is a market garden, so mainly horticulture. Next year will be our first growing season, so I'm very much in the early stages right now.

### Why did you apply for mentoring support?

'I already had a personal contact that I met some time ago while on a farming course.

'By working on his own farm he had built up a lot of experience and his horticultural knowledge was phenomenal. He provided informal advice when I started up, which I was grateful for. However, I thought I would apply for mentoring support through FAS to make it a more formal arrangement going forward and to recompense him for his time.

### How did you find the process of applying for funding through FAS?

'It [the application process] wasn't too bad actually. I think it was only a couple of weeks between me submitting my application and it being approved.

'Compared with some other paperwork I've had to do as part of my business, it was a doddle.'



Going through FAS was helpful in that the programme was able to formally recognise his expertise and award him mentor status. Meaning his time could be compensated financially.





## What support did you receive?

‘My mentor helped me with getting infrastructure right, establishing contacts, choosing the right equipment, deciding on farm layout and improving my growing knowledge – my horticultural knowledge in particular. With his expertise being in horticulture, he saved me a lot of time and energy.’

‘He could just look at how a plant was growing and tell me if there was a problem with it.’

‘It was great being able to simply pick up the phone and ask his opinion or take a picture and have him respond with a “yep, this is the problem”. It was really ideal.’



Compared to some other paperwork I’ve had to do as part of my business, it was a doddle.



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

‘I visited his farm once, but he mainly came to mine. It was pretty flexible. We set up appointments according to what worked best for our schedules.’

## How has mentoring benefitted you?

‘Having someone I could speak to directly about any issues I was experiencing saved me a lot of time.’

‘Being able to access that source of knowledge really helped me to avoid problems and issues I may have run in to by myself. I can’t quantify it, but I think it also had a financial benefit in saving me unnecessary expense that I may have otherwise experienced.’

## What are your aspirations for the future?

‘In time, I’m hoping to build in scale, grow the business, provide food to the local community, and be profitable of course!’

‘I also want to demonstrate to others that small-scale farming is economically viable.’



It was great being able to just pick up the phone and ask his opinion or take a picture and have him respond



## Would you recommend mentoring to other farmers?

‘Yes, definitely. For me, an important thing for people to know is that an adviser doesn’t need to be formally accredited. They just need to be a knowledgeable farmer. You can nominate someone you know who has great practical experience. They don’t need to already be part of an official body.’

‘Going through FAS was helpful in that the programme was able to formally recognise his expertise and award him mentor status. This meant his time could be compensated financially.’

‘For me, it was super useful having help from someone who’s been there and done it all before.’

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

‘Yes, as long as it continues to run programmes like these [mentoring support programme].’

‘FAS is awesome – the support I received was really helpful.’

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

Or contact us  
T: 0300 323 0161  
E: [advice@fas.scot](mailto:advice@fas.scot)



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