

The role of the British Grassland Society in technology transfer

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History and objectives Since its formation in 1945, the British Grassland Society (BGS) has been active in disseminating information to the grassland and associated sectors of agriculture and has adapted to a change from production-based agriculture to its current output mix of private and public goods. The BGS has as its remit: (a) improved production and utilisation of grass and forage crops for the promotion of agriculture and the public benefit, and (b) the advancement of education and research in grass and forage crop production and utilisation, and the publication of results.

Membership Currently standing at around 1,000, BGS members are mainly from the UK but with a growing proportion (around 20%) from overseas. Members come from the research community, consultancy and supply industries and those in education, together with many practising farmers. In addition BGS provides technology transfer support to a network of affiliated local grassland societies with some 4,500 members throughout the UK.

Technology transfer Technology transfer is achieved through a programme of conferences, meetings and grassland events, when BGS promotes the results of research findings to those within the grassland industry and the public at large. As a registered charity, it is an independent body with learned society status. All its meetings are open to members and non-members and its published material lies within the public domain.

Publications 'Grass and Forage Science' (GFS), edited by Professor J A Milne, is a highly regarded, peer-reviewed, publication and is both the scientific Journal of the British Grassland Society and the Official Journal of the European Grassland Federation. It publishes the highest quality academic papers within grass and forage crop production, management and utilisation as well as non-agricultural aspects of grassland management such as recreational and amenity use and the environmental implications of grassland systems. Sitting as a companion publication, the magazine 'Grass & Forage Farmer' (GFF), with a circulation of some 6,000, is aimed primarily at farmer members of BGS and the local grassland societies with the aim of supplying up-to-date technical information. Scientific findings from GFS are distilled into farmer-friendly messages in GFF.

Conferences and meetings The BGS engages with its members and the public through its regular programme of conferences and meetings including:

- A three-day **Summer Meeting**, usually held in July, including visits to farms and research stations.
- An annual **Winter Meeting** which, in 2004, became 'mobile' for the first time with a series of regional one-day meetings aimed at attracting local farmers who might find it impossible to leave the farm for longer periods.
- **BGS Research Conferences** aimed at giving younger research workers the opportunity to present papers in theatre or poster format and also provides a forum for work which may be at an early stage of development.
- **Occasional Conferences** on 'hot' subject areas. BGS publishes the proceedings as the Occasional Symposium Series and collections of conference papers - these being available for sale after a meeting so widening the availability of the information presented.

Research and development initiatives Whilst BGS does not directly fund R&D, it is pro-active in influencing direction of funding by Government and other agencies through the work of its R&D Committee. In particular, the Society maintains a list of priorities for R&D, which it distributes widely within the research community and to Government departments. The wealth of experience and expertise within its membership provides a wide knowledge base from which to source information and individuals are regularly co-opted to assist in such initiatives. The R&D Committee also provides the focus for BGS input into wider Government policy issues by responding to consultation documents directly and through its affiliation to the Institute of Biology. Furthermore, BGS is prepared to act to fill a 'knowledge gap' if one is identified. A recent project, 'Grass '99' was launched to initiate on-farm grazing groups throughout the UK to enable farmers to communicate with, and learn directly from, each other. This kick-started a whole new way of 'self-help' groups which continue to thrive.

Conclusion The BGS exists to facilitate two-way dialogue involving scientists and practitioners with communication being its key objective. It provides a vital link so that technology transfer can flourish within the UK and globally to the benefit of all actively involved in grassland and forage crop science and practice.