

Talking to... **Richard Simpson**

Grass and Forage Manager editor Sara Gregson talks to BGS past President Richard Simpson about his career and hopes for the future of grassland farming in this country

Q: What is your involvement with grassland and ruminant livestock?

I was brought up on a 90-cow dairy farm in Gloucestershire, getting involved milking and helping out from a young age. Following a Harper Adams degree, I managed a herd near Bristol for a couple of years, taking on responsibility for the grazing management.

I joined Kingshay in 1994, not long after its formation, getting involved in practical on-farm reviews on everything from grass and maize variety trials, silage additive comparisons, feeding trials and much more. The basis, as it remains today, was to independently compare products and systems, producing 'Which?' type reports to members, with all results published, good, bad, and indifferent.

I am indebted to the training and mentoring from the late Martin Hutchinson, who had an immense passion for producing quality milk and meat from grassland.

Q: Tell me about your involvement with BGS. What have you derived most from being a member?

Soon after joining Kingshay, I joined our local Somerset Grassland Society, along with attending BGS Summer Meetings and events. Local grassland societies are the bedrock of BGS, providing a great opportunity to hear from leading farmers, researchers, and above all, those with an interesting and informative story to share.

Somerset Grassland Society has thrived in recent years, with well attended meetings and plenty of participation in the grass ley and silage competitions. I have really enjoyed helping to organise all the activities, and it brings much pleasure seeing young members joining and actively getting involved.

It was a huge privilege to be asked to join the presidential team in 2018. My presential year in 2019–2020 started with an excellent summer meeting in Gloucestershire, visiting several impressive farming businesses where I particularly remember seeing and understanding more about mixed species

swards. The year was unfortunately curtailed by the Covid lockdown, with a rapid transition to online events. A huge amount of credit must go to Tom Goatman and the team for keeping the Society relevant through this difficult period.

Q: What do you think the most exciting opportunities are for grassland managers today?

One of the most exciting opportunities lies in the growing recognition across society of just how vital grassland is, not just from an agricultural point of view, but for the environment and more importantly, for our future food systems.

'Healthy soil, healthy forage, healthy livestock, healthy profits' is a strapline that we frequently use at Kingshay, an adage that is simple, but captures the sustainable farming cycle.

What makes things more exciting is how technology is accelerating progress. Satellite technologies are giving us better visibility on forage cover and plant health, plus variable rate applications and spot-spraying drones will help reduce fertiliser and pesticide use, while maintaining productivity. And then there's Artificial Intelligence, where we are only just tapping into its potential to speed up innovation and make grassland management smarter and more sustainable.

Q: What would you encourage grassland managers to do to make our world a better place?

To make a real difference, I would encourage grassland managers to focus on what really matters and not get distracted. Discussion groups offer huge value in sharing knowledge with peers, challenging assumptions, and learning from real-world experience. Plus, seek out truly independent advice. Be ever curious but critical!

The most successful grassland managers have a clear objective, a real understanding of soil health, a commitment to measuring and monitoring, and the use of flexible rotational grazing systems. None of these are quick fixes, but they work. In a world where many are looking for the next silver bullet, sometimes the biggest gains come from mastering the basics.



Richard Simpson

Q: Who would you like to chat to over dinner (dead or alive)?

I would want to bring together people who are shaping how we think about food, health, and the environment. Tim Spector would be on the list for his work on human nutrition and the gut microbiome.

Then there's Henry Dimbleby, who has done much to highlight how food is undervalued in our society. He talks powerfully about the importance of nutritionally dense food and the need to rethink our food systems from a quality, not just quantity, perspective.

And of course, Sir David Attenborough – I think he would offer an incredible perspective on how to communicate the need for change. Not with blame, but with hope. I would love to hear his take on how we can reset the narrative around food and show that farmers can be a vital part of the climate solution, not the problem.