

Call for experts participating in Focus Groups of the European Innovation Partnership on "Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability"

The European Commission is launching a call for experts such as farmers, advisers, scientists and other relevant actors for four new EIP-AGRI Focus Groups. The Focus Groups will begin their work in June-July 2014 and are expected to present their results and recommendations within 12-18 months. Candidates for each of the focus groups below are invited to apply in accordance to the rules set out in this notice for the purpose specified.

You can start your application by [clicking here](#).

Focus Group Themes:

For the current call, experts, including farmers, advisers, researchers and others are invited to apply for participation in focus groups on the following topics:

- 7 High Nature Value (HNV) farming profitability** - How to make HNV farming more profitable without losing the HNV characteristics?
[More info](#)
- 8 Mainstreaming precision farming** - How to organise the data capture and processing to mainstream the application of precision farming for an optimisation of inputs and yield?
[More info](#)
- 9 Profitability of permanent grassland** - How to manage permanent grassland in a way that combines profitability, carbon sequestration and biodiversity?
[More info](#)
- 10 Fertiliser efficiency – focus on horticulture in open field** - How to use innovative fertilisation and nutrient recycling to solve the conflict between the need for crop fertilisation and legislative requirements regarding water quality?
[More info](#)

What is a Focus Group?

The purpose of a Focus Group is to explore practical innovative solutions to problems or opportunities and to draw on and share experience gained from relevant innovative projects. The group will discuss and document research results and implications for further research activities that will help to solve practical issues in the sector. Such issues may be related to production, processing, consumption, transport or other areas. The group is asked to focus on practical knowledge, dissemination to the sector as well as developing project ideas for [Operational Groups](#).

Focus groups are expected to work for 12-18 months and will meet face-to-face twice a year. For more information on the focus groups, please see the [focus group charter](#).

Please note that the dates for the first meetings of the focus groups are indicated below, per Focus Group.

What is the outcome of a Focus Group?

The specific questions and tasks per focus group for the current call are listed below. Candidates should carefully study these questions and refer to them in their applications, indicating how their experience is relevant to answering these questions.

All Focus Groups will be required to:

- ✓ **make a summary description of the issue**
- ✓ **take stock of the state of the art of practice in the field of its activity, listing problems and opportunities.**
- ✓ **take stock of the state of the art of research in its field, summarizing possible solutions to the problems listed.**
- ✓ **identify needs from practice and propose directions for further research.**
- ✓ **propose priorities for innovative actions by suggesting potential practical operational groups or other project formats to test solutions and opportunities, including ways to disseminate the practical knowledge gathered.**

The outcome of the Focus Group will be presented in a report (see example of outline in [annex](#)) and feed into the EIP network which will share the knowledge and practical experience with the wider public as well as with relevant programming authorities.

Who can apply?

The composition of the focus groups will be based on the following profiles, while taking into account the different characteristics of the specific challenge/objective at stake and a good balance in the composition of the group (area of expertise, professional capacity and experience, geographical balance, etc.):

- Experts, such as farmers and advisers, with relevant technical knowledge and practical experience on the topic, who can contribute with practical solutions for problems or opportunities in the field.
- Experts with a good understanding and experience of the relevant economic situation related to the topic concerned, including market prospects, production costs, supply, manufacturing, and socio-economic impact for farmers.
- Experts with experience in practical research and innovation actions related to the topic.

Detailed Description of the Focus Groups

Focus Group 7: High Nature Value (HNV) farming profitability first meeting 12-13 June 2014

It is well acknowledged that HNV farming across Europe maintains a high proportion of semi-natural features (such as hedgerows, ponds, patches of woodland and arable margins) and is pivotal in managing farmland that is home to rare or important populations of species. There is a pressing need to ensure that HNV farming, which is nowadays struggling between abandonment and intensification, can become more economically viable while at the same time maintaining its natural features.

Question: How to make HNV farming more profitable without losing the HNV characteristics?

The Focus Group is expected to carry out the following main tasks:

- Clarify the main socio-economic threats to the continued existence of HNV farming and the main opportunities. Use examples to illustrate these threats and opportunities;
- Identify research/examples of methods/projects that result in economically viable or improved HNV farming systems (for example: use of specific machinery, alternative crops and livestock species, developing special products , small scale food processing facilities, innovative marketing, new business models, diversification into non-agricultural activities, etc.);
- Identify fail factors that limit the scope for new economic activity by farmers in HNV areas and summarise how to address these factors;
- Explore the role of innovation and knowledge transfer in supporting the socio-economic viability and sustainability of HNV farming.

**Focus Group 8: Mainstreaming precision farming
first meeting 3-4 June 2014**

Research and development in precision farming has led to the availability of a large number of sensors capable of collecting data: e.g. soil sensing and crop sensing techniques for precision crop farming, early warning systems for pig production, automatic lameness detection for cows and sows etc. When large volumes of data (big data) are coming from different types of sensors they need to be processed, integrated and combined with economic data into decision support systems that allow farmers to take the right management decisions. There is a need for further development of user-friendly IT applications for precision farming and for accompanying measures to facilitate the mainstreaming of precision farming in the EU.

Question: How to organise the data capture and processing to mainstream the application of precision farming for an optimisation of inputs and yield?

The Focus Group is expected to carry out the following main tasks:

- Identify and assess the different systems and use of data handling in precision arable farming and precision livestock farming;
- Identify and assess where compatibility issues need to be resolved as well as potential solutions;
- Identify existing or potential solutions to processing large volumes of data from different types of precision farming sensors as well as existing or potential solutions to integrating these data into user-friendly farm management support systems;
- Identify existing or potential solutions to integrating precision farming systems into small and medium-sized holdings;
- Identify fail factors that limit the use of the identified techniques/systems by farmers and summarise how to address these factors as well as explore the role of innovation and knowledge transfer in addressing these fail factors.

**Focus group 9: Profitability of permanent grassland
first meeting 26-27 June 2014**

Maintaining permanent grasslands is an important element in the Greening of the Common Agricultural Policy. The objective of the Focus Group is to identify and exchange knowledge and practices that allow an increased efficiency and profitability in grassland management while keeping biodiversity values and carbon sequestration, as well as a better recognition of the interrelationships among these functions.

Question: How to manage permanent grassland in a way that combines profitability, carbon sequestration and biodiversity?

The Focus Group is expected to carry out the following main tasks:

- Identify and describe the main farming systems using permanent grassland.
- Identify practices to improve efficiency and productivity in milk/meat production systems both for extensive and intensive farming systems (i.e. diversified and improved grassland composition, more efficient grazing-mowing patterns, enhanced fertilisation management (N-P cycling), ICT at farm level for more efficient management, etc.).
- Identify grassland management practices which enhance animal health, welfare and productivity. Identify improved grassland composition and management practices that allow for the development of premium and functional products.
- Identify key traits that relate grassland management with biodiversity and carbon footprint; as well as examples of strategies to combine maintenance of biodiversity and low carbon footprint with farming profitability.
- Identify fail factors that limit the use of the identified techniques/systems by farmers and summarise how to address these factors.

**Focus group 10. Fertiliser efficiency – focus on horticulture in open field
first meeting 3-4 June 2014**

One of the main challenges for open field horticulture is to reconcile the need to fertilise (in order to ensure high quality and productivity) with the need to avoid negative impact on water quality. Innovative techniques and strategies for reduction of nutrient losses in horticulture are being developed for many different crops. The objective of this focus group is to exchange knowledge and practices on these developments by comparing different open field vegetable crops and experiences from different regions.

Question: How to use innovative fertilisation and nutrient recycling to solve the conflict between the need for crop fertilisation and legislative requirements regarding water quality?

The Focus Group is expected to carry out the following main tasks:

- Identify how crop quality and yield is influenced by legal requirements (stemming from the Nitrates Directive and the Water Framework Directive) and by which elements in particular (application standards, closed periods, organic matter calculation);
- Identify and compare systems to reduce fertiliser use without affecting yield and quality while taking into account cost-effectiveness and other factors like temperature, humidity, soil etc ;
- Identify and compare innovative systems that can help to solve the conflict between crop quality and quantity demands and the legislative requirements, e.g. innovative fertilisation techniques, crop residue management, irrigation management, crop rotation, organic matter and by-products management, N and P dynamics in relation with soil quality, the use of slow release fertilisers and catch crops, nutrient spreading or placement, tillage, other;
- Identify fail factors that limit the use of the identified techniques/systems by farmers and summarise how to address these factors.

Selection Process and Terms of Agreement

Each focus group consists of up to 20 experts: farmers, advisers, scientists and where appropriate representatives from industry, civil society or other relevant actors.

Experts will be chosen according to their qualifications based on proven expertise to support the progress of the focus group (relevant information to be submitted via the application form). The European Commission, Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development, will nominate the group experts.

Selection criteria (individual)

Technical and professional capacity - evidence of the technical and professional capacity of experts based on:

- Proven professional experience that is relevant for the focus group at stake: examples linking experience to the specific questions for the focus group – detailed below - should be given;
- Motivation, reasoning why the expert should be member of the focus group;
- Potential contribution to the focus group by the expert – the candidate should clearly state how, and what he or she can contribute to the focus group;
- Relevant educational and professional qualifications – this includes practical experience -, clearly linked to the specific questions for the focus groups listed above.

Balancing criteria:

The focus group will be constituted, taking into account the balance in the areas of expertise, professional capacity and experience, and geographical balance.

Application procedure:

Candidates need to complete the on-line application form and **submit it by 8 April 2014 13:00 CET** (Brussels time).

The system will notify candidates upon successful submission of the application. Please, be aware that in the case that this notification is not displayed, the submission of your application was not successful and you will have to start again.

Terms of agreement

By submitting an application, the applicant agrees on the following and confirms that:

- The applicant easily expresses him/herself in English (as this will be the working language in meetings, documents and in all means of communication) in both oral and written form;
- In case of a nomination, the applicant's willingness and ability to share information, knowledge and experience and to contribute actively to work documents to achieving the focus group objectives,

- Attendance of the meetings: in case of a nomination, the applicant's willingness to travel (within Europe) to attend meetings of the focus group. Nominated experts can be reimbursed for travel and accommodation costs according to established guidelines;
 - Transparency: in case of a nomination, the applicant's agreement to publish his/her name along with their professional capacity (e.g. advisor, scientists, etc.) and country of residence on the Europa EIP website.
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You can start your application by [clicking here](#).

Background:

The European Innovation Partnership (EIP) "Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability" aims to provide a working interface for innovation actors, including farmers, advisors, agri-business, civil society, and researchers, working at EU, national and regional level. The partnership aims to act as a catalyst for innovation-related actions to foster enhanced productivity and sustainable resource management across the whole value chain. In line with this, the European Commission, Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development, requested the EIP Service Point to set up focus groups on specific agricultural topics to facilitate innovative actions in the field and better connect science and practice.

The first six focus groups on the following topics are ongoing and the call for experts for these groups is closed: 1.Organic farming (optimizing arable yields); 2.Protein crops; 3.Animal husbandry (reduction of anti-biotic use in the pig sector); 4.Genetic resources: cooperation models; 5.Soil organic matter content: Mediterranean region; 6.Integrated Pest Management (IPM): focus on Brassica species.

Annex: Draft Outline for EIP-AGRI Focus Group Final reports



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