

Innovative farmers platform

Innovative Farmers aims at bridging the gap between off-farm research and the answers farmers are finding on-farm. It is about using a network to ensure both financial and environmental sustainability in farming in the UK and beyond. Launched in October 2015, it is the second phase of the **Duchy Future Farming Programme**.

Tom MacMillan, director of innovation at the Soil Association said; *"More than 750 farmers and growers have been involved in the Duchy Future Farming Programme in the last three years, running field labs on 35 topics. The field labs really struck a chord. We asked these farmers how we could make them even better and Innovative Farmers is the result."*

Innovative Farmers recognises that many of the best ideas in farming come from farmers. They trial, test and analyse, but often in isolation. The not-for-profit network Innovative Farmers matches farmer groups with research teams. It provides professional support, a web portal where groups share their learning, and access to a dedicated research fund. The partners aim to award more than £800,000 to farmer groups by 2020, allowing farmers to investigate techniques that will really make a difference on the ground. The network will also help groups apply for grant schemes such as EIP-AGRI Operational Group funding.



At the centre of the network is an interactive web portal which invites farmers, advisors, researchers and businesses to make a profile. The portal then acts as a match-maker, forming new groups and making connections according to compatibility.

In order to turn a research idea into a tested approach to sustainable farming, the portal enables three key steps:

1. Farmers meet in small groups to test and develop new tools and techniques in practical field labs.
2. The Innovative farmers' portal matches each group with a co-ordinator and a researcher. They offer professional support, and help the group win research funding.
3. The co-ordinator shares the group's learning through this website where groups can track their progress and compare notes.

John Pawsey, Shimpling Park Farm in Suffolk, said; *"As farmers we are always experimenting; what's the best way to grow this crop, how can I improve the yield of that crop. Innovative Farmers turns us from advice takers to advice makers. As far as I'm concerned it's about engagement, passing on and sharing knowledge and empowering us by giving us the tools and experience to have belief in our own experiments. I've certainly learnt things from field labs that I've applied to my farm and I hope others will do too."*

As well as inviting farmers to join, the network is encouraging farm advisors to get involved as group coordinators, accessing benefits for themselves and the farmers they work with.

More information:

www.innovativefarmers.org
info@innovativefarmers.org
[@IFarmers](#)

Duchy Future Farming Programme

Duchy Future Farming Programme
on the [EIP-AGRI website](#)



Thank you to Innovative farmers for the images.