

Call for expression of interest 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, foresters, advisers, scientists and other relevant actors for two new EIP-AGRI Focus Groups. The Focus Groups will start working in June 2017 and are expected to present their results and recommendations within 12 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.

Please note that the dates for the first meetings of the Focus Groups are indicated below for each Focus Group, and that experts are expected to be available to travel to the Focus Group meeting on these dates. Focus Group participants will also be requested to do some preparatory work before and in between the first and second meetings.

You will find the link to the application form underneath the calls below. Please read the entire call text carefully before applying.

Focus Group themes:

For the current call, experts, farmers, foresters, advisers, researchers and others¹ are invited to apply to participate in the Focus Groups on the following topics:

24: New forest practices and tools for adaptation and mitigation of climate change

[More info](#)

25: Grazing for Carbon

[More info](#)

What is an EIP-AGRI 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 discusses and documents 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 around 12 months and will meet face-to-face twice. For more information on the Focus Groups, please see the [Focus Group brochure](#) and the [Focus Group charter](#).

¹ See p. 2 section 'Who can apply'

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 play of practice in the field of its activity, listing problems and opportunities**
- ✓ **take stock of the state of play of research in its field, summarising possible solutions to the problems listed**
- ✓ **identify needs from practice and possible directions for further research**
- ✓ **propose priorities for innovative actions by suggesting ideas for Operational Groups or other project formats to test solutions and opportunities and ways to exchange the practical knowledge gathered beyond the Focus Group**

The outcome of the Focus Group will be presented in a report (see example of outline in [annex 1](#)) and feed into the EIP-AGRI 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, foresters, advisers, with relevant practical experience and technical knowledge 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 and the forest sector.
- Experts with experience in practical research and innovation actions related to the topic.

Detailed Description of the Focus Groups

Focus Group 24: New forest practices and tools for adaptation and mitigation of climate change

First meeting: 20-21 June 2017

The Paris Agreement recognises that forests will be crucial for achieving the long-term objective of balancing anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions and removals by sinks in the second half of the century. EU forests currently sequester around 10% of annual EU emissions and their mitigation potential may increase in the next decades with the use of innovative practices and tools; however it may also diminish if appropriate sustainable forest management practices are not put in place. Forests are also exposed to the effects of climate change which may increase forest vulnerability due to the changing environmental conditions, such as more frequent and extreme weather events and disturbances. Thus forest adaptation to climate change and their ability to help mitigate climate change need be considered jointly.

At the same time, with increasing demand for renewable wood materials, renewable energy and potential of wood to substitute energy intensive materials, there is growing pressure on forests to provide these products. In addition, forests and the forest sector play a vital role in the sustainable development of EU rural areas, contributing to employment and economic growth and to landscape and nature conservation. Therefore, when considering new practices and tools for adaptation and mitigation of climate change, it is essential to adopt a holistic approach towards forests - integrating the economic, social and environmental dimensions – in accordance with the EU Forest Strategy [COM(2013)659].

The Focus Group will address ways to enhance mitigation and adaptation potential of EU forests, while taking into account that forests provide multiple functions and services to EU citizens. The group should also consider trade-offs between mitigation and adaptation, as sometimes reducing mitigation in the short term may be necessary to improve adaptation.

QUESTION: Which new practices and tools can improve the climate mitigation and adaptation potential of EU forests?

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

- Identify the main challenges and opportunities posed by changing climate patterns for sustainable forest management in the EU
- Identify new practices and tools that maintain or increase the carbon sequestration potential of EU forests in the long term while keeping their multifunctional role
- Identify the needs of forest managers in relation with adaptation to changing climate patterns in the EU. This may involve identifying questions requiring research and innovation, as well as the most promising adaptation practices that may answer to these needs, while maintaining the multifunctional role of forests, e.g. by selecting tree species, provenances and varieties or specific sustainable forest management practices
- Identify new practices and tools (including the use of digital technologies) that contribute to improving resilience of forests ecosystems to extreme weather events such as droughts, forest fires, storms and heavy snowfall, considering all the actors involved in managing the risks resulting from more frequent extreme events

- Analyse possible synergies and trade-offs between mitigation and adaptation practices
- Provide examples of relevant practices and identify tools for sharing information about practices to improve mitigation and adaptation of forests, and synergies with other sectors such as agriculture
- Propose potential innovative actions to stimulate the knowledge and use of management practices and strategies for improving EU forest's mitigation and adaptation potential and providing inspiration and ideas for Operational Groups and other innovative projects
- Identify remaining research and innovation needs coming from practice associated to the potential of EU forests for mitigation and adaptation

Focus Group 25: Grazing for Carbon

First meeting: **13-14 June 2017**

Grasslands are an important source of low-cost and high-quality feed for ruminants. Grassland soils store large quantities of carbon and in many regions have the potential to sequester even more carbon, while providing a range of other ecosystem services related to habitat and water quality. Grazing also contributes to the preservation of certain ecosystems, where grazing is necessary to maintain the existing biological balance. In some regions grazing is the only potential agricultural activity. Due to climate change, the area covered by these regions will grow, especially in the dryer regions.

However, the potential for carbon sequestration and techniques for achieving it are country/region specific, and differ across soil types, management practices and climate. Carbon sequestration is highly variable across small spatial scales, and subject to reversibility/impermanence due to short-term flooding, drought and wind erosion. The use of appropriate practices is necessary to maintain the local ecosystems, production systems and enhance the potential for soil carbon storage.

The focus will be on grazing...

- *in intensive production systems where the potential carbon sequestration is often under used,*
- *in areas under high climate change pressure. These areas have often fragile ecosystems, where the removal of grazing practices would have negative consequences for the local and global environment (e.g. desertification). Although it delivers a number of ecosystem services, production in these areas is often not economically rewarding.*

This Focus Group will look into alternative grazing management systems which can improve the underlying economics and the positive environmental effects, notably soil carbon storage.

This Focus Group builds further on the outcomes of the Focus Group on Profitability of permanent grassland and the Focus Group on Soil organic matter content in Mediterranean regions.

QUESTION: How to increase the soil carbon content from grazing systems?

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

- Explore grazing management practices from ruminants and their business models that have a beneficial impact on soil quality and more specific on the carbon content. Which examples can be found in the EU taking into account different regions, soil types and climate?
- Compare these different management practices taking into account cost-effectiveness, labour and knowledge intensity in relation to the soil quality, and more specific soil carbon content.
- How can these grazing management practices be adapted to other conditions?
- Analyse economic and technical factors that stimulate or limit the implementation of these grazing management practices and indicate how to address them exploring the role of innovation and knowledge exchange.
- Identify tools to improve grazing management, e.g. grass measurement, data recording, decision support systems.
- Identify innovative business models.

- Identify further research needs from practice, possible gaps in technical knowledge, and further research work to address them.
- Suggest innovative solutions and provide ideas for EIP-AGRI Operational Groups and other innovative projects.

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.

Please note:

There will be no translation, it is essential that group members are able to express themselves in English.

Selected experts will need to be available to participate in both meetings; the date for the first meeting is mentioned for each new Focus Group.

Selected experts will be requested to prepare for the first meeting and do some work in between meetings, and they should be able to reserve some time for this.

Results produced within the Focus Group are always attributed to the group as a whole, not to individuals, and conflicting views should be included in the final report.

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 above – should be given;
- Motivation, reasoning why the expert should be a 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 composed taking into account a 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 23 March 2017 23:59 hrs 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.

Applicants will be informed whether or not they have been selected **by 28 April 2017**.

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 is willing and able to share information, knowledge and experience and to contribute actively to work documents, to achieve the Focus Group objectives;
- Attendance at the meetings: in case of a nomination, the applicant is willing and available to travel (within Europe) to attend meetings of the Focus Group (the dates for the first meeting of each Focus Group are indicated under the respective call). Nominated experts can be reimbursed for travel and accommodation costs according to established guidelines ([annex 2](#));
- Availability: in case of a nomination, the expert will be available to attend the first meeting on the dates specified in the call; should this, for whatever reason, not be the case, the nominated expert will inform the EIP-AGRI Service Point as soon as possible, to allow for the selection of another expert to replace him or her.
- Transparency: in case of a nomination, the applicant agrees to publish his/her name along with their professional capacity (e.g. adviser, scientist, etc.), country of residence and email address on the EIP-AGRI website. The applicants also agree to register to the EIP-AGRI website to facilitate the Focus Group work.

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

Background:

The European Innovation Partnership ‘Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability’ (EIP-AGRI) aims to provide a working interface for innovation actors, including farmers, advisers, 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-AGRI Service Point to set up Focus Groups on specific agricultural topics to facilitate innovative actions in the field and better connect science and practice.

For previous EIP-AGRI Focus Groups, please see the [EIP-AGRI Focus Group pages](#). Please note that the calls for the previous 23 groups are now closed, and it is not possible to join them.

Annex 1: Draft outline for EIP-AGRI Focus Group Final reports



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1. Summary
2. Introduction
3. Brief description of the process
4. Theme / issue 1 (actual problem, how does it relate to the Focus Group topic)
 - a. State of play
 - b. Innovation process and fail factors
 - c. Overview of research – missing implementation – missing testing – missing research
 - d. Recommendations / ideas for Operational Groups – recommendations for dissemination of results and solutions – recommendations on how to ensure a broader take-up
5. Theme / issue 2 (actual problem, how does it relate to the Focus Group topic)
 - a. State of play
 - b. Innovation process and fail factors
 - c. Overview of research – missing implementation – missing testing – missing research
 - d. Recommendations / ideas for Operational Groups – recommendations for dissemination of results and solutions – recommendations on how to ensure a broader take-up
6. Theme / issue 3 etc. (depending on the number of themes identified by the Focus Group)
 - a. State of play
 - b. Innovation process and fail factors
 - c. Overview of research – missing implementation – missing testing – missing research
 - d. Recommendations / ideas for Operational Groups – recommendations for dissemination of results and solutions – recommendations on how to ensure a broader take-up
7. Epilogue from the group: broader ideas, things that the group would like to say but don't fit into the Focus Group framework – general recommendations etc.
8. Annexes
9. List of members of the Focus Group
10. List of relevant research projects
11. List of relevant Operational Groups
12. List of documented best practices

Annex 2: Practical arrangements for EIP-AGRI Focus Groups



What will the EIP-AGRI Service Point provide during an EIP-AGRI Focus Group meeting?

1. The EIP-AGRI Service Point provides Travel and Accommodation for Focus Group participants. We can only provide travel by public transportation. For local travel to the train station or the airport we do our best to make proposals within our limits.
2. The EIP-AGRI Service Point provides the needed travel and accommodation with the help of its travel agency. The travel agent will send the selected participants travel proposals based on their requirements.
3. Priority is given to travel on regular flights, but low cost flights can also be proposed. Participants will not be requested to start travelling before 07:00 (trains) or 8:00 (planes) respectively or to arrive at their destination later than 22:00. If this is not possible, the travel agent can propose to travel on the days before and/or after the meeting.
4. For participants who have to travel on the day before or after the meeting because of flight or train schedules, the EIP-AGRI Service Point will arrange for accommodation and breakfast for an extra night. *No other meals will be provided.*
5. Once a ticket has been issued, it is final and cannot be changed.
6. The EIP-AGRI Service Point provides meals and catering during the event. However, participants have to pay their meals outside the event themselves. Participants will also have to pay themselves for any extra services they request from the hotel.
7. All other costs: taxi, tolls, use of private car, parking fees, local bus or metro are not covered and cannot be reimbursed.
8. Costs related to personal travel arrangements are not reimbursable (change of travel dates, different town of departure and return,...). Some local travel costs can be refunded based on a substantiated request before the event.